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Principals As Instructional Leaders: Supporting New Middle School Principals To Implement Systems Allowing For Instructional Leadership

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Recommended Citation

PRINCIPALS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS:
SUPPORTING NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TO IMPLEMENT SYSTEMS
ALLOWING FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

National College of Education

National Louis University

February 28, 2024

Principals as Instructional Leaders: Supporting New Middle School Principals to Implement
Systems Allowing for Instructional Leadership

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"Great school leaders constantly pay attention. They build a culture focused on student learning. They confront mediocre teaching. They invite. They inspire. They support families, students, and school staff in ways that lead to improvement. They want to be trusted, not simply liked."

Nicole Leighton

ABSTRACT

This study is a collection, interpretation, and, eventually, recommendations based on data collected through interviews with current middle school principals. The research questions examine how middle school principals can increase their effectiveness as an instructional leader within the building. The research begins by examining the factors contributing to the principal being an instructional leader and what systems can be implemented to support this goal. These systems should include the ability for principals to facilitate learning for staff, just as staff facilitate learning within their classroom. Policy implications and recommendations highlight the need to look at resources available for principals as well as the culture of the building.

PREFACE

This research began as I reflected on my career as an assistant principal and principal over the past sixteen years and how involved a principal at the middle school level can be (and should be) regarding instruction within the school. I have found over time that, although the principal can easily be pulled in many directions other than instruction, it is imperative for a principal to be involved in the instruction within a school, especially a middle school. Especially a middle school because it is accessible at that level to rely heavily on the staff who often teach a single subject and tend to be the experts in the content they teach. Although that is often true, the staff still have room to grow regarding instructional practices.

As I began this research, I predicted the data would point primarily towards time. Specifically, it would look at how best to create more time in the week for principals to take on the work of instruction. Some data from the research pointed towards time. Still, more information was shared through the interviews that resources available to principals for support from internal and external staff was critical.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over these past several years, I have had many others support me in this journey. My dissertation chair, Dr. Don Angelaccio, was able to bookend this process. He was my first professor in my very first class and followed me through to leading my dissertation committee at the end of this journey. I appreciate all the support he gave me throughout my time at National Louis University.

To my colleagues in the cohort who were excellent partners, teammates, and friends, I appreciate your support and help. You were all amazing to work with, and I look forward to continuing our relationships moving forward.

Within my district, my Superintendent, Dr. Mary Gorr, was a fantastic role model, encouraging colleague, and friend. She supported this endeavor, always letting me know I could do it, and helped me to cross that finish line.

Most importantly, to my family, who supported me through this process with long nights and many weekends working on my classwork. I appreciate all your support these past few years and could not imagine completing this without you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Building principals understand the need for their leadership; however, the

day-to-day demands of the position often supersede the greater need to be the school's

instructional leader. The role of the principal can look vastly different depending on the

building, the district, and the community. There is no question that instructional

leadership is essential in a middle school and needs to be present; however, the

question falls to how to get it done with so many competing priorities within the daily

routine of a principal. In January 2013, The Wallace Foundation released a report titled

The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning.

This article was the first in a series to look at leadership within schools and how it can

best be developed and supported. In the article, they found an "empirical link between

school leadership and improved student achievement" (Wallace, 2013, p.5).

Based on their research, the report listed five key responsibilities and duties of the

principal:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students

- Creating a climate hospitable to education

- Cultivating leadership in others

- Improving instruction

- Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement

    (Wallace, 2013, p.4)

All of these responsibilities aim to educate students to the best of their ability.

Therefore, it is essential to look at how to best support new principals in the role and

offer strategies that will allow for continued growth in education and ensure that building leadership growth is included as we look at school reform.

As we discuss support for building leaders, it is important to look at the "how" of allowing building principals to be instructional leaders of the building. As Horng, Klasik, and Loeb stated in their 2010 article, "While only a small body of research links principals directly to student achievement" (Horng et al., 2010, p. 491), a much more extensive research base documents principals' effects on school operations, "fostering communication, allocating resources, and developing organizational structures to support instruction and learning" (Horng et al., 2010, p. 491). This understanding of the impact principals have on a student's learning and growth is why this topic is important to me.

I moved from teaching to administration at a very early age. I had only been in the classroom for five years with my entire teaching career in one school, one grade, and teaching one subject. My experience was limited, which made for a difficult transition to an assistant principal role. What I know now (more than fifteen years later) is that my lack of experience and knowledge of educational pedagogy did not allow me to be the instructional leader that schools need from the building administration. Over the next decade, I spent time in three different districts as an assistant principal, principal, and two years in the district office as a business manager. I learned strategies, went to trainings, and took classes to understand better what leaders can do to impact instruction within the school. The conversations at team meetings and informally with teachers increased my awareness of the needs of the teachers and how my work can impact their growth. Although the three districts were close in proximity

and had some similarities, I saw many differences that helped me grow as a leader as I compared and contrasted the different instructional philosophies.

In 2012, I received my first job as a middle school principal. I was extremely excited about the opportunity and felt ready to take on the next challenge in my career. I started the new role on July 1, and before any students were ever present in the building, I was told of an issue with a student subgroup, which was made up of students with IEPs. The group showed a lack of growth over the past few years, which was identified through the state assessment. As a principal, I was prepared to work with student behaviors, develop schedules, and even develop curriculums. However, as a former math teacher, working with special education teachers on how to best support their students to make the necessary growth needed by the state was not something I felt as comfortable supporting. I worked closely with my Director of Student Services for the district and looked at some issues I knew needed improvement (like the schedule and how best to support students). Although I was able to utilize resources within the district (something that will be discussed later), I look back on this opportunity to support the teachers and think of many ways I could have been more supportive. For example, I could have helped the teachers learn strategies for better instruction within the classroom. These strategies will be shared as we work through the dissertation and the results of the data collected.

Another example came in 2017 after I had moved to my second principalship. The state again identified a subgroup within my school. They identified the school district I worked in as having an inappropriate percentage of English Learners (EL) identified with an IEP. At this time, I was a middle school principal with just under 900

sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. The district was comprised of two middle schools, with a total of eight schools. Although this was a challenging problem to work through as a district and a school, I was surprised to learn that this would start me on a path of realizing that a building administrator's impact on a school instructionally is more than what I had experienced prior. This identification thrust learning practices of EL students within the classroom at the front and center of our building. Unlike my prior position I just spoke about, in this case, I was much more prepared to address the issue head-on and work with the staff to support the students.

Over the next two years, our leadership team and the entire teaching staff were in a problem-solving mode, working together to correct the issue and determine best practices to support our EL students differently. Our School Improvement Plan was focused on supporting EL students within the classroom. From core content teachers to fine arts teachers to social workers, staff underwent professional development to learn the SIOP method (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol). We had sub-committees of the building leadership team helping to support staff within the school. Furthermore, all of this was done without taking anything off the plate of our staff. That was probably the most important factor in this whole process. The day-to-day operations remained the same, but our focus as a staff and the different programs and procedures we put in place helped to utilize the staff better and put forth what is truly important within the school: student learning. All of this helped me see the impact a school leader with a vision can have on the learning within the building.

PURPOSE

As a principal in a middle school for nine years and another seven years as an assistant principal, I saw first-hand how quickly a plan to focus on instruction within the school could fall by the wayside as other priorities would present themselves. I worked in four different schools and three different districts, and the demands of the job, specifically the time needed to address non-instructional topics like student behavior, scheduling, and parents, did not easily allow for time to address instruction in the school. My goals included getting into classrooms, attending team meetings, or joining the staff as they received professional development. However, these goals would often not be achieved as I would be called to participate in a student crisis or to complete a task by a specific deadline. It was not until later in my career that I realized how important it was to prioritize my time and understand that what often presents as an emergency task does not need to be completed immediately.

This past summer, I accepted a new position as an Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations. As I reflected on my past nine years as a principal, my biggest takeaway was that I had seen the impact a principal could have on instruction in the building and how unprepared I felt I was at the beginning of my transition to being a principal. This study will look at what systems can be put in place for the new middle school principal and how a principal can have the most impact on instructional learning. We will look at many school districts and data from several sources to develop action plans for new building principals to support the need to be instructional leaders. All of this will start by looking at this through the lens of my current school district.

My current school district is a small school district of about 2,200 students located in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. The District is comprised of four schools. The smallest school is a school that serves early childhood, half-day kindergarten, and first-grade students. Two schools serve second through fifth grades. The middle school comprises sixth, seventh, and eighth graders.

The 2019-2020 Illinois Report Card (Illinois Report Card, 2023) reports a student makeup of 78.5% white, 8.3% Asian and 6.2% Hispanic. The District struggles with some older buildings and lower salary schedules; however, a referendum was passed in 2018 to increase the limiting rate, allowing for an increase in taxes annually. The referendum has helped increase revenue and, in turn, supports students through facility updates and staffing increases. There are approximately 145 teachers in the district. Seventy percent of teachers have a master's degree or higher, with an average salary of just under $63,000.

In comparing the District to overall state numbers, the District tends to be lower in percentage in all student groups. The English language learners percentage in the District is 7.8% compared to the state's 12.9%. The low-income student number is tremendously different from the state as the district has just over 5% to the state's 48%. In addition, the District sees a higher percentage of daily attendance and fewer homeless students than the state average.

I was the principal of the middle school in the district for four years, from 2012 to 2016. Therefore, I came back to the district in a new role, but luckily, I have some history in the district and know the district now both as a building principal and through the eyes of the District office. The school district is currently part of a significant

transition as the long-time Superintendent retired two years ago. In addition to a new Superintendent, there are new faces in both Assistant Superintendent roles, teaching and learning, and my role in finance and operations. There are only five district administrators, with three new to their position these past two years and one (the Director of Technology) who was new three years ago. This transition comes with both growing pains and excitement for the District as new eyes and a fresh perspective can envision a plan moving forward for the district.

With the shift in leadership, the District embarked on developing a new strategic plan over the past few years. In 2023, the Board of Education approved the new strategic plan (omitted for confidentiality, 2023) with four key success factors:

- Outstanding Student Experiences

- Staff Growth and Support

- Family and Community Partnerships

- Fiscal Stewardship and Facility Planning.

These four goals are broken down into strategic objectives and strategies. Each of the four success factors supports the need for student learning success. Since the principal's role is to support the strategic plan, instructional learning should be at the forefront of the initiative that is put in place. Building principals need to use the strategic plan to guide their decisions. The School Improvement Plan of a school always reflects on the strategic plan's goals and, therefore, should push the school forward with the strategic plan's vision, especially through the second goal of staff growth and support. In this district, it is clear that student learning should be at the forefront of all decisions.

RATIONAL

As stated in the first sentence of this chapter, principals often cannot focus on instructional learning due to the day-to-day demands of the position. Although the strategic plan is clear, and principals know that learning is essential, other factors such as student discipline, schedule needs, social/emotional learning needs, special events, and PTO meetings often pull them away from the goal. What is often not seen is how these other demands can directly impact student learning. Therefore, we need to look at strategies a principal can have to support student learning, even when time is unavailable.

A study by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in 2016-17 shows that "the national average tenure of principals in schools was only four years. However, this number masks considerable variation with 35 percent of principals staying at their school for less than two years, and only 11 percent of principals staying at their school for ten years or more" (NASSP, 2019, p.1). This study shows how important it is that a new principal can receive the support needed to hit the ground running on the first day.

As new principals enter the administration field, support must be in place. School districts spend so much time helping students and teachers transition to a new school, but in my experience, there has been very little support for a new administrator in a district. Similar to a new teacher in the school, a new principal does not understand or grasp what instructional goals have been present within the school prior to their arrival. The principal is unaware of what initiatives have previously been in place for all staff. There is typically little transition between the previous principal and the new principal to

discuss exactly what professional development has happened with the staff. Therefore, districts need to look at the onboarding process for a new principal. How do you give the principal a new staff orientation when they are often a single position, or one of two, within the district? Is there someone in the district that can support the transition? For me, that person was the Superintendent during my first principalship. Although the Superintendent was knowledgeable of district goals, she did not understand the specifics of what was happening within the middle school. In addition, other principals were there to support me as needed. However, middle schools are often very different from elementary schools both in needs and how they function. Therefore, the Superintendent and other principals do not always know exactly what support has been provided in the middle school.

GOALS

A principal has a variety of controls within the position that we will look at throughout this study that can impact a student's overall learning within the school. We will look at strategies principals can use to give meaningful feedback to encourage growth. This will include feedback through walkthroughs and observations, both formally and informally. In Grissom, Loeb, and Master's article titled *Effective Instructional Time Use for School Leaders: Longitudinal Evidence From Observations of Principals*, they state, "a major thrust of this literature is that strong instructional leaders are 'hands-on leaders, engaged with curriculum and instruction issues, unafraid to work directly with teachers, and often present in classrooms" (Grissom et al., 2013, p. 66). They go on to say that "good principals frequently visit classrooms in walkthroughs or

informal evaluations" (Grissom et al., 2013, p. 1). Instructional leaders cannot be passive. They need to roll up their sleeves and be willing to offer constructive criticism to staff when needed. The growth of teachers cannot happen without honest feedback. The feedback is not meaningful if the principal is unaware of what instruction looks like in the classrooms, which is why the principal must be present through the walkthroughs mentioned. This feedback can be given to staff individually or through attending team meetings in the hopes of helping guide the staff in small groups towards the school's common instructional learning goals.

This study will explore research that will look at the substantial impact a principal can have on instruction within a school. Principals are not able to be everywhere at the same time. They cannot know everything regarding each subject area or information about every instructional strategy available for staff. What principals can do is be involved. Principals can be present at the professional development opportunities offered to staff so that they are aware of what staff are being taught and asked to implement in their classrooms. Principals can help guide staff to resources that would be helpful for their growth. However, for principals to know and understand these growth areas and provide feedback, they need to observe instruction in the classroom and be present at teacher meetings where curriculum and lesson planning are being discussed.

In addition to feedback, this study will look at the systems that are put in place to support the principal and the continued growth of the staff toward increasing student learning. There will be a deep investigation into how a school is structured with committees to support student learning and how teacher leaders are developed and

supported. The study will look at distributive leadership and how that is accomplished.

A distributed leadership model defines leadership roles, how they will work together,

and the systems needed to support them. The figure below represents an image of

what distributed leadership can look like within a school. How can a principal build the

capacity of the instructional leader team? What can coaching conversations look like

with teachers? What is known is that leadership needs to be a shared responsibility

where processes are set up to create multiple layers of leaders within the organization.

A school needs to develop multiple avenues for colleagues (in addition to school

administration) to support the other staff in student growth. More will be shared on this

topic in Chapter 2.

Figure 1

Distributive Leadership

Image removed due to copyright

Source: Bain and Company

A third support will be to share an analysis of how staff professional development can look within the building to assist all staff. The study will research successful needs assessments in a school, how to take the identified needs, and how to create support to move these areas of deficiency to areas of success. In addition, the principal needs to be aware of the resources in the building and the district, as well as external resources that can help support staff development.

Finally, the study will look at the knowledge a principal possesses. If we ask teachers to grow, principals must also grow in their profession. I remember, as a principal, always being hesitant to attend conferences. I was concerned about several things, including the fact that I would be out of the building or the cost of the conference. However, later in my career, I saw that part of my job was to continue to grow and know what opportunities were available to bring back to my school and teachers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

All of this information will be analyzed through the vessel of three research questions:

- What methods will allow new building principals to put systems in place to ensure they tackle the critical task of being the instructional leader in the building?
- Just as teachers are facilitators of learning within the classroom, how can principals facilitate learning for staff?
- What are the factors that contribute to building administrators being successful instructional leaders?

Within these research questions, sub-questions will examine how time is spent daily and weekly to allow principals to support instruction while managing a school's day-to-day operations. They will look at resources, both internal and external, that are

available to principals to support instruction. In addition, the study will look at how a principal can gather feedback to know the level of instruction within the building and what supports are needed.

CONCLUSION:

Principals are often on an island in a school as a singleton position within the school (and maybe the district). There is often little guidance on how to utilize their time. New principals spend the majority of their time-solving daily problems that arise instead of creating a vision for the school and looking at the big picture and how to implement that vision.

This study will examine how a principal can set up a school's systems to keep the vision at the forefront, have enough time to implement appropriate strategies, and ensure that the staff is supported appropriately as they move forward to support student learning.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION:

This literature review will focus on instructional leadership for middle school principals and break it down into three distinct subtopics: how time is utilized in order to support instruction, systems to put in place to support principals, and prior experience in supporting new principal's transition. These three subtopics will allow for a deeper understanding of the need for principals' leadership among instruction and key factors that support the success of new principals. These key factors will support the recommendations for change made in Chapter 6.

One cannot discuss the implementation (or addition) of new concepts without looking at time. So often, both teachers and administrators alike will discuss the need for time in order to achieve everything that is needed to support students. As the topic of instructional leadership is discussed, and this study dives deeper into actual implementation, we will also need to discuss how time is a factor and show that this implementation is part of what is already happening within the school.

Some research articles reviewed in this chapter will focus on the systems that can be implemented to support principals as they become instructional leaders. We will look at what systems will help principals, both new and veteran, to put processes in place to support their goal of being the instructional leader of the building. We also know that effective prior experience will allow any person to be successful as they move forward, particularly principals as they move from teaching to administration.

The research articles discussed will help to support the belief that principals need to prioritize instruction in their daily routine and that principals need to be present and active participants as teachers receive professional development.

Focus 1: How time is utilized in order to support instruction

As one looks into change, there is often a fear of the impact that change will have on the individual. Quickly, the individual will look specifically at the concept of time and how much additional time the new initiative will take to implement, as well as how much time it will take regularly to continue the progress, additional systems, or initiatives. Principals can play a crucial role in supporting instruction within schools. However, how much support is given is often centered around how they utilize their time.

A research article by Horng, Klasik, and Loeb in 2010 unpacked this idea of time and how to manage and prioritize it as a principal. For them to do the research, they shadowed 65 principals in Miami, coding what they were doing every five minutes for an entire day. This allowed them to look at what the day in the life of a principal equates to in terms of time. This data was then compared to outcomes at each school, including survey results and test scores. They found that principals in higher-performing schools spent more time in their day on instruction, organizational management, and external relations than those in lower-performing schools. However, when you looked at all the school's data, it showed that "on average, the activities on which principals spent the most time were overseeing student services, managing budgets, and dealing with student discipline issues" (Horng et al., 2010, p. 20). Their data showed that principals spent a little over 10% of their time on instruction-related tasks.

Horng, Klasik, and Loeb's conclusion is not surprising to anyone who has been a middle school principal. In fact, the Illinois Principal Association's School Leader Paradigm shows all the roles a principal is expected to take on within three categories: personal intelligence, social intelligence, and systems intelligence. As shown in the figure below, the principal has several roles, from innovation to capacity building to cultural responsiveness.

Figure 2

Roles of Principals

Image removed due to copyright

In looking at time, principals need to identify and define their roles. In a study completed by L.R. Vogel, there was a goal to "explore what elements of their responsibilities these educational leaders identified as part of their instructional leadership roles" (Vogel, 2018, p.1). The study also looked at how the principals were prepared to be instructional leaders and what experiences supported their ability to assume the role of an instructional leader.

This qualitative study surveyed fifty principals currently practicing. An open-ended survey was used to collect the data. Since it was open-ended, participants could fully explain their feelings regarding questions about being prepared as an instructional leader. In addition to answers, demographic data that included professional and educational background, size, and type of school they worked in was collected.

The study found that principals pointed to their experience as teachers in preparing them to be instructional leaders. They shared what level they taught and how long they taught. Many (32%) shared that being in leadership roles as a teacher greatly supported them as they transitioned to a principal instruction leader role. As the study looked at the first research question, how did principals in one Rocky Mountain state define their instructional leadership responsibilities, the findings showed that their primary focus was on coaching and teacher supervision, with a secondary focus on assessment data. Other focuses included planning and implementing professional development, collaboration, and curriculum planning. All of these focuses for the principals helped support staff instruction growth.

In addition to looking at the time element, Vogel also shared why instructional leadership is important for leaders to focus on within their job requirements. Starting with the introduction, she shared the belief that a school leader needs to be an instructional leader, which is critical for success. In addition, she shares that this is the primary objective for school leaders. Within the introduction, Vogel makes it clear through past studies that even with guidance around the importance of the building leader being an instructional leader, instructional leadership is still recognized as a critical area that must be addressed. She continues to share that as test scores and other federal mandates (NCLB or ESSA) are present, it is more important than ever to address the different subgroups and reduce the gap among at-risk populations and other groups of students.

Focus 2: Systems to put in place to support principals

Reflecting on my work as a principal and instructional leader, I know that one important concept to understand is that systems must be implemented to support principals. It is not enough to just make the time and understand the importance of being an instructional leader. Principals must also have processes to support their goals and visions for the school. In Vogel's study, talked about in focus 1, she also comes to the conclusion that certain systems can be implemented to support principals. Her conclusions include principal prep programs that possess leadership as a topic, including a look at specific case studies that draw upon prior experiences of aspiring principals.

In a study by Ghavifekr, Radwon, and Velarde (2019), the authors look at principals as instructional leaders through the lens of the teachers. The study examines teachers' perceptions of a principal's instructional leadership practice.

The study included a total of one hundred fifty primary school teachers spanning over five different schools. The study found that teachers moderately understand their principal's role in instructional leadership, which includes setting and communicating school goals. In addition, teachers show through the survey that they also have a moderate understanding of the principal, how they coordinate curriculum, and how they evaluate the instruction happening within the school. The authors also interpret the data to show that teachers have a low level of perception regarding their principal monitoring student progress and protecting instructional time. Regarding the other research questions, the study concluded that the findings showed no relationship between gender and the perception of instructional leadership.

Although the findings showed "below average to average perceptions of the principal's instruction leadership practices, the principals still manifested key functions of instructional leadership designed to aid students' academic achievement" (Ghavifekr et al., 2019, p. 81). This study helped show how important it is for principals to build a culture within a school that allows teachers to see the principal as the instructional leader in the building. This ties back into the first focus, as principals must make time to participate in and lead professional development opportunities for staff. A principal needs to understand what best practices are being taught to staff to help support them in the future. This is highlighted by Drago-Severson et al. in the book *Learning for Leadership.* In the book, the importance of adult learning in schools is shared. The

authors state "that students benefit and that their academic achievement increases when adults learn and grow in schools" (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 13).

In a second study by Grigsby et al. (2010), the authors focused on principals' transformation from being a manager to an instructional leader. This study also examines how principal preparation programs are created and their goals for the future principal. Through a qualitative study, this research was designed to "gain better insight into the principal's involvement with the design, delivery, and monitoring of curriculum and instruction" (Grigsby et al., 2010, p.4).

Through interviews with thirty-five principals (fifteen elementary, ten middle, and ten high school), the authors gathered information about what principals view as their level of involvement and responsibility in developing curriculum and instruction on their campus.

The findings and conclusions were broken out by the level at which a principal worked: middle, elementary, and high school. Elementary principals showed that they were the most involved in curriculum issues, whereas the high school principals delegated the most to others. One common theme was a need for more community involvement at all levels.

This research supports my theory that being a principal at different levels looks different. Elementary principals are typically the most involved in the curriculum. This paper seeks to answer how to have middle school principals rise to that level of involvement. This article concluded with several recommendations in which building principals should become more involved through regular meetings with departments,

take feedback from teachers for improvement ideas around curriculum, and conduct walk-throughs and model lessons.

One system that a principal can implement to support instruction is to look at an instructional leadership team. Although the principal is the leader of the building, not all work needs to fall on their shoulders. In an article written by U.M. Sharif, research is done to look to "discover who else works as an instructional leader and how an instructional leadership team can be formed" (Sharif, 2020, p. 662). The author uses a qualitative approach as he reviews the literature to show that the building administration is not alone in being the school's instructional leader. Sharif's methodology "consists of a semi-systematic literature review" (Sharif, 2020, p. 663).

Three themes came out of this article:

1. Forming an instructional leadership team with experts.

2. Managing instructional mismatch.

3. Fostering teacher leadership to support the instructional leadership team.

The first theme looks for experts already within the school who can support instructional leadership and are a part of the team. The second theme looks to help manage and differentiate the support needed for different staff members' abilities. The third theme looked to foster teacher leaders as they support the leadership team.

Two conclusions came out of the three themes. The first was that the principal cannot lead on their own. The second was that the principals needed to look at each content area and recruit a leader for the instructional leadership team. These are two systems principals, especially new principals, can implement. I say "especially new principals" because not only will this help support instructional growth, but it will also

allow for some of the responsibility to be shared.

Focus 3: Prior Experience in Supporting New Principal's Transition

As with all new jobs, it is important to look at how prior experience has helped prepare the person for the new role. This is true as well for a new principal. Often, principals can be on an island with little to no support in the transition. Some principals have no other administrator in the buildings. Many middle school principals are the only middle school principal in the district. For all these reasons, prior experience is critical to be prepared for the role.

In a study by Yavuz and Gulmez (2018), they looked specifically at the factors that affect the principal's perception of being prepared to lead instructional leadership activities. The goal of the study was to contribute by providing a framework that can "help specify what the needs of urban educators to serve as instructional leaders" (Yavuz & Gülmez, 2018, p. 99).

There were many research questions in this study, with the most impactful to this paper including how participants' gender, years of teaching experience, age, race, participation in the educational leadership program, previous leadership experience, school level, and school size predict their perceived readiness to perform instructional leadership activities and do the number of years spent in the educational leadership program make a difference in their preparedness levels.

All members of a leadership preparation program collected the data. The program is a two-year educational leadership certification program that includes an internship. One hundred fifty participants were invited, with seventy-four participating in

the study.

The inferential findings showed that among the different categories identified in the study, including age, race, years of experience, and participation in the leadership program, only participation in the leadership program significantly and positively contributed to their perceived readiness for being instructional leaders and performing leadership activities. However, there was no statistical difference between the first and second-year program completers. "To increase perception of preparedness, school leaders educators need to re-examine and differentiate projects and assignments provided for prospective urban school leaders" (Yavuz & Gülmez, 2018, p. 113). In addition, it was suggested that each candidate prepare an evidence-based portfolio to prepare for being an instructional leader.

The study's main conclusion was that policymakers must understand that there is a difference between knowledge-ready, performance-ready, and impact-ready leaders. Therefore, training programs need to differentiate between these different leaders. There are some different ways this differentiation can look. However, I would recommend that middle school principals may need to seek a middle school endorsement for the principalship similar to what is needed for middle school teachers. This could be an additional class or additional assignments within a class to help them understand how to manage the staff at the middle level. Although this paper looks more into what principals need to do once in the role of instructional leaders, we also need to understand how important it is to give aspiring principals the knowledge and support during their studies to succeed in the principal role.

Glanz, Shaked, Rabinowitz, Shenhav, and Zaretsky (2017) put together a study comparing two countries, the USA and Israel, as they looked at leadership practices among principals. In the study, The authors looked not only at the increased expectations of schools to perform and that expectation falling on the principal but also looked at comparing two countries to see how the principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders as well as what influence, if any, the principal preparation programs played in the principal's ability to serve as an instructional leader.

The authors used a mixed-methodological research approach. A questionnaire was constructed, as well as a total of twenty semi-structured interviews. The main conclusion included that schools need to attract principals who are not only verbally committed to instructional improvement but also possess the teaching experience that will help them be the instructional leader needed in the school. This shows that it is not only important to have impactful principal prep programs but also for principals to have seen and been a part of best practices throughout their teaching career.

CONCLUSION:

A common theme in all the literature I reviewed is that principals must be the instructional leader within the building. In each article, there were plenty of reasons why it is difficult, from time constraints to lack of knowledge and preparation. However, it is clear that if principals make it a priority, the school will have a better chance of being a high-performing school.

Teachers need to look at the time they have and ensure that they carve out time within their day to support instruction. This can look different depending on the needs of

the staff. Principals can participate in professional development either by leading themselves or by attending with teachers to understand best practices and support the teachers moving forward. In Chapter 6, we will look at the different systems that can be implemented to support principals, specifically new principals, as instructional leaders.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN OVERVIEW:

This qualitative study will seek to examine the instructional leadership practices of middle school principals, looking specifically at the systems that can be implemented early on in a principal's tenure. The research will be conducted by interviewing six middle school principals working with sixth through eighth-grade students.

In step 5 of Patton's book *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (2012), he shares different evaluation methods, including the Knowledge-Generating Evaluation (Patton, 2012, p. 125). This evaluation model would make principals more knowledgeable about implementing these systems. This evaluation would "involve changing the model by adapting it to changed circumstances and emergent conditions" (Patton, 2012, p. 127).

The primary research question this study seeks to answer is: *What methods will allow new building principals to put systems in place to ensure they tackle the critical task of being the instructional leader in the building?* For this question, it is important to look both at the systems in place for new principals and what systems should have been in place as more veteran administrators reflect on their early years as building principals. Therefore, this study needs to interview both principals who are new to the role as well as veteran principals. Having participants on both ends of the years of service spectrum allows for data that will show what is needed for newly hired principals and allow veteran principals to reflect on what could have supported them to be more influential instructional leaders within their schools in the early years.

Middle school principals were explicitly chosen to narrow the research to one specific grade level ban. Many variables can be discussed between elementary and middle schools, and focusing on just middle schools can exclude some of the variables that can impact the data in the research.

It is important through this research to identify what it means to be an instructional leader in a middle school. Through these interviews, data is collected to answer research question number three: *What are the factors that contribute to building administrators who are instructional leaders?* Defining instructional leadership in order to support these factors will be part of the interview data analysis.

This methodology will help me answer my research questions for several reasons. First, the interviews will bring in several different viewpoints to share what makes for a successful instructional leader in a middle school. Second, the interviews will identify how principals can utilize time to increase teachers' instructional levels. The interviews will bring forth data on what these principals do to improve the learning level within the school. Finally, the interviews will utilize the feedback from veteran principals to support the recommendation of how systems can be implemented to support new principals to increase teachers' ability to instruct students. This final part will help support answers to the first research question: *What methods will allow new building principals to put systems in place to ensure they tackle the critical task of being the instructional leader in the building?*

PARTICIPANTS:

There is a need to seek out specific participants for this study in order to gather the data. Guest et al.'s guidance in their 2006 article "How Many Interviews Are

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Enough?: An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability" shows that six to twelve interviews is a well-accepted standard. Therefore, it was determined that at least six interviews would be conducted. Through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2008), these six participants will be chosen, including some veteran and some principals new to the profession. The qualifications for the three newly appointed principals are that they are in their first seven years as a principal in a middle school. The veteran principals' qualifications include having at least seven years of experience as a principal in a middle school.

All participants will be sought out by inviting principals to share a willingness to participate in the study. The questionnaire will include some minimal demographic information, including

- the school district they currently work in

- how many years they have worked in that position

- how many years of total experience they have as a middle school principal

- how many years of total experience do they have as an administrator in a school

The answers to these questions will allow me to ensure that the correct number of new and veteran principals are selected for the study. Principals will be chosen based on demographic information in order to provide a variety of principals with different years of experience, as well as a need to limit participants to one per district. If needed, snowball sampling will be utilized to increase the number of participants by having the research participants assist in identifying other potential subjects.

DATA GATHERING TECHNIQUES:

The data in this research will highlight how principals utilize their time to ensure that systems are implemented to support teachers' growth and increase instruction within the school. Gordon Donaldson shares that there is a direct correlation between supporting the learning and growth of adults and student achievement (Donaldson, 2008). He also shares that research indicates that students benefit, and their achievement increases when adults learn and grow in schools.

In gathering data for this research, the questions shown in Appendix A were created for reliability and consistency. The semi-structured interviews will be completed in person, with an approximate timeframe of 45-60 minutes. The interviews will include demographic information to begin the interview.   The remaining questions will all be predetermined open-ended questions with the opportunity for follow-up when needed. An audio recording will assist with transcribing the interview after completion.

Throughout the entire process, all participants will be identified by numbers to protect their anonymity. In addition, there will be no mention of their specific school district as there is often only one middle school principal within a district, especially in Illinois, where I will be concentrating.

This study has several limitations, including the small sample size and minimal time limit in which to collect the data. The interviews can be completed either in person or online. Online interviews allow for ease of recording the interviews. It also allows for geographic proximity to not be a factor when looking for participants.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The ethical considerations learned through the CITI Program training will ensure that the research and data collection does not harm any participants. These considerations include:

- disclosing to potential research subjects information needed to make an informed decision

- facilitating the understanding of what has been disclosed

- promoting the voluntariness of the decision about whether or not to participate in the research.

Information will be shared with participants through the informed consent process to ensure that all participants understand the specifics of what was approved through the Institute Research Review Board (IRB) process. In addition, a description of what the participant will need to do and that this interview is completely voluntary and can be stopped at any time will be shared.

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES:

Interviews will be conducted, with all interviews recorded and then transcribed to review the information shared. Once transcribed, each question will be reviewed to identify common themes. Themes will then be categorized within the three research questions. It is possible that some themes will be categorized into multiple areas. Quotes that support the themes will be identified. Any identified outliers will also be documented.

To analyze what systems best support a new principal to be an instructional leader, the 4 C's framework of Wagner will be utilized (Wagner et al. 2006). Context, as

seen through external factors, the culture of the district, conditions that will support

organizational change and competencies that allow for the change to be carried out, will

all be utilized as the data is analyzed. Looking into Wagner's 4 C's will help process the

themes and success seen through the interview data when determining how best to

implement these systems through organizational change.

CONCLUSION:

This chapter provided the rationale for this research study of systems to support

new principals to be instructional leaders. It included the purpose of this study, how

participants will be chosen and who will participate, how data will be gathered and

analyzed, and ethical considerations. Interviews with six current principals will provide

the research needed to investigate answers to the three research questions. Interviews

will be analyzed, and themes will be identified to support solutions to the research

questions. Additional research will be shared to support the themes identified through

this qualitative research method.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

INTRODUCTION:

As a school administrator for the past nineteen years, I have seen the impact a building principal can have on instruction within the school. I have also seen how difficult it can be within a middle school to ensure that systems are in place to allow for instructional growth within the school. Principals are often pulled in many directions daily. From scheduling to student discipline to their interaction with parents and community members, it is often possible for instructional leadership to be left off the list of items to be done. That is why principals need to look at what systems are in place within their school to ensure that building capacity among their teachers and continual instruction growth is included in the to-do list.

With the signing of the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) in 2010, all principal evaluations must include a student growth component starting in 2012 and the standards of effective practice that clearly describe what excellent school leadership means. With this act, the principal's role within a school as an instructional leader became front and center as it required principals to have more of an impact on student growth and be held to the metrics set.

I specifically chose middle school as a focus for several reasons. With most middle schools having content-specific teachers (similar to high schools), there can be a feeling of a principal to allow the "experts" (teachers) to take more of a lead in the growth of instructional practices within the school. However, I have seen through my principalships how important it is for guidance to come from the building leadership to

make sure best practices are being developed as a whole staff and not in a silo of one classroom or department.

This study aims to identify ways principals can implement systems that allow new middle school principals to be instructional leaders within the school setting. The ultimate goal is to provide a roadmap for newly hired principals to use as they define how their leadership will look within the middle school.

I used semi-structured interviews to compile data from several current middle school principals to gather qualitative data. First, the interviews brought in several different viewpoints to share what makes for a successful instructional leader in a middle school. Second, the interviews identified how principals can utilize time to increase teachers' instructional levels. The interviews brought forth data on what these principals do to improve the learning level within the school. Finally, the interviews were able to separate what veteran principals can do and how systems can be implemented to support new principals to increase teachers' ability to instruct students.

Once the interviews were completed, I analyzed the answers to look for common themes that surfaced. I looked specifically at how the principals set up their time and what fundamental structures are in place to ensure that instructional leadership is part of the regular job description.

The six key participants in this study are all current middle school principals. The participants varied in age and experience. Participants had a minimum of seven years of administrative experience to a maximum of sixteen years. Their range of experience as a principal was from three to fifteen. Their range as middle school principals was specifically one to fifteen years. The highest level of education for four of the principals

was a master's degree, and for the other two participants was a doctorate. Four of the

participants identify as male, while two of the participants identify as female. However,

the participants were not picked based on gender since gender is not a variable being

looked at through this data.

As seen in table one and two below, the school districts the participants work in

are primarily high-achieving districts based on their IAR scores. They are districts that

are not in financial crisis and, for the most part, have low-class sizes. The teachers are

paid well, and the ratio of students to teachers and students to administrators is low.

The data from each of the participants' middle schools is listed below. The data

comes from the Illinois School Report Card.

Table 1

School-Specific Demographic Data

School Specific Data	School 1 6-8	School 2 6-8	School 3 6-8	School 4 K-8	School 5 6-8	School 6 6-8
Summative Designation	Exemplary	Commendable	Commendable	Commendable	Commendable	Commendable
Number of Students	627	577	760	703	289	402
School spending per student	$22,619	$21,227	$13,249	$18,961	$28,366	$21,973
IAR ELA	76%	23%	36%	55%	69%	58%
IAR Math	68%	20%	38%	41%	54%	55%
Average class size	18.3	25.5	28.9	17.4	18.8	20.2

Table 2

District-Specific Demographic Data

District Data	School 1 6-8	School 2 6-8	School 3 6-8	School 4 K-8	School 5 6-8	School 6 6-8
Student:Teacher ratio	12:1	16:1	18:1	12:1	11:1	12:1
Percent with Masters	82%	73%	69%	81%	54%	81%
Teacher retention	89%	88%	91%	95%	83%	90%
Average Salary	$88,000	$81,636	$64,755	$87,978	$73,988	$85,928
Administrator / Student ratio	130:1	156:1	160:1	117:1	101:1	139:1
Principal Turnover in the past 6 years	1 principal over the past 6 years	2 principals over the past 6 years	1 principal over the past 6 years	4 principals over the past 6 years	2 principals over the past 6 years	2 principals over the past 6 years
Admin Average Salary	$151,921	$122,376	$123,426	$130,883	$140,712	$173,870

FINDINGS:

The research completed within this study helped to support the three research

questions:

- What methods will allow new building principals to put systems in place to ensure

  they tackle the critical task of being the instructional leader in the building?

- Just as teachers are facilitators of learning within the classroom, how can

  principals facilitate learning for staff?

- What are the factors that contribute to building administrators being successful

  instructional leaders?

All three questions support principals within the middle school to build systems to

support their ability to be an instructional leader within the school. Therefore, data was

compiled through interviews with middle school principals with a variety of experience.

Why Choose Leadership?

In order to look into systems that principals can implement to support their being instructional leaders, the interviews first looked into what makes a principal an instructional leader. All of the principals interviewed shared the most important contributing factors that led them to become middle school principals. Within their answers were several themes. One theme was the ability to have "a greater impact on the success of children," which was shared by participant number 4. Participant five added to that belief by stating, "I felt like being an administrator gave me the opportunity to have an impact on more students." This idea that administrators could have a more significant impact on more children than just the ones that were in their classroom gave way to the importance of being a leader within the building that helped other teachers grow instructionally. Since it was important to have a more significant impact, systems needed to be set up to support that growth.

Another contributing factor that led the participants to become a middle school principal was the fact that they had many opportunities to exhibit their leadership skills. Whether it was as a coach of a team, a mentor of a new year, or the opportunity to be a team leader, the participants felt that those opportunities helped open the door to their wanting to be a building leader. In addition, the encouragement they felt from their supervisors also led them down this path. One participant shared that they were "very fortunate to have an administrator who saw potential in me for leadership opportunities." Another participant shared that they "received a fair amount of positive feedback along the way where people (were) acknowledging the work." All of these factors helped lead

the participants to look into formal leadership roles as building principals in a middle school.

The participants shared that they chose leadership to help more kids because they had leadership potential. One participant shared that they "wanted to have a greater impact on the success of children." Almost the exact words were used by another participant, as that was clearly a theme among the participants. Another participant shared that they were "I was very quickly (in) year three or four of my teaching career put in an opportunity to be a part of the leadership team as an athletic director over at my school." That participant later shared the idea of "starting to think through the 10,000-foot view and how that impacts multiple stakeholders." Through the interviews, the themes of helping more kids and being told of their leadership potential emerged as themes of why the participants chose leadership.

What does instructional leadership look like?

Multiple principals shared their need as instructional leaders to have a clear vision and guidance. They share that being an instructional leader involves setting a clear vision for effective instruction within the school. This includes defining expectations for both teachers and students regarding instructional practices and learning outcomes across different content areas. As participant 1 shared, it was important to "set a vision of what that looks like. What instruction looks like in our building across all the different content areas and being a middle school, I think it can be tricky just because everyone is in their own silo when it comes to their subject area." This shows the need for a vision from the principal to be in place. I would often think

the same thing as a principal. Part of my job was to help connect different staff

members to a vision of how we would grow and improve our practice. Silos are talked

about often within education. Sometimes, it is different departments not working closely

together, like when the curriculum and instruction department is not on the same page

as the technology department, and our tech supports in the classroom do not match our

best practices for learning. In this case, silos are talked about as teachers will often

know their own classroom but not be aware of what is happening in other classrooms or

teachers of different content. That is when a principal needs to help make those

connections, and the best way to do that is through a shared vision.

A second principal added, "How can you allocate resources, whether that's

people, whether that's time, whether that's curriculum materials…how can I, in my

position, support teachers so that they can be at their best so that they can work

together in their professional learning communities, have the resources they need to

deliver high-quality instruction." This also starts with a vision and takes it a step further

to how best to implement the vision with the staff. It is not enough to have a vision as a

principal; you have to have a plan to implement that vision and attain the goals you

have set for the staff.

What routines are in place?

Throughout the interviews, the topic of time continued to surface. As the

participants shared what was being done or what they would like to see done, they

would mention the need to carve out specific time. One participant shared, "I think it is

spending a lot of time with your different teams, whether it is your subject area or your

grade level teams, and having kind of honest conversations about, you know, how things are going in the classroom." Other participants would share strategies they had to carve out time and not allow other things, like attending to behavior concerns or following up with parents who have reached out, to monopolize the time.

One participant shared that they "make it a priority to go to as many …student multi-tiered system of support meetings." Another participant shared that they use an application called Mcrawl to keep track of the walkthroughs they do. A third participant shared how the master schedule helps teachers attend grade-level planning periods. Since principals can spend a lot of time on clerical tasks and not have the time to help the staff grow instructionally, it is essential to ensure time is set into the day or week to support teachers with their instruction.

Most principals shared the need to be a part of teacher meetings. Many reference professional learning communities as a specific meeting they attend. They shared that attendance was necessary at the meetings, and they needed to be there consistently and offer meaningful and honest feedback to the staff regarding what they observed and where growth was needed.

In addition, there is a need to get into classrooms to observe teachers as they are teaching and then give meaningful and timely feedback on what was observed. These observations are another routine that requires time to be set aside to ensure it happens. Often, classroom observations occur throughout the evaluation process, which is an excellent way for principals to bring the more large-picture conversations down to a specific teacher's needs. One principal stated:

"One of the most significant opportunities is through the evaluation process. As I observe classrooms as I go in for formals and informals, being able to provide direct feedback to

teachers and make recommendations or considerations for them to explore. That's great

dialogue that I get to have with teachers one on one. That generally doesn't happen in

other settings…that's normally group settings. And we're not able to dive in necessarily

to a teacher's practice. It's more curricular, right? It's more large picture when I'm talking

to the whole math department, but I can talk about specific strategies with individual

teachers."

The opportunity to work individually with teachers does not happen easily. One of the

most critical thoughts in the above quote is the need for informal observations. These

informal observations can trigger supporting and meaningful conversations between the

principal and teacher as the principal can discuss the instructional practices observed in

the classroom.

Who is available to help?

Supporting staff in growing their instructional practices cannot be done solely on

the principal's back. Another prominent theme within the data is that principals think

being an instructional leader is important. However, there are barriers to being an

effective instructional leader, including time and additional support expressed by the

participants. Therefore, supporting the staff to continue to learn and grow can be

supported by others in the district. Within the interviews, the principals often spoke of

how others were involved in different processes. For example, many principals talked

about the involvement of team leaders in various decision-making processes, such as

curricular adoptions, resource integration, and implementation strategies. This

involvement ensures that the perspectives of passionate subject-area experts are

considered.

Others talked about teacher leaders' ability to represent their grade levels or departments in meetings and discussions about instructional practices, curriculum, and other educational matters. Their input can provide a more holistic view of the instructional landscape. In addition, the regular team leader or department chair meetings created open communication channels for discussing instructional strategies, student progress, professional development needs, and challenges. The meetings also allowed for an opportunity to share best practices, help to align school goals, have direct involvement in initiatives, and continuously learn through targeted professional development. Teacher leaders are empowered to take ownership of their departments or grade levels, contributing to decision-making, problem-solving, and strategic planning.

As one principal said, "It is all hands on deck." Using teacher leaders is positive because "then it is more of a team approach in trying to help, especially younger teachers, or even older teachers that may be stuck and they just can't figure out a way to connect in a certain way to kids." This is where the distributive leadership model in Chapter 1 can come in handy. This model can define leadership roles to allow teacher leaders to work together through systems that are set up to support all staff.

In addition to teacher leaders within the building, the principals also spoke of instructional coaches and district office support that can be part of the "all hands on deck" belief. The principals seemed to all share the same thought process: Many people in different roles within the district can help support the instructional growth of teachers.

How do you know what is needed?

A question asked of the participants was: How do they determine the needs of the building as it pertains to instruction? The principals shared a variety of ways they determine these needs.

One specific way to determine needs is through the curriculum review process. Leaders involve teachers and administrators in reviewing the effectiveness of the current curriculum and instructional resources. This process helps them identify areas that require enhancement or adjustment. One principal spoke of the curriculum adoption process and the need to support the teachers not only in the year the curriculum was rolled out but also to continue support in future years. He stated that "we're trying to keep teachers that are passionate about specific subjects in the conversation so they can be spokespeople for their teams or their grade levels at the younger grades. And not just let that adopt and die mentality."

Another principal spoke of using both formal and informal evaluations. The principal shared that it comes from meeting with "instructional coaches, and what they're seeing in the building, and then also comes from our data, especially our MAP data." This was consistent with other participants who shared that they would use multiple avenues of input to determine the needs of the building. Another participant shared that input is received through casual conversations when "you can tell if there needs to be more because the staff is giving you that immediate feedback that maybe they're lost or they're confused on what they should be doing."

Through the interviews, it was clear that the principals use a combination of data analysis, observation, communication, collaboration, and alignment with strategic goals to identify the instructional needs of the building. This ensures that professional development, curriculum, and instructional practices are tailored to address specific challenges and enhance student learning experiences.

What do you do?

A specific question in all the interviews was: What professional development have you offered to support instruction? The answers were all across the board, from focusing on instructing English Language Learners best to working through the Danielson model on the best practices in teaching to how best to help staff self-regulate so that they are in the best position to support the students. Although there were many different offerings, there were central themes around how the principals chose the support needed for the staff.

Many of the principals made a connection between the self-assessment they would do to determine the needs of the building and the professional development they would offer. For example, one participant who spoke about understanding needs through the evaluation process also spoke about supporting staff through that evaluation process. Another participant spoke about collaborating with teachers to prioritize instruction. This comes after the principal shared that informal conversations with teachers are one way to help determine the teachers' needs.

In addition to professional development, several other strategies were put in place by the different principals to ensure that they set aside time to support the instructional growth of teachers. One principal mentioned that the district has designated time every week for students to leave early and staff to stay later to support their growth. "Some form of professional development or staff meeting is happening every Monday. And they're set for professional learning community meetings. There's one of the Mondays is set aside specifically for grade levels. One Monday is set aside specifically for content professional learning communities. One is set aside for district professional development, and then one set aside for me."

The professional development for instructional improvement within the schools is diverse, ranging from curriculum adoptions and specialized training to collaborative learning opportunities and technology integration. The focus is on addressing specific school needs while fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth among educators.

INTERPRETATION:

It was unanimous among all interviewed that being an instructional leader of the building was an important attribute of the building principal. Although not an easy task, as many shared, the participants agreed that support in helping teachers grow instructionally was a part of their job that needed to be done. Reeves shares how "the very discussion of change would require an admission of error." (Reeves, 2016, p. 16) This sums up how any change, including how a principal might spend their time on a daily or weekly basis, must include an admission that what had been done prior was not perfect. When asked how the study participants ensure that they have time for the instructional growth of teachers, they overwhelmingly shared that, although they try, time often gets away from them with so many other duties of their job demanding their time from discipline to logistics to scheduling the students. When talking about change for teachers, Reeves states that when the teacher hears, "You're going to really enjoy this professional learning program for student engagement…the teacher hears, my principal must think I'm a terrible teacher who doesn't engage students" (Reeves, 2016, p. 29). This is also an example of why change can be difficult. Not only are principals asked to admit they were not doing it as well as they could prior, but they also might

hear they were actually doing it wrong. This is why the presentation of how to change and build this philosophy into the culture of a building must take some time and proactive conversations.

The findings in this chapter clearly show that there are many ways that principals offer support to staff within the realm of instruction. Just like not all students learn the same, we know that not all teachers will learn the same. Therefore, offering a variety of ways to support staff is a way to help reach all staff members. Participants shared they determined the needs of the building and provided professional development to support the needs. What is difficult is how consistently this is happening, which is why the conversation around time is so meaningful. This takes us to the research questions and how the data helps to answer them.

What methods will allow new building principals to put systems in place to ensure they tackle the critical task of being the instructional leader in the building?

One of the participants was a principal who was new to the school. In recalling what he would have done differently when starting a year prior, he shared that he had wished there had been a crash course in the curriculum that he could have taken. When thinking back on my first years as a principal (or even into my fifth year), I would agree that curriculum did not seem to be the most important thing to learn as a principal. However, that is why you, as a principal, will not have buy-in from teachers. If you are not able to have some knowledge of the curriculum, even from a broad vantage point, teachers will have a hard time trusting you and what you share or the professional development you offer. The first recommendation would be to engage in conversations

around the specific curriculum. As a middle school principal, one needs to understand all the different curricula being taught. Although you cannot be an expert in everything, you can have a good understanding of what is being taught and what is the scope and sequence. This can happen through navigating the websites of the textbooks, doing a deep dive into teachers' websites, having conversations with teachers specific to the curriculum, or meeting with district-level administrators to learn about all that is taught in the school. As shared earlier, the participants shared in the interviews how meaningful informal conversations are with staff to help support the growth of the teachers. Principals must show knowledge of the curriculum during these informal conversations.

A second recommendation, similar to the first, is to learn about the school upon entering the new role as a principal. However, this time, it is not about learning curriculum, but rather, learning the instructional practices that have been a focus through the professional development of staff within the school prior to your arrival. Often, schools have school improvement plans, and school districts have strategic plans that spell out what the initiatives are for the district. As a new principal, you must ensure those plans are followed. Then, learning about the specific initiatives rolled out around instructional practices will help the new principal transition into the new role. If a new principal can come into a building and build off of what was previously taught to staff, that can only help support a smooth transition. Staff want to see initiatives through and not feel like professional development is one and done.

A final recommendation would be to manage time efficiently. At the beginning of each school year, I would meet with my new staff members. One of the best pieces of advice I would give them is that it is vital to identify what is truly an emergency and what

can wait, and I would share that belief with the new staff members. I would share that a student in danger or hurt is an example of an emergency. A student cheating on a test is not an emergency (although many teachers want to solve it immediately). The same can hold true for new principals. They must distinguish between what is an emergency and what can wait.

What was shared during the interviews was how difficult it was to keep the time carved out in a week for instruction. Often, other issues will surface, but a new principal needs to recognize what needs their immediate attention and what can wait. Appropriately identifying those issues can help ensure that time can be spent supporting teacher's growth.

Just as teachers are facilitators of learning within the classroom, how can principals facilitate learning for staff?

As shared in the results of the interviews, there are many ways to learn the needs of a building. The first recommendation for this research question is to identify the needs of the building. This should happen through multiple avenues, including surveying staff, individual conversations with teachers, attending curriculum and team meetings, and utilizing past and current initiative knowledge. Once a needs assessment is complete, the next step is to develop a short and long-term plan to support teachers in the different areas and communicate it with the staff. This plan should support the District's strategic plan.

There are many different ways that the principal can facilitate this learning. It does not necessarily mean a principal needs to attend a staff meeting and offer

professional development, although that is one way. Principals can connect teachers

who can support each other through distributive leadership. Through conversations and

observations, principals should know different teachers' growth areas and strengths. I

would often recommend that teachers talk to and observe different teachers who may

be able to support them. As with all items on these lists, having good relationships with

the teachers so they feel supported would allow for this to be a positive

recommendation.

In addition, principals can bring in other "experts" to support the staff. I often

would see that teachers would learn best from an outside consultant. Even though I

often felt like I could present the topic, sometimes an external consultant who does not

evaluate the staff can better be heard, increasing the support the teachers will receive.

What are the factors that contribute to building administrators being successful instructional leaders?

What is clear is that principals need to have a pulse on what the building needs are to

support teachers best. They need to have a strong relationship with the staff. There needs to

be trust, good communication, the ability to listen, and well-thought-out short- and long-term

plans to move staff forward. Staff must not feel like different initiatives or professional

development opportunities are fragmented but rather flow together as the staff continues to

learn and grow.

This final research question brings together this chapter, which includes the results of the

interviews and interpretations and recommendations of what is next as we begin to look into the

change plan in the next chapter.

CONCLUSION

This chapter shared not only the need for principals to understand the culture of their building and how best they can support their staff but also the need for internal and external resources to support their teachers' growth. This chapter's results helped determine recommendations for the principal to increase their ability to support staff instructionally.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHANGE PLAN

INTRODUCTION: This chapter will look at the as-is model through Wagner's framework to compare it to the to-be as I begin to share what needs to be done to allow for change moving forward. The ideas shared within this chapter are summarized in the tables included at the end of the chapter.

AS-IS: To discuss the findings from the research gathered through the interviews with different middle school principals, I utilized Wagner's 4 Cs framework (Wagner et al., 2006). Within this framework, I created my As-Is chart to help look deeper into the three research questions:

As is seen in Figure 3, there are four arenas of change with context encompassing the entire organizational system. Context refers to the "larger organizational systems within which we work, and their demands and expectations, formal and informal" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 104). Within this study, the context refers not only to the educational system that is in place and how time can be distributed, but in this specific study of middle schools, the context also encompasses an idea of teachers being content-specific and what principals can offer to help them grow within their specific content.

The cultural arena of change provides the most barriers to change. Culture is defined as "the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 102). The most barriers are presented here because not only is there a need for the principals

to understand why this must be a priority to help teachers grow their instructional skills, but there is also a need to bring along teachers for this understanding. For principals, it is easy to share all the other tasks that need to be completed with their time, from behavior to PTA meetings to addressing parent concerns. If it is not a priority to support instructional growth within the building, the growth will not happen. In addition, teachers will not only need to be able to reflect on their practices and where there is a need for growth, but they also must be open to receiving professional development from the principal or whomever they designate.

The condition arena is defined as the "external architecture surrounding student learning and tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 101). This arena will be addressed in abundance within Chapter 6 as we look more at how the principals spend time within the middle school. This study looks at how principals utilize their time. Therefore, we will need to look at how time conditions are put in place to support new principals by allowing them to be instructional leaders instead of only school managers.

The final arena focuses on competencies or "the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 99). There is a need to ensure that principals are not only taking time to be instructional leaders but also have the ability to do so. To this end, district leadership must provide the tools to principals and instructional leaders. This can happen in many ways, including ensuring that district administrators have opportunities for professional growth for themselves as well. Some school districts will go as far as to create regular learning opportunities for building administrators throughout the year. This allows building principals to learn and

discuss with other administrators how to implement these newly taught strategies in their schools.

Within each of these categories, I looked at the as-is (what currently is being done within the category) and the to-be (what should be done in the category). The following breaks out the topics within the different categories.

CONTEXT:

Within the context category, one can see why, specifically, middle school principals are the topic of this study. As stated previously, the principals within middle schools are working with some unique characteristics not found in the younger elementary schools, as many teachers view themselves as content experts who usually only teach one subject area. This makes it often difficult for a principal, who is not often a content expert in multiple subjects, to support the staff, or at least the staff being open to that support.

In addition, the middle school principal's time is often pulled in many directions regarding behavior at this level, following up with different incidents, scheduling, and other responsibilities that pull them away from having time to support the staff. Lastly, it is not specific to middle school, but it is important to have teacher leaders who have the staff's trust. This requires a straightforward, transparent selection process and an opportunity for leaders to build trust after they are chosen through professional development leadership opportunities.

In looking at what is to be, I have broken it down into five different sections:

Staff and Teacher Dynamics: As discussed above, there must be a level of trust among the staff to allow the principal to impact the instruction happening within the school. Although the principal does not need to be an expert in all areas, the staff needs to know that the principal is there to support them and will seek solutions and professional development to help increase their ability to provide appropriate instruction to their students.

Resources and Support: The principal must be aware of the resources available. Following the first section above, the principal must connect staff with the resources necessary to continue improving their instruction. This might be other colleagues, available conferences, or coaches within the district.

External Partnerships: One of the best examples of an external partnership is connecting staff with businesses within the community that can support the instruction through field trips or in-school speakers that will support the curriculum.

Professional Learning Communities: Principals need help. How they structure their building to allow staff to work with each other to grow is also a responsibility of the principal. This goal can profoundly impact the staff as learning can happen simultaneously for many staff members.

Changing Educational Landscape: The principal needs to know current best practices within instruction. Keeping up-to-date with all the latest trends through research, reading, and attending their professional development will allow that knowledge to be shared with appropriate staff to support their growth.

CULTURE:

The current culture has a top-down approach to instruction, with the district office often sharing the district's instructional vision and the principal's job being to implement that vision. In addition, the culture, specifically in middle schools, does not have principals viewing instructional leadership as a central part of their daily job responsibilities, or at least not a high priority. Teachers are not open to receiving the information principals share when change is attempted within classroom instruction. In looking at the to-be within this section, I have broken it into the following categories:

Shared Vision and Mission: The principal must work with staff to develop a shared mission. Often, this can happen through the School Improvement Plan (SIP) but needs to be shared with staff to ensure that staff are all on the same page regarding working towards a common goal.

Instructional Coaching and Support: Looking at a principal's limited time, there should be a system to implement coaching and support that does not rely solely on the principal being that support. This can involve formal coaching from staff hired as an instructional coach and support from colleagues through mentor programs or job-alike meetings.

Recognition and Celebration: Principals need to look into how best to recognize and celebrate the amazing things happening in classrooms. How can that information be shared with other staff to spark colleagues' ideas regarding improving their instructional practices?

Modeling Instructional Leadership: The principal must be seen as an instructional leader to the staff. This can happen through modeling throughout the year. A principal

needs to actively be a part of the professional development by attending the opportunities and, at times, by leading them.

CONDITIONS:

Building trust has already been mentioned several times. The fact that the principal is also an evaluator of the staff members, finalizing whether the staff member will be employed the following year will often hinder the ability to build the trust needed. In addition, limited resources in the school and district will directly impact the systems that can be implemented within the school. Time is an issue not only for the principal to carve out time to support the staff. Finding the time for staff to receive professional development can be an issue. Training during the school days is offered less with less availability of substitute teachers. After-school time is often not an option for staff, and summer development happens by choice and typically will only include some staff that need the training. All of these constraints for when professional development can be offered and how to ensure that all staff are able to receive the professional development make it difficult to put an initiative in place and support the growth of teachers.

Categories for this section's to-be include:

Professional Development: There is a need for continuous professional development to be attended by the principal to allow for best practices to be shared eventually with staff.

Mentorship and Networking: Principals need a mentor to support their growth. This does not limit the mentorship to that first year as a principal (as is often done).

Principals should always have mentors they are working with for support. In addition, the need for networking is crucial. In both of my principal roles, I had a group of middle school principals that I met with regularly and could reach out to at any time for support. Although they did not have specific knowledge of my district, they were able to relate to the challenges of a middle school principal in order to support and offer solutions for issues that arose.

School Culture and Climate: It is the principal's job to ensure a culture/climate in the building that is open to a growth mindset regarding instructional practices within the classroom. This can happen in a variety of ways, including building trust, being transparent, and being involved in the trainings and initiatives that are put in place.

Collaborative Decision-Making: Principals need to develop teacher leaders and involve both those leaders and the entire staff in decision-making related to curriculum, instruction, and school improvement.

Data-Informed Decision Making: A date-informed approach must be used within the school. Too often, decisions are made solely on a feeling staff have instead of looking at the data that can support those feelings.

Reflective Practice: Principals must engage in self-reflection and continuous improvement as instructional leaders. This includes gathering feedback from staff, students, and colleagues and refining practices and systems.

COMPETENCIES:

Principals are often not offered opportunities to grow instructionally. They are also not provided opportunities to learn how to support best and coach their staff (especially

more veteran staff members). In addition, new principals often are not educated in the beliefs and vision of the district, especially when looking at historical beliefs, to understand best all the different systems and beliefs in place.

ENVISIONING THE SUCCESS (TO-BE):

Within this section, recommendations are made for what the principal's role within a middle should be.

Curriculum Development and Alignment: Principals need to deeply understand the curriculum design and how the curriculum aligns with the state standards and educational goals. Principals need to work collaboratively with staff to ensure the curriculum is rigorous, relevant, and meets the needs of the students.

Instructional Strategies, Best Practices, and Data Development: Principals need to be knowledgeable about a number of best practices and instructional strategies. This includes understanding how best to reach diverse learning.

Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development: Principals should be fair and honest regarding teacher evaluations. They should set clear goals, give meaningful feedback, and set ongoing professional development for teachers.

Collaboration and Communication: To build positive relationships with staff, principals need strong communication skills when collaborating with staff, students, and parents. Principals should foster a collaborative learning environment that encourages teamwork, shared decision-making, and open communication among staff.

Instructional Leadership and Coaching: Principals should be able to provide instructional leadership and coaching to teachers. This should include observing classroom instruction and giving meaningful feedback.

Some common themes emerge through these to-be categories in all four sections. They include:

- Building trust
- Effective communication
- Principals being present
- Developing systems that allow others to support the vision

These themes will be included in Chapter 6 as I look into a change plan that will support the data found through the research conducted.

CONCLUSION AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS:

My current unanswered questions stem from the culture section. Specifically, they are:

1) How do we help building principals understand the need to prioritize instructional growth support over all the other issues that need their attention each day?

2) How can staff members understand that, although their principal may not have taught in their subject area, the principal can still support their instructional growth in supporting their learning of best teaching practices?

Both of these questions call for a need to change the culture of the building (or, in some cases, the District). Bolman and Deal described organizational culture as the "way things get done around here" (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 231). As you think of culture this way, leaders must shape the culture and not vice versa. Many beliefs and patterns

within a school and district are "unconscious or taken for granted" (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 231). Therefore, leaders need to take time to reflect on what the culture of the building is and whether there are changes that need to be made.

The first question requires principals to truly immerse themselves in the need to be instructional leaders. For this to happen, there must be conversations among all administrators (district and building level) to understand the need. As I spoke about in Chapter 1, I did not fully open myself up to the idea of being an instructional leader within a building until I was encouraged to do so by my Superintendent. This happened in my seventh year as a principal and could have, and should have, happened years prior. Therefore, the first step is for the district administrators to see the need and then share this need with the building principals. That will allow this to become a priority within buildings. After the principal is given the charge to be an instructional leader within the building, the next step will be for open dialogue about how this can look and what support is needed. The principal must understand that they do not always need to provide support and guidance. They need to be seen as a coach and someone who will connect teachers with the correct person to support them. At times, that might mean bringing in a content area specialist to support teachers, while other times, it might mean that they provide ideas and tools to help the teachers grow.

The second question looks to bring in teachers to understand this need. Just like the students we teach, if the teachers are not open to receiving the teachings, nothing will be learned, and growth will not happen. Therefore, it can come down to the teachers understanding their need for support. I would start the conversation by having teachers complete a self-assessment. For a staff member who might be reluctant to

make this change, I would not share that it is necessarily the "principal" who needs to provide the necessary tools to grow. Instead, I would offer an opportunity for teachers to share what support is required. That feedback would allow a beginning to how the principal can support the teachers. From there, it should open up the opportunity for growth through the needs the principal also sees.

Figure 3
4 C's

Context
- Principal population (Middle School) typically focus on schedule and behavior concerns.
- Teachers content specific; principals feel unprepared to provide support in specific contents

Culture
- Lack of support in number of administrators per building
- Lack of systems in place to allow for teaching of instructional practices to take priority
- Teachers don't see need or at least don't trust that principal can help them grow

Conditions
- Little professional development provided to new principals
- Frequent turnover in positions provides little time to learn the role.
- Lack of time to designate for instructional practice growth among teachers

Supporting New Principals to be Instructional Leaders

Competencies
- Lack of superiors (district admin) educating the building admin on how to help teaches grow in instructional practices.
- Principals lack skills in instruction (often are good at managing, but not in growing)

Table 3
As-Is To-Be Context

Context: Social, Historical, Political, Economic	
AS IS	**TO BE**
• Middle school teachers view themselves as content experts. • Middle school principals are often handling more complex schedule and behavior needs. • Team leaders voices are shared for making shift, but are they trusted by their colleagues?	• Staff and Teacher Dynamics: Consider the dynamics among the staff and teachers in the school. Understand the level of collaboration, trust, and professional relationships among the staff members. Identify existing strengths and areas for improvement in terms of teamwork, communication, and professional growth. Foster a supportive and collaborative environment that encourages instructional leadership among the teachers. • Resources and Support: Assess the availability of resources and support systems in the school. Consider factors such as funding, technology infrastructure, professional development opportunities, and support staff. Determine how to leverage available resources effectively to support instructional practices and provide necessary support for teachers and students. • External Partnerships: Identify potential external partnerships that can support instructional leadership efforts. This can include collaborations with universities, community organizations, businesses, and educational networks. Explore opportunities for professional development, mentorship programs, grants, and other resources that can enhance instructional practices in the school. • Professional Learning Communities: Determine the presence and effectiveness of professional learning communities within the school. If they exist, assess their structure, functioning, and impact on instructional practices. If they don't exist, consider establishing or strengthening such communities to foster collaboration, shared learning, and continuous improvement among teachers. • Changing Educational Landscape: Stay informed about the current educational trends, research, and best practices. Consider the evolving landscape of education, including advancements in technology, changes in teaching methodologies, and the emphasis on skills like critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. Adapt instructional leadership strategies to align with these changing expectations and prepare students for the future.

Table 4
As-Is To-Be Culture

Culture: Values, Beliefs, Assumptions, Expectations, Behaviors, Quality of Relationships	
AS IS	**TO BE**
• Principal is not always in charge of instructional vision. Sometimes top-down decisions are made. • Principals do not see instructional growth as a part of their regular responsibilities. • Teachers are not open to feedback about instructional shifts.	• Shared Vision and Mission: Develop a clear and compelling vision and mission for the school that emphasizes the importance of high-quality instruction and student achievement. Communicate this vision regularly to staff, students, parents, and the wider community to create a shared sense of purpose. • Instructional Coaching and Support: Implement a system of instructional coaching and support that provides teachers with targeted feedback and assistance to improve their instructional practices. This can involve regular classroom observations, feedback conferences, and modeling of effective teaching strategies. Ensure that coaching is supportive and focused on growth rather than punitive in nature. • Recognition and Celebration: Recognize and celebrate exemplary teaching practices and student achievements. Establish mechanisms to showcase and share innovative and effective instructional strategies within the school community. Celebrate student progress and achievements to create a positive and motivating learning environment. • Modeling Instructional Leadership: As a principal, model instructional leadership by actively participating in instructional activities and staying engaged with the teaching and learning process. Demonstrate a commitment to ongoing professional learning, engage in classroom observations, and provide meaningful feedback to teachers. Show a genuine interest in instructional practices and support teachers in their professional growth.

Table 5
As-Is To-Be Conditions

Conditions: External architecture, Tangible arrangements, Time, Resources, Space	
AS IS	**TO BE**
• Lack of trust as the principal is often the evaluator of the teacher. • Limited instructional coaches in the school. • Time is not specifically designated to support instruction. • No systematic way to provide instructional professional development to staff.	• Professional Development: Engage in continuous professional development to enhance your knowledge and skills as an instructional leader. Attend workshops, conferences, and training sessions focused on curriculum development, instructional strategies, data analysis, and leadership development. • Mentorship and Networking: Seek out mentors who are experienced principals or instructional leaders. Their guidance and support can provide valuable insights and help you develop as an effective instructional leader. Additionally, build a professional network within the educational community to collaborate, learn from others, and share best practices. • School Culture and Climate: Create a positive and supportive school culture that values instructional excellence and continuous improvement. Foster a climate that encourages collaboration, innovation, and open communication among staff, students, and families. • Collaborative Decision-Making: Involve teachers and other stakeholders in decision-making processes related to curriculum, instruction, and school improvement. Encourage shared leadership and provide opportunities for teachers to have input in shaping instructional practices. • Data-Informed Decision-Making: Develop a data-driven approach to decision-making, using multiple sources of data to inform instructional strategies and interventions. This includes analyzing student achievement data, conducting regular assessments, and using data to monitor progress and adjust instructional plans accordingly. • Reflective Practice: Engage in self-reflection and continuous improvement as an instructional leader. Seek feedback from teachers, students, and colleagues, and use that feedback to refine your leadership practices and enhance instructional effectiveness.

Table 6
As-Is To-Be Competencies

Competencies: Skills, Knowledge, Dispositions, Leadership, Communication	
AS IS	**TO BE**
• Principals are not provided opportunities to grow instructionally in order to support teachers. • Principals are not provided opportunities to learn how to best support/coach staff through different processes including the evaluation process. • New principals have not been educated in the beliefs of the district, especially instructional beliefs, as well as data analysis.	• Curriculum Development and Alignment: Principals should have a deep understanding of curriculum design and be able to align curriculum with state standards and educational goals. They should work collaboratively with teachers to ensure the curriculum is rigorous, relevant, and meets the needs of all students. • Instructional Strategies, Best Practices and Data Analysis: Principals need to be knowledgeable about a variety of instructional strategies, best practices in teaching and learning, and data analysis. This includes understanding different pedagogical approaches, instructional technologies, and differentiation techniques to support diverse learners. • Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development: Principals play a critical role in evaluating teachers' performance and providing constructive feedback for improvement. They should be able to conduct fair and meaningful evaluations, set professional development goals, and facilitate ongoing professional learning opportunities for teachers. • Collaboration and Communication: Principals need strong interpersonal and communication skills to build positive relationships with teachers, staff, students, parents, and the wider community. They should foster a collaborative school culture that encourages teamwork, shared decision-making, and open communication about instructional practices and student progress. • Instructional Leadership and Coaching: Principals should be able to provide instructional leadership and support to teachers. This includes observing classroom instruction, providing feedback, modeling effective teaching practices, and offering professional coaching to help teachers enhance their instructional skills.

CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

The findings from the six interviews completed suggest that the work of a middle school principal is complex, with many different tasks competing for their time throughout the day, week, and year. In the introduction within Chapter 1, I shared the five key responsibilities and duties of the principal from Wallace, which included shaping a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction, and managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. These five keys are the backdrop to the research completed through these interviews to help determine what systems can be implemented and how a new building principal can impact instructional learning most.

These keys lend themselves to the three research questions. The first research question looks into what methods allow new building principals to put systems in place to be the instructional leader. This speaks directly to the improvement of instruction and how to manage processes within the school. The second question looks at how best principals can facilitate learning for staff. This question takes the keys to cultivating leadership in others and managing people. The third question asks what factors contribute to building administrators to be instructional leaders and is associated with all five keys.

In utilizing the 4 C's of Wagner's framework to answer these three research questions, I looked at the As-Is and bridged them to the To-Be as the participants' feedback of the interviews was interpreted. This chapter will examine the steps needed

to make this bridge change possible. Through the four dimensions of context, culture, conditions, and competencies, action items will be presented to show how to get from where we currently are to where we need to be.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS:

It was George C. Lichtenberg who said, "I cannot say whether things will get better if we change; what I can say is they must change if they are to get better." As is shared in countless books regarding making change, change is difficult but necessary for growth. To create change, one needs to identify the current structure, a goal for what is required with the change, and the actions that will be taken to produce this change. In Chapter 5, both the As-Is and the To-Be were shared. Within this section will be the action steps needed to be taken to make the To-Be a possibility. As shared in the introduction, this chapter will work through Wagner's 4 C's to lay out a change plan with specific strategies and actions to accomplish the goal that allows a new middle school principal to implement systems for instructional leadership.

As individuals work through a principal prep program, they spend much of their time learning about the many aspects of the job. They take classes such as school finance or school law to help them understand how to do some of the nuanced parts of the job, like running the school budget or ensuring their decisions are rooted in prior court cases. They discuss organizational change and teacher evaluation. They look at case studies to help them make difficult decisions. However, the understanding of curriculum and instructional practices tends to be lacking within higher-level programs. It is not a principal's job to know every aspect of the curriculum. Still, there should be a

general understanding of what is being taught, how the curriculum is developed, and how best to teach the curriculum with the classroom lessons.

This brings us to the section on context. Middle school principals have a different job than their elementary counterparts. They have teachers who view themselves as content experts. This happens for a variety of reasons. Unlike elementary school teachers, who often teach all the subjects to students, middle school teachers often teach only one or two subjects at the most. Middle school teachers specialize in subject areas, with their certification endorsing that they have more "expertise" than others. In addition, we see middle school principals often handling more complex issues, both with the behaviors of students and scheduling needs. As mentioned throughout the interviews, the principals must find time in their day or week to ensure they support the instruction within the buildings. Therefore, there are specific action steps that principals need to take to get to the To-Be of Table 3. All the action steps of this domain have a particular theme: to build a community and structure within the school that supports growth.

First, the principal needs to assess the availability of the resources and support systems within the school. The principal needs to understand what is available for staff to utilize and what is available for the principal regarding support systems. There may be an instructional coach or another curriculum specialist in the building. Those positions can be a great resource to a teacher but an even greater resource to a principal trying to help all staff grow. The power behind many of those positions is that they are not rooted in staff evaluation and, therefore, can often allow staff to show their

vulnerability and be open to feedback, knowing it is not connected to their future employment.

In addition to understanding the resources available within the school, the principal also should identify the resources in the district as a whole. There can often be amazing resources within the district, either at the district office or other schools, that can support the middle school. Although larger districts often have more resources, I was surprised how many times we are able to lean on staff within our district to create and run professional development for their colleagues in the small district where I currently am employed.

Next, the principal must determine what external partnerships are available for support outside the district. These partnerships can be mentorship programs, grants, and other resources that will enhance the practices within the school. The principal will not have all the answers when coaching a teacher, but the principal does need to know how to connect the teacher with other resources to receive the much-needed support.

Understanding what resources are available, both internally and externally, does not come easy. It takes time for principals to network. Having worked in multiple districts, I have begun to keep a list of all the resources I come in contact with. It is a great skill to have to be able to identify a specific need for growth with a staff member or at a school and be able to quickly know of resources that you can reach out to for help.

Once the resources are known internally and externally, the principal needs to look at the culture within the school of staff supporting their own growth. Teachers often present themselves as life-long learners, but it needs to be something that is not just

said but practiced within the school. The principal must ensure that professional learning communities (PLC) are present within the building. This was something mentioned by all six of the principals interviewed. I have seen several different models of professional learning communities, and what I have noticed is that specific goals for these communities are vital in bringing success to the building. These communities must foster collaboration, shared learning, and continuous improvement among the teachers. Although the structure of a PLC is often brought through the district, a building principal is responsible for ensuring the time is utilized to support the growth of the teacher's instruction, not just the development of the next day's lesson. Too often, the PLC is administratively driven. A PLC works best when the principal empowers the teachers to believe that they own the PLC.

As we move into culture, we begin to look at the principal and the understanding that being an instructional leader is not only their responsibility but a crucial one. For this to be possible, there are some specific action steps a principal needs to take. First, the principal must have a shared vision and mission with the school. It needs to emphasize the importance of high-quality instruction and student achievement, and it must be communicated regularly with staff, students, parents, and the wider community to create a shared sense of purpose. The vision should be connected to the district's vision.

Second, the principal must build an instructional coaching and support system within the school. Although a sound evaluation system is essential to ensure you have the correct people working in the building, it is a coaching model that will genuinely allow teachers to grow in their position. This system would provide teachers targeted

feedback and assistance to improve their instructional practices. In addition, the principal needs to model instructional leadership by actively participating in instructional activities and staying engaged with the teaching and learning process.

The system must include opportunities for the principal to model instructional leadership. This can happen through active participation in instructional activities and staying engaged in the learning process and can be seen in a plethora of ways. The principal can participate in the curriculum review process, run their own professional development on institute days, or even come into classrooms and model teaching a lesson to students.

The final action step for a principal within the category of culture is ensuring there is recognition and celebration among staff for the exemplary teaching practices and student achievements seen within the school. It is important to have regular mechanisms to showcase and share innovative and effective instructional strategies within the school community. This can happen through principal newsletters, staff meetings, or even school-wide pep assemblies. School pep assemblies allow students, in addition to other staff, to see the teachers recognized for their hard work and the growth they continue to show.

As we look at the third C of Wagner's 4 C's, we come to conditions. Although some of the subcategories are similar to the above (professional development or mentorship), we will examine how they relate specifically to the conditions within the school culture. We currently see it difficult for principals to be in a coaching model as they are often the evaluator as well. In addition, we see a difficulty of not having

designated time (or at least not enough time) to provide meaningful professional development to the staff. Moreover, there are insufficient personnel resources to support the teacher's growth in the building. Therefore, we look at the following action steps to bring the school to the level it needs to be.

The first action step looks at how to support the principal best. Before looking at changes in the school culture or systems, we must ensure that the principal has the knowledge and expertise to be the instructional leader. Therefore, the principal must have a mentor and a network of principals/instructional leaders. As an assistant principal, I had colleagues within the district but nobody outside of the district to utilize. Once I became a principal, I always had a group of other middle school principals to meet regularly with and email questions as I looked for advice. It was an excellent opportunity for support. As Assistant Superintendent, I meet with other business managers monthly and email them or receive emails from them almost daily. My central administration colleagues also have their "group," from the directors of technology, student services, and human resources to the superintendent. Although sometimes groups are already created when a principal starts in a new role, that is not always the case. Even within my business office, I am helping the different staff members create their own groups, from the payroll specialist to the accounts payable person. Their roles are specific to their job, and they are individual roles within the school, so it is helpful to have others doing the same role. This has happened for years with teachers in PLCs who are singletons within the district. For example, the French teacher might be the only one in the district and need to find French teachers in other districts to network with.

Once a mentor and networking group is established, the principal needs to seek professional development. This can help to enhance their knowledge and skills as an instructional leader. It can come from attending workshops, conferences, and training sessions; however, the important part is their focus. The principal should seek professional development focusing on curriculum development, instructional strategies, data analysis, and leadership development.

After looking at conditions that impact just the principal, the principal must look at situations that impact the whole school. The principal must create a culture within the school that is positive and supportive and fosters a climate that encourages collaboration, innovation, and open communication among staff, students, and families. This can happen through collaborative decision-making that involves the appropriate stakeholders in decision-making processes related to curriculum, instruction, and school improvement. In addition, the principal must make data-informed decisions. This includes analyzing student achievement data, conducting regular assessments, and using data to monitor progress and adjust instructional plans accordingly.

As a last action item under conditions, the principal must embark on self-reflection to allow for continuous improvement as an instructional leader. This should happen by seeking feedback from teachers, students, and colleagues and then using that feedback to refine their leadership practices to enhance instructional effectiveness.

This brings us to the final category within Wagner: competencies. The action steps within this category are implemented to support the knowledge that principals

need to be the instructional leaders within the building. Principals need to know instructional best practices themselves to help teachers grow. Once they know the best practices, principals need to know how best to support the staff to ensure the best practices are known. Finally, principals need to ensure they are educated in the district's beliefs to ensure consistency between the district's goals and vision and the school's goals and vision.

When principals begin their role, they need to learn a lot of information specific to the school. Having worked in four different schools as an assistant principal and principal, I know the last thing on a principal's mind is how the curriculum was developed. Principals come in wanting to know procedures in place to support students, which doors are used for entry/exit, and what the master schedule looks like in order to find a student or teacher during the day. Unfortunately, curriculum development is often pushed aside or not looked at altogether. However, for a principal to be an instructional leader, they need to take the time to understand how the curriculum being taught in the school came to be. They need to understand what professional development has been done recently to support instructional strategies. The principal needs to sit down with the curriculum coordinator in the district to understand instruction within the district.

Once this is complete, the principal must continue participating in the curriculum development and alignment within the district. The principal should participate in curriculum review committees and work collaboratively with teachers to ensure the curriculum is rigorous, relevant, and meets the needs of all students. In addition, the principal needs to be knowledgeable of the best practices of instructional strategies and

data analysis and participate with teachers as they are learning these strategies and best practices. Principals should be present and participate when possible in the professional development that teachers receive regarding instructional practices.

These action steps will allow the principal to collaborate and communicate with the staff. In addition, their coaching and leadership within the school will be more meaningful for the staff if they have more knowledge regarding how the curriculum is created and what instructional strategies are taught to teachers to teach the curriculum best.

The above action steps are summed up in Table 7 below. They have been divided into two sections: those that the principal needs to address for themselves and those that need to be addressed by the school community.

Table 7
Action Chart

ACTION CHART	
PRINCIPAL KNOWLEDGE	**SYSTEM IN THE SCHOOL**
- Assess the availability of resources and support systems within the school. - Determine external partnerships available for support. - Have a shared vision and mission. - Have a mentor and create a network of principals/instructional leaders. - Seek out professional development for themself regarding instructional practices. - Embark in self-reflection. - Understand historically how the curriculum was developed and what instructional practices have been shared with staff.	- Ensure professional learning communities are present. - Have an instructional coaching and support system in place for staff. - Recognition and celebration among staff for exemplary teaching practices and student achievements within the school. - Create a culture that encourages collaboration, innovation, and open communication among staff, students, and families. - The Principal participated in the curriculum development and the professional development of instructional practices.

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy advocacy intends to prioritize that middle school principals are instructional leaders. They are equipped with the knowledge and ability to support their teachers to grow by having the following systems in place:

1. The principal is a part of all curriculum and instructional strategy decisions and professional development.

2. The principal prioritizes their time to ensure they find time to attend PLC meetings and participate in professional development regularly.

3. The principal develops a system utilizing internal and external resources to coach and support staff.

4. The principal seeks out the opportunity to network with other middle school principals.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS

Economic Analysis:

As one looks at the action chart, very few economic impacts should happen based on these changes. The decision to ensure that the principal prioritizes instruction in their daily routine does not have a direct economic impact on the school or district. However, other tasks need to be accomplished that either need to be delegated or need to be completed more efficiently. In talking to the study participants, it was clear to them that to make this happen, it was not a need for more money or even more people but a need to make it a priority in their daily routine.

The economic impact can come into play in determining how best to support the principal. The principal should be viewed as an important resource within a school; therefore, financial support should be provided to support the principal through a mentor that will be provided or professional development offered to support the principal.

In the Wallace Foundation report of 2021, the President of the Wallace Foundation, Will Miller, suggests that "we need a balance of investments in developing great principals and great teachers" (Grissom et al., 2021, page X). This helps to show that our financial resources need not only support our teachers but our principals as well. In addition, according to a School Leaders Network's report, CHURN: The High Cost of Principal Turnover: "Twenty-five thousand (one-quarter of US principals) leave

their schools each year, leaving millions of children's lives adversely affected. Fifty percent of new principals quit during their third year in the role. Those that remain frequently do not stay at high-poverty schools, trading difficult-to-lead schools for less demanding leadership roles that serve more affluent populations. These retention and persistence realities deeply hamper the ability for schools, particularly high-poverty schools, to initiate and sustain school improvement efforts necessary to achieve real gains for students" (Culbertson, 2024, p. 1).

Political Analysis:

By changing the priorities of the principals in a middle school, there will inevitably be some concerns expressed by the staff for two reasons. First, many teachers do not view their principal as an instructional expert. This is why it is so essential for the principal to do their due diligence in understanding historically how the curriculum was created and then take the time to be a part of the changes that are happening in the school through curriculum review and instructional strategy professional development. Second, this shift will prioritize the principal's time away from some of the more logistical tasks, which may have a negative impact on the school and culture of the building. This is why it will be critical for the principal to ensure procedures are still in place for these tasks to be completed. As Doug Reeves states, "One of the greatest myths of traditional change leadership is that the leader must gain buy-in from the staff before proceeding with change" (Reeves, 2016, p. 7). He is correct that you do not need buy-in, but you need good communication on why and how changes will happen. The teachers need to understand the reasons behind the change, whether they agree or not, to understand what will be coming next and how it will impact their classrooms.

Change is not easy; like any change, there must be clear communication with the stakeholders. The principal must show a vested interest in what teachers teach in their classroom, what best practices are being shared with the staff, and how any new curriculum is being implemented within the school and district.

Legal Analysis:

From the school standards for administrators per the Illinois State Board of Education, one of the responsibilities of a principal within standard one is to facilitate a vision of learning by promoting "the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship fo a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community" (ISBE, Standards for Administrative Certification, p. 349). Standard two adds that the "competent school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to students' learning and staff's professional growth" (ISBE, Standards for Administrative Certification, p.350). Both of these standards show that this is already the principal's legal responsibility and, therefore, does not legally impact the principal or district moving forward.

Moral and Ethical Analysis:

If the goal of a school is to educate every child, then the goal of a principal needs to be to support that ultimate goal by giving the teachers the tools to make it a possibility. This can happen by ensuring teachers can educate to the best of their ability. Therefore, the principal needs to ensure that teachers have the best strategies and knowledge of curriculum and instructional strategies to ensure this happens.

In his book, Reeves stated that being an effective principal"...requires a leader who is simultaneously an enabler and a disrupter" (Reeves, 2016, p. 101). The goal of a principal cannot just be status quo. The principal needs to both support the teachers and look to continue to help the teachers grow by, at times, disrupting what is happening in the classroom to push the teachers to increase the rigor in the classroom and, in the end, help the students grow as much as possible.

Implications for staff and community:

As stated earlier, "the very discussion of change would require an admission of error" (Reeves, 2016, p. 16). Although that is one way to look at change, that it means something was being done wrong, in this instance, it is crucial for staff and principals to understand that this change is not necessarily about changing something that is wrong, but instead, about improving upon what has been done in the past.

The policy recommendation will significantly impact the staff as they will see principals participate more in the instructional part of their daily routines. Principals will be part of their professional learning communities, helping to support the instruction and growth of the students and teachers. The staff will see principals participating in more committee work, especially in curriculum development. This, in turn, will mean principals may find themselves out of the office more or less as available as they were in the past, impacting staff. That is why procedures and systems must be implemented so the staff members do not see this as a negative impact on the culture of the building.

There will also be an impact outside of the staff and in the school as a whole. There will be a clearer vision and mission for what instruction looks like. Parents will be able to see more consistency as their children move from grade to grade and teacher to

teacher. Although teacher autonomy is important, there is also a need for teachers to have some consistent instructional practices, which these changes will allow.

CONCLUSION:

Principals prioritizing a focus on instruction within the middle school will allow for a much-needed change for students and staff. A principal needs to be more than just a manager of a school. A principal needs to ensure a clear vision for the building that includes the growth of instructional strategies for the staff. In addition, systems need to be implemented to allow for this growth.

Principals need to take it upon themselves to identify resources that will support the staff with instruction. These resources can be internal and external but must be known and available to help coach the staff. In addition, the action steps discussed in this chapter aim to create and foster a culture that encourages collaboration, innovation, and open communication among the staff, students, and families.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Script: Thank you for participating in this research interview. The topic of this interview is how to support new middle school principals in implementing systems that allow for instructional leadership. I will be asking you a series of questions which may include follow-up questions depending on the answers. The interview should last about sixty minutes. I appreciate your honest answers to the questions. As a reminder, this interview will remain anonymous, with pseudonyms used throughout the data collection and dissertation writing. This interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you wish to stop your participation, you are free to do so. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background questions:
1. How many total years do you have as an administrator?
2. How many years have you been a principal?
3. How many years have you been a principal in a middle school?
4. What is your highest level of education obtained?
5. What do you believe is the most contributing factor that led you to become a middle school principal?

Dissertation research questions for all participants:
1. What does it mean to you to be an instructional leader of a middle school?
2. What routines have you set up to ensure you are able to be the instructional leader of your building?
3. How do you incorporate teacher leaders to support your vision for instruction?
   a. Are there other people in the district you incorporate to help with the instructional growth of teachers?
4. What professional development have you offered to support instruction?
5. How do you determine the needs of the building as it pertains to instruction?
6. What do you do to ensure that there is time for the instructional growth of teachers when other duties of the job (discipline/scheduling/logistics/etc.) can take up so much of your time?
7. When you first started as a middle school principal, did you receive a mentor?

Additional questions for veteran participants
1. As you look back on your experience, what do you wish you knew that would have allowed you to have more impact as an instructional leader?
2. What advice would you give a new middle school principal to help them be instructional leaders in the building from the onset?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW INVITATION EMAIL

Dear Administrator -

I am a doctoral candidate at National Louis University and am working on a dissertation study regarding the topic of supporting new middle school principals to implement systems that allow for instructional leadership. The purpose of this letter is to seek your participation in this study. The research will begin in November 2022. The study aims to understand what specific systems are in place for middle school principals to be effective and impactful instructional leaders. The study will collect data from both veteran principals as well as principals newer to the profession.

If you are currently a middle school principal and interested in participating, please fill out the form below, which contains seven brief questions about your experience and contact information. If you know someone who might be interested and fits the parameter of a current middle school principal, please forward this email to them.

Survey Form

Thank you for considering to participate in this research. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at ██████████ .

Sincerely,
Jason Kaiz