ABSTRACT

Qualities of Effective Principals in Urban Public Schools:
A Multiple Case Study on Effective Principals

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The achievement gap among African American and Latinx students in urban public schools is expanding, and principals often lack the important qualities necessary to lead an urban public school. This study addressed two problems. First, the achievement gap among students of color is continuing to expand, mainly in urban public schools. Secondly, principals who lead urban public schools lack the necessary qualities needed to support school improvement. Research has called for principals to be culturally responsive leaders who are keenly aware of urban schools' challenges and are committed to achieving positive results for their students.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe and understand the qualities of effective principals in urban public schools. The five participants in this study were selected purposefully with the criteria of being highly effective principals within YES Prep Public Schools, the research site for this study. The researcher conducted a series of interviews of each of the five participants at each of their campuses.

The interviews were semi-structured in the form of open-ended questions to allow for the participants' specific views and opinions to be collected.

       The study's findings provided a detailed understanding of the qualities and practices leveraged by effective principals in their schools. The persistent qualities within the literature and the study's findings were: culturally responsive leadership, data-driven decisions, instructional leadership, communicate high expectations, and build effective leadership teams. Additionally, the study informed YES Prep Public Schools on the qualities necessary to lead urban schools effectively. Lastly, the study's findings provided a leadership framework that can be leveraged by urban principals abroad. This study's impact emphasized the need for principals of urban schools to be culturally responsive leaders who are self-reflective, promote inclusive learning environments, develop culturally responsive teachers, and engage students and parents. Culturally responsive school leadership is necessary for closing the achievement gap among students of color.

Qualities of Effective Principals in Urban Public Schools:
A Multiple Case Study on Effective Principals

by

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A Dissertation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF FIGURES

# LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

To Milen. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my first-born child Milen. Although you are in Heaven, you have been the angel by my side the entire time. The hardest thing I had to go through in life was losing you. When things became challenging for me in the program, I remembered your strength and the strength you gave your mom and me. Your life gave my life new meaning. There is not a single day that goes where you are not on my mind. I dedicate this dissertation to your memory. I love you.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Problem of Practice

*Introduction*

One of the biggest challenges facing American education is closing the

achievement gap for students of color. Stakeholders across various educational sectors

regularly debate how to close the gap (Howard, 2010). Students of color continue to

suffer the reality of lower academic success in poor-performing urban schools across the

country (Darling-Hammond, 1998). The achievement gap is an issue of equity and access

that deserves attention and action. The principal's role has a significant impact on a

school's ability to provide an equitable education to students.

The achievement gap among students of color is a persistent problem that has

been documented since *Brown v Board of Education*. In 1966, the federal government

provided the Equality of Educational Opportunity, a report that detailed the disparities

between students of color and their White peers (Coleman, 1966). The Coleman study

examined whether schools provided an equal education for minority students (Coleman,

1966). One of the study's findings was that educational opportunities for students of color

were mostly nonexistent. Nearly 55 years later, the achievement gap between white

students and students of color is still an issue that needs to be addressed.

Low-performing schools in urban communities are a significant contributor to the

widening of the achievement gap. Urban schools are often staffed with low-skilled

leaders (Meyers & Sadler, 2018). Schools and leaders must be prepared to address the

1

achievement gap, specifically among African American and Latinx students throughout the United States. Principals are both the "problem and solution" to addressing the achievement gap in urban schools (Meyers & Sadler, 2018, p. 93).

Urban schools are often schools requiring a turnaround, and principals in many cases are replaced in urban schools to improve school outcomes (Trujillo & Renée, 2015). Another issue within the achievement gap is the unique characteristics and challenges of urban public schools, making it difficult to close the achievement gap among African American and Latinx students. Urban public schools often have poor facilities, low-quality instruction, and students who are unprepared academically (Murphy & Meyers, 2008.)

Urban public schools' unique challenges that serve mainly African American and Latinx students are an equity issue that needs further intervention. Former Secretary of Education John B. King stated that "education remains the civil rights issue of our time" (King, 2017, p.1). African American and Latinx students are considered the most vulnerable students. They are consistently enrolled in schools with low expectations, unsafe learning environments, and teachers who lack the training and development to provide students with rigorous instruction (King, 2017). YES Prep Public Schools, the site of this study, was designed to help address the ever-widening achievement gap. YES Prep Public Schools is one of the top-performing Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) in the United States. The *U.S. News and World Report* for 2017 ranked all YES Prep high schools that qualified in the top 100 schools nationally and the top thirty CMOs nationally (Dalton, 2017). YES Prep seeks to increase the number of students from low-income urban communities who matriculate to and through college. There are currently

21 YES Prep campuses across the city of Houston. YES Prep is important to this study because it is a network of urban public schools that exist in low-income communities across the city of Houston. The origins of YES Prep are rooted in addressing the achievement gap among students of color. As YES Prep continues to grow in serving primarily African American and Latinx students across the fourth largest city in the nation, it is increasingly vital for the organization to understand the impact the principal has on student achievement. The school principal's role is a highly demanding and influential position that has a significant effect on a school's success. District leaders need a clear understanding that effective schools must consist of both influential leaders and teachers (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). Specifically, urban school leaders have to be courageous leaders who have the necessary critical thinking skills to serve the needs of the students they serve (Jackson, 2005).

This study aims to emphasize the need for effective principal leadership in urban schools as a contribution to closing the achievement gap, specifically for African American and Latinx students. Secondly, this study provides a framework for the urban school setting. Specifically, this study's findings provide a leadership framework grounded both in the literature and in the actual practices of the study's participants. The purpose of this case study is to describe and understand the qualities of effective principals that lead to successful public urban schools in YES Prep Public Schools. This study informs YES Prep Public Schools with the necessary research to support current school principals, prepare principal residents to take over existing schools.

*Statement of the Problem*

This study addresses two essential problems: the expanding achievement gap among African American and Latinx students and the lack of high-quality leadership in urban public schools. The achievement gap is a phrase that has been widely discussed over the past 20 years but is a phenomenon that has been in existence for nearly two centuries, and it is one of the most challenging issues of our time (Howard, 2010). Understanding the demographic shift in the United States is essential in exploring the achievement gap's impact, specifically on African American and Latinx students. Dating back to the early 1900s, 12% of the United States citizenry were people of color. In the early 2000s, the non-white percentage increased to 33% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). For Latinx in America, there has been a population increase from over 6% in 1980 to nearly 20% in 2006, and it is estimated that the Latino population will make up almost 30% of the population in the United States by the year 2050 (Passel & Cohn, 2008). In a report published by the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2007, over 40% of students of color made up the public education system, and by 2035 students of color will make up the majority of the public-school student population (NCES, 2007).

A body of research has concluded that principals who lead in urban schools are often unprepared to lead because they lack two qualities: that of an instructional leader and a lack of cultural responsiveness to the needs of students of color (Khalifa et al., 2016a). High-quality leadership is essential for urban schools to address the achievement gap, but often principals are unprepared to lead effectively in urban public schools (Mitgang, 2013). The shift from principals as managers to principals as instructional leaders has left many principals entering the role unprepared to lead. Fink and Resnick

(2001) point out that when principals transition from assistant principals to campus principals, they struggle with the transition to an instructional leader as their role as an assistant principal required mainly administrative tasks and functions. The literature points out that time and lack of preparation are two factors preventing principals from truly being instructional leaders and a lack of preparation to engage as instructional leaders. Often principals spend their time managing administrative tasks and rarely spend time in the classrooms with teachers and students (Fink & Resnick, 2001). Principals must understand their roles and responsibilities as instructional leaders to address the achievement gap in urban public schools.

Cultural responsiveness is another quality that many principals in urban public schools lack. (Young et al., 2010) conducted a study on principals' perceptions and their perceptions of their abilities to address diversity in their schools. The study noted that not only were principals ill-prepared to address issues of cultural diversity at their schools, but they could also not engage in conversations on issues of diversity. Scholars note that "the recognition of culture is important to multiple disciplines in education" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 6). Culturally responsive leadership is a critical quality to address the achievement gap in urban public schools accurately. Research literature emphasizes teachers' need to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom pedagogy management (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, Gay (2010) indicated that while culturally responsive pedagogy or teaching is essential in improving students of color, it is equally crucial for principals to be culturally responsive leaders. Therefore, culturally responsive teaching cannot be done with fidelity if the principal is not a culturally responsive leader. If principals in urban schools are not culturally responsive leaders,

they will risk significant turnover in the role, specifically in urban schools (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Culturally responsive principals must be intent on creating an inclusive learning environment and being agile while demonstrating a true value for diversity in their schools (Madsen & Mabokela, 2013).

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this multiple case study is to describe and understand the qualities of effective principals in urban public schools, specifically at YES Prep Public Schools. This study seeks to examine how YES Prep principals lead in culturally sustaining ways that help reduce the achievement gap. This study provides an in-depth look at the high-performing principals who lead within the organization. This study uses existing literature and detailing the experiences of effective principals to codify the qualities that make principals effective in their leadership.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of effective school principals in YES Prep Public Schools, and how are those beliefs manifested in their schools?

2. What are the practices effective YES Prep Public School principals leverage to help increase school improvement?

*Theoretical Framework*

As the achievement gap expands for minority students in urban communities, principals need to lead with a lens of equity. Principals must set a vision for equity, execute that vision, and lead well to get results. This study's data collection and analysis centered on one primary theoretical framework: Culturally Responsive School Leadership (Khalifa, 2018).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) as a theoretical framework provides an in-depth understanding of the critical components that make principals equitable leaders. The CRSL framework is made up of four components: critical self-reflection, developing culturally responsive teachers, promoting an environment that is culturally responsive and inclusive culturally responsive and inclusive school environment, and engaging students, parents.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership provides a framework demonstrating what effective school leaders should do to be an equitable leader in their schools. CRSL, as a framework, highlights qualities that principals of urban public schools need to embody to be equitable leaders. CRSL qualities serve to impact the achievement gap among students of color positively. The framework highlights the historical and community-based epistemological understanding of CRSL. Based on this epistemology, there is a vast disconnect between schools and the communities they serve. The disconnect between schools and communities leads to exclusionary school environments for "minoritized children" (Khalifa, p. 2, 2018). Khalifa describes community-based epistemology as one in which community members in these underserved communities view schools as official institutions representing the interest of the local or national government (Khalifa, 2018).

Understanding the voice of the community is an essential element of community-based epistemology. Effective principals recognize the educational inequities among African American and Latinx students and lead in a manner to address those inequities. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) articulated three reasons culturally responsive leadership is needed. First, closing the achievement gap among African American and

Latinx students is now a central issue in the United States. Secondly, the need to address the achievement gap among African American and Latinx students has driven legislative initiatives and reform efforts across the country. Thirdly, schools will continue to become more racially and culturally diverse  (Khalifa et al., 2016a). CRSLs must operate with the belief that all students can achieve at high levels. In addition to CRSL as a collection of qualities effective principals must embody, Chapter Two provides insight on CRSL as a practice that effective principals apply to their work.

*Research Design and Methods*

The research design for this study was a qualitative multiple case study. The researcher used purposive sampling as the study participants are five of the highest performing principals in YES Prep Public Schools. This sampling strategy captures the varied perspectives of the study's participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Data collection consisted of interviewing various schools' principals to gain a diverse perspective that supports the researcher in identifying common patterns to understand the skills, behaviors, and mindsets concisely that effective principals have. The researcher used a combination of coding by reading through the text and making notes in the margins. The researcher created and organized files to analyze and establish patterns in the data. This study aims to contribute to the existing research so that leaders in public schools across the nation can leverage evidence within this research to increase student achievement in public urban schools.

*Definition of Key Terms*

The following definitions served to clarify the terms used throughout the discussion of this study.

*A-F Accountability*: The A-F accountability system in Texas is the label or grade given to both districts and campuses. Accountability grades are based on three domains: student achievement, school progress, and closing the gaps (Delgado, 2019).

*At-risk:* Describes students who are at high risk of not graduating high school. Additionally, other factors that might qualify a student as being at-risk are failing two or more classes and low reading and math test scores (Capuzzi & Gross, 2014).

*Charter Management Organizations:* Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) are nonprofit organizations that manage charter schools (DeArmond et al., 2012).

*Charter Schools:* Charter schools are public schools that are tuition-free and have an open enrollment process usually done through a lottery. Additionally, charter schools are funded based on the student population. Charter schools are held accountable for meeting state expectations on a standardized test and financial expectations set by the state (Vergari, 2002).

*Culturally Responsive Leadership:* CRSL is a leadership style that demonstrates how principals can equitably serve racial minority students (Khalifa, 2018).

*High Expectations:* Expectations set to increase student achievement and student *success.*

*Student Achievement:* The assessment of student performance based on learning goals with an emphasis on instructional activities that students are expected to show mastery on (Hattie & Anderman, 2013).

*Urban Schools:* Urban schools consist of factors including poverty, racial diversity, low achievement data, poor facilities, and low-quality teaching (Schaffer et al., 2018).

*Conclusion*

This study addresses the expanding achievement gap among African American and Latinx students and the lack of high-quality leadership in urban public schools. This qualitative multiple case study sought to build a framework that principals can use to enhance their ability to lead through the challenges prevalent in an urban public school. Culturally Responsive School Leadership (Khalifa, 2018) served as the study's theoretical framework. Data collection included interviews and observations with five YES Prep Principals. Leaders in public schools across the nation can leverage evidence within this research to increase student achievement in public urban schools. Chapter Two presents a review of the current literature, highlighting the need for effective leadership in urban public schools that serve students of color.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

*Introduction*

Students of color who live in urban cities deserve to go to high-performing schools. The expanding achievement gap and the lack of high-quality leadership in urban public schools are addressed in Chapter Two. The following literature review illustrates that effective principals have specific qualities that allow them to drive school improvement. These qualities enable principals to play an active role in closing the achievement gap among African American and Latinx students. This literature review provides research-based evidence about the need for effective principals in public schools and explores the challenges urban school principals face. First, the literature review begins by providing an overview of the achievement gap in public education. Second, the descriptors of urban schools are explained. Third, the literature review highlights the importance of school leadership and aspects of corresponding leadership theories. Fourth, the literature draws connections from Critical Race Theory and then transitions to a Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework analysis. Specifically, the origins of Critical Race Theory are discussed along with its connections to public education. Finally, the chapter concludes with descriptions of effective leadership practices for principals who lead in urban public schools.

*Understanding the Achievement Gap*

Closing the achievement gap is a complex phenomenon that requires intentional efforts from both teachers and leaders (Grantham & Whiting, 2008). The achievement gap creates a barrier to success in urban public schools, and this barrier prompts the need for a deeper understanding of the specific causes of this gap. Leaders often fall into the trap of addressing the achievement gap's challenges through short-term approaches that do not directly address the challenges of the achievement gap among students of color. The short-term "fix" merely focusing on improving test scores rather than academic outcomes is an approach that has historically plagued public education (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 11). Focusing solely on improving test scores is a short-term approach that simply makes students better test-takers rather than improving the whole child.

Across the United States, there is an academic achievement gap between African American and Latinx students and their White peers (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Students of color begin experiencing academic gaps in vocabulary, math, and reading as early as Kindergarten, and the gaps continue to widen throughout a student's academic career (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Barbarin, 2002; Chatterji, 2006). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) provides statistical information that has shown some promise in math and reading growth over time in student achievement for African American and Latinx students. In 1975, nearly 50% of African American and Latinx students performed at the lowest levels on reading achievement assessments, while only 2% of African American and Latinx students performed at the highest level. In the mid-1980s, this number dropped down to nearly 40% of African American and Latinx students scoring at the lowest performance level while an uptick to over 5% of African American and Latinx students performing at the highest level (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

12

Additionally, there are also positive data for improvement in math achievement assessments. Between 1975 and 2008, there was an improvement of 25% in math achievement assessments for African American and Latinx students. Boykin and Noguera note that while these improvements are useful and necessary, there is still a significant gap in student achievement of African American and Latinx students compared to their White counterparts. White student performance has continued to increase between 1985 and 2008 (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). African American and Latinx students are struggling to increase their performance in achievement-based testing.

The achievement gap continues to expand as it relates to college readiness for African American and Latinx students. College-bound students take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). The SAT is an achievement-based exam that many colleges and universities require students to take before school admittance (JBHE Foundation, 2004). The performance trend on the SAT follows nearly the same pattern as the achievement gaps in math and reading achievement performance, as measured by the NCES. During the 1980s, performance on the verbal and math portions of the SAT showed improvements between African American and Latinx students compared to their white peers. However, a downward shift began to occur in the 1990s, therefore increasing the performance gap on the SAT with African American and Latinx students performing lower on the exam (Lee, 2002). The achievement gap has a significant role in defining outcomes for students of color. Understanding how urban schools are defined is also essential and important to leverage when addressing the achievement gap. African American and Latinx students make up a significant portion of urban schools. The next sections describe specific elements that define urban schools.

13

*Defining Urban Schools*

This section provides a general definition of the term "urban" and provides an overview of Milner's (2012) framework of urban schools. Some definitions of urban schools are determined by the school's geographic location and population (Schaffer et al., 2018). Other definitions of urban schools are derived from social contexts such as economics, race, and poverty. The word urban makes connections to race and class. The term "urban public schools" is described as segregated institutions with most African American and Latinx students (Posey, 2009, p. 8). Urban public schools are often entrenched in poverty, have little to no resources, and are often underperforming (Posey, 2009). This section begins with a review of Richard Milner's (2012) framework of defining urban schools: "urban intensive," "urban emergent," and "urban characteristics."

"Urban intensive" schools are in large urban cities such as New York and Los Angeles (Schaffer et al., 2018). The sheer size of these cities related to population (urban intensive-population size over one million people) makes it challenging to provide adequate support for students who attend schools in these cities. The challenge of providing adequate support for students in urban schools is primarily because urban schools have larger enrollments than both rural and suburban schools (Schaffer et al., 2018). As a result, these cities endure high poverty rates, inadequate housing, and transportation issues. "Urban emergent" refers to schools in cities that are smaller than urban intensive cities. The population size is under one million. These cities endure the same challenges as "urban intensive" cities but on a lesser magnitude. Example cities within this locale are Austin and Nashville. "Urban characteristic" refers to schools that are not in large or mid-size cities but have characteristics consistent with "urban

14

intensive" and "urban emergent" cities. Schools in this category are in rural and suburban school systems (Milner, 2012).

Milner's typology of urban schools serves as an essential foundation for understanding urban schools' unique challenges. In providing a clearer understanding of urban schools, this section focuses on how "urban intensive" schools are defined through race and socioeconomic status. Additionally, this section makes connections to the impact of race and socioeconomic status on student performance. This research study is YES Prep Public Schools, located in Houston, Texas, with over four million people. Houston will experience significant growth over the next twenty-five years of upwards of three million people, increasing to a population of over seven million people by the year 2025 (Podagrosi et al., 2011). Urban schools in Houston are classified in the "urban intensive" category, according to Milner (2012).

*The Impact of Race*

Race has a significant impact on defining and understand urban public schools. Urban public schools are often segregated by race and mostly consist of African American and Latinx students (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017). Segregation in urban public schools continues to be true across the nation, even though reforms were made to prevent de jure segregation (Clotfelter, 2004). Segregation by race has become significantly worse despite the opportunities created by civil rights legislation of the sixties (Wang & Kovach, 1995). Although some progress has been made in terms of integration, schools in urban cities remain primarily segregated. This segregation contributes to the achievement gap among African American and Latinx students (Wang et al., 1986). Wang and Kovach (1995) describe segregation in urban schools as

15

residential segregation. Massey and Denton (1993) suggest two reasons for residential segregation. First, the decentralization of urban cities in the twentieth century resulted in Whites moving out of the city due to an increased population of minorities. Second, the economic makeup of urban cities has undergone significant changes. In the nineteenth century, jobs consisted of factory and skill work, but now the job market has shifted to more service-focused jobs (Massey & Denton, 1993). The quality of education experience of students of color in urban communities and Whites are inequitable as a result of segregation in urban schools (Orfield & Yun, 1999).

*Socioeconomic Factors*

Socioeconomic status is another factor that defines urban schools. Urban public schools serve low-income students of color (Lippman, 1996). These communities are stricken with poverty. For the remainder of this section, low socioeconomic persons are referred to as low SES in this section. Students of color attend high poverty schools at a higher rate than their White peers, primarily because students of color mainly live in urban intensive cities (Saporito & Sohoni, 2007). Nearly 40% of African American children live below the poverty line compared to just over 10% of their White counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). As a result of poverty, low SES students are impacted academically.

Jensen (2009) defines urban poverty as a combination of chronic and acute stressors. Examples of these stressors "include crowding, violence, and noise" (Jensen, 2009, p. 6). Jensen continues to note that the effects of poverty have risk factors associated with it: emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety concerns (Jensen, 2009). These risk factors present a

considerable amount of academic challenges. Emotional and social challenges begin in infancy for poor people of color and create anxiety or feelings of insecurity. As students get older, these challenges play out in the classroom in students' behavioral performance, resulting in behavior that leads to suspension from school ( Kim et al., 2010). Low SES students deal with a tremendous amount of chronic stressors compared to their more affluent counterparts (Almeida et al., 2005). Chronic stress or acute stress impacts brain development and makes it hard for students to learn and remember (Coplan et al., 1996). Cognitive lags have a tremendous effect on low socioeconomic populations. These effects include achievement tests, cognitive ability, and literacy (Baydar et al., 1993). Health and safety for low SES children include inadequate health care, hunger, and environmental hazards (Jensen, 2009). Health and safety factors impact a student's performance leading to absenteeism from skipping classes to simply not coming to school (Jensen, 2009). Poverty has a significant impact on the educational outcomes for poor students of color. Principals in urban schools must understand the nature and breadth of poverty and its impacts on student learning.

*Challenging Factors of Urban Schools*

Factors that challenge urban schools in supporting student's academic performance include a high number of English Language Learners (ELL) students and inadequate teaching due to a lack of professional development for teachers who teach ELL students (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). In 2017, public schools across the United States received over a 10% increase of ELL students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). ELL students are not yet proficient in the English language (Bialik et al., 2018). Latinx students make up a vast majority of ELL students across the nation. In

public schools, nearly 80% of the ELL student body are Latinx students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The expansive number of ELL students in urban schools has made it challenging for urban schools to address their ELL students' needs (Stufft & Brogadir, 2011). Urban schools struggle with financial restrictions, a shortage of resources, limited support staff, large classroom sizes, and cultural issues (Lee et al., 2007). As a result of the challenges urban schools face when supporting ELL students, students' opportunities for a better life often decrease. Next to special education students, ELL students struggle the most in school more than any other demographical group (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010). Data shows that less than 40% of ELL students nationally have a chance to obtain a high school diploma (Jammal & Duong, 2007). Urban schools must intently focus on the needs of ELL students. Effective principals must recognize the challenges of ELL students and work actively to address them.

*Teacher Factors*

This section highlights three issues that impact quality teaching in urban public schools: lack of time, high teacher turnover, and unqualified teachers. Teacher quality is one of the chief variables for increased student achievement (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011). First, lack of time is challenging quality teaching. Teachers spend most of their time trying to adapt and internalize the district-provided curriculum. Teachers have very little time to learn and develop curriculum independently (Abel & Sewell, 1999). Quality teaching should consist of teachers spending time learning the curriculum to allow them to be responsive to the needs of all of their students. Often, teachers spend more time training on classroom management rather than improving their instruction is another element of teacher burnout (Bowers, 2010). Ingersoll (2001)

conducted a study in which teachers reported reasons for leaving their urban schools. Nearly 20% reported leaving due to not having enough time to prepare for teaching.

Second, high teacher turnover has a major impact on quality teaching in urban schools. Within the first five years, the national average for teacher turnover is over 25%, but in urban schools, the rate is nearly 50% (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Teacher demographics and experience are reasons for high teacher turnover. Teacher experience is a determiner for teacher turnover within urban schools—less experienced teachers turnover at a rate higher than experienced teachers (Ingersoll, 2001). Teacher burnout consists of high levels of stress, student misbehavior, and poor performance (Avalos, 2011). Teachers in urban schools endure burnout that ultimately impacts student achievement among students of color.

Third, urban schools lack highly qualified teachers. Highly qualified teachers are in high need in urban schools, yet many urban schools across the country lack qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Qualified teachers have met all of the state requirements to teach, they have stronger content knowledge, and they can better address student gaps in the classroom (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011). Students of color in urban schools are nearly 70% more likely to have an unqualified teacher. Nearly 10% of urban schools have teachers who are not fully certified (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011). The low distribution of highly qualified teachers is a major challenge for urban schools to attain and retain highly qualified teachers. The low distribution of qualified teachers in urban schools leads to schools hiring low-skilled unqualified teachers (Smedley et al., 2001).

Understanding how urban schools are defined is important; however, this definition should extend beyond simple demographic characteristics. Understanding urban schools also include consideration of the unique needs and challenges urban schools face. In defining urban schools, it is important to consider the impact that race, socioeconomic status, teacher turnover, student experiences, and other external factors have on urban public schools.

*The Importance of School Leadership and Effective Practices*

At the heart of every successful school is a successful leader. In a detailed 2010 survey conducted by the Wallace Foundation, district administrators and lawmakers asserted that the principal role is essential in addressing public education challenges (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Understanding the importance of school leadership is essential to this study. This section highlights five reasons that demonstrate the importance of school leadership: student safety, crafting a mission and vision, communicating high expectations for students and staff, building an effective leadership team, and focusing on instruction.

Student safety is one of the most important components of a successful school, and it is an essential element of a principal's responsibilities (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). One way principals can ensure campus safety is by setting clear behavioral expectations and communicating consistently and widely. Expectations of behavioral standards are key to ensure that all staff and students know how both teachers and students should conduct themselves to ensure safety for all (Cotton, 2003). Effective discipline measures include consistent consequences that are fairly executed and rules that are concise and understood by all students (Sammons et al., 1995). Additionally,

20

effective discipline measures require the implementation of clear processes to ensure that behavior expectations are upheld with consistency and fidelity for all students and staff (Leitner, 1994). Finally, principals must delegate responsibilities to other campus leaders to support discipline across the campus consistently (Sammons et al., 1995).

Schools also have a responsibility to set the campus's mission and vision (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Research indicates that transformational leadership is essential in helping principals set a vision and mission for the campus (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is a leadership style in which the leader and the followers support each other to increase morale and motivation (Burns, 1978). This mutual support allows principals to use their influence to create change and attend to the achievement gaps in urban public education. Principals have a unique opportunity to set a vision and help teachers invest in a vision that can lead to positive outcomes. Cotton (2003) suggests that effective principals set a campus vision and goals that have a clear focus on student learning. Therefore effective principals set a vision based on two principles: excuses for student failure are unacceptable, and all decision-making must be grounded in student learning (Cotton, 2003). Effective urban principals go beyond crafting a general vision and instead craft a vision centered on the belief and commitment that all students can learn and succeed (Scheurich, 1998). Vision setting is an important quality of principals that determines the course of action for increasing student achievement in urban schools.

Effective principals communicate high expectations for student performance. Research shows that student achievement increases by setting high expectations for

student performance (Murphy, 1990). Butler (1997) describes the impact of students who experience schools with low expectations for student performance:

> There is nothing that will improve a student's self-esteem better than academic success. Engineering such success is a good teacher's obligation. But lowering the bar so that anyone can step over it does not create a genuine feeling of success. It is patronizing, artificial, and demoralizing. (p. 30)

Communicating high expectations includes providing full transparency to staff on the working realities and expectations of the campus. Expectations relate to teachers' professional development and how to ensure that lesson plans are high in quality and executed with fidelity. Additionally, effective principals communicate high expectations about student achievement as an essential focus of the campus. Student achievement should consist of students spending most of their time working towards acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to succeed (David et al., 2006). Raising the bar for student success shows honor and respect to students of color, and it communicates a belief in their ability to be successful.

Building an effective leadership team is an essential quality of effective school principals. "Teamwork is not a virtue. It is a choice and a strategic one" (Lencioni, 2012, p. 21). Principals in urban schools need to establish a purpose while cultivating commitment and creativity within the campus's leadership team. Additionally, principals must understand the issues and challenges that their schools face and address them accordingly. An effective leadership team is important in addressing the challenges a school faces. Lencioni further describes effective teams as teams that share responsibility and common objectives. Additionally, he highlights that effective leadership teams function of five principles: trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and results (Lencioni, 2012).

There is a need for principals to collaborate and share their leadership responsibilities by using an effective leadership team (Singh et al., 1997). Reaching campus goals requires a collective effort (Kythreotis & Pashiardis, 1998). Effective principals delegate leadership across the campus to support school improvement (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). The roles and responsibilities of the principal must be shared amongst a strong and aligned leadership team. Closing the achievement gap is an effort of teamwork, and the leadership has an essential role in driving change on campus.

A focus on improving instruction is a final characteristic of effective school leadership. "Good instruction is the foundation of any successful school" (Spiro, 2013, p. 5). Spiro highlights that principals who focus on instruction emphasize teacher professional development and consistently provide feedback to teachers on their instructional practices in the classroom (Spiro, 2013). Another component of an instructional focus is making instructional decisions based on data. Data-driven decision-making is the best way to improve student achievement (Stronge, 2008). Stronge further describes instructional leadership as a practice that consists of five goals. The fourth goal is "using data to make instructional decisions" (Stronge et al., 2008, p. 4). The use of data is a means through which principals can gain relevant context on their school's performance concerning the campus goals. As a result, data analysis is a constant practice that allows principals to assess their actions related to their campus goals. Data-driven decision-making is an intentional practice that gives deliberate focus on student achievement. Using data to drive decision-making is critical to improving outcomes for students of color who attend urban public schools. The next section introduces critical race theory and its implications on public education in urban schools.

*Critical Race Theory*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emphasizes racial and equity issues in public education. CRT undergirds the chief theoretical framework for this study, Culturally Responsive School Leadership. This section focuses on first describing the tenets and origins of CRT and then draw connections of the theory to public education. Critical Race Theory began as a movement with the research of Derrick Bell. In his writings, there was a focus on understanding the Western world's racial history and the racial conflicts in "civil rights litigation" (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998, p. 467). Within the literature of CRT, there are five tenets of the theory: the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992), identity privilege, counter storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1995), interest convergence (Ladson-Billings, 1998), and critique of liberalism. (Tate, 1997). The first tenet permanence of racism provides the notion that racism permanently marks itself in American culture. Racism is "permanent and will never end" (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998, p. 470). Racism is deeply ingrained in American culture and appears to be a constant social problem in America. Many have skepticism on racism as to how or if it will change (Bell, 1992).

The second tenet, Whiteness as property, describes tangible benefits as a basis of being White, and as a result, Whites contain power and privilege over these tangible benefits. Tangible benefits are property and rights. Include land. Additionally, Whiteness as a property or identity privilege. Identity privilege asserts that privilege based on discrimination creates both victims and "beneficiaries." Specifically, a person's skin color or gender entitles them to certain privileges that others may not be entitled to or have to access. The straight White male is considered a key beneficiary of identity privilege. At the same time, other minority groups experience victimization due to

identity privilege (Moschel, 2007, p. 63). The third tenet, counter storytelling, is uplifting the stories of people of color that define their narrative, not the narrative held by the majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Additionally, counter storytelling describes race through the use of narrative writing. Writings and discussions about race occur through storytelling to account for a racial minority group's specific lived experiences. The narrative tenet also focuses on uncovering the "hegemonic structures that exist with those in power" based on the experiences of the racial minority (Moschel, 2007, p. 64). The fourth tenet, interest convergence, describes that the needs and goals of the minorities are achieved when the needs are consistent with the majority race (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The fifth tenet, a critique of liberalism, challenges the notion of colorblindness and the exposed impact law has on race (Martinez, 2014). Additionally, CRT scholars argue that colorblindness supports the "status quo" by maintaining institutional racism against persons of color. Acknowledging the influence of race ensures that instructional racism is not perpetuated while continuing to hurt people of color (Martinez, 2014).

While CRT emerged as a movement to address racial issues in law and politics, the theory has also been applied in public education. Many researchers use CRT to understand the many issues that impact the education of African American and Latinx students, including curriculum and discipline.

CRT provides a critique of the school curriculum. Specifically, CRT suggests that the school-based curriculum is based on Whites' hegemonic experiences as a result of colonialism (Peters, 2015). The traditional curriculum is structured in a way in which only upper-class White students are benefiting. The traditional curriculum is often replicated in schools regardless of the demographics of the students. Urban public

schools present the traditional curriculum to African American and Latinx students void of their own lived experiences and cultural values (Yosso, 2010). A curriculum void of the experiences and perspectives of students of color creates deficits in urban public schools, such as college persistence and low expectations for achievement (Weiner, 2006). "The deficit paradigm that is so deeply embedded in urban schools mirrors a proclivity in national debates about a range of problems" (Weiner, 2006, p. 1). Students of color are learning a curriculum that negates their cultural capital and community cultural wealth. Therefore, the urban learner often has little connection with the curriculum that can be leveraged to increase learning. CRT seeks to challenge racism in all forms of both formal and informal curriculum (Yosso et al., 2001).

The critical race curriculum is a researched solution to challenging the traditional curriculum. Yosso identifies a critical race curriculum as a way to understanding "curricular structures, processes and discourses informed by critical race theory"(Yosso, 2010, p. 93). There are five elements to a critical race curriculum: centralism and intersectionality of race and racism, challenging the dominant ideology, commitment to social justice, value of experience, and knowledge. Educators who understand the "central and interacting roles of racism, sexism, and classism curricular structures processes and discourses" can change the narrative that blames students of color for not matriculating into college (Yosso, 2010, p. 93). Rather a critical race curriculum is a curriculum that ensures that all students are prepared for college. Critical race educators challenge the traditional curriculum and all structures and processes associated with it. Critical race educators are committed to social justice in schools. Educators can do this to ensure that social justice is the main goal of the curriculum to prepare students to analyze

and form their own opinions. Students need to be prepared to address forms of racism; they see whether it be in the media or in the curriculum itself. A critical race curriculum recognizes the importance of the lived experiences and perspectives of students of color. Additionally, parent engagement is a vital part of understanding the lived experiences of students. Parents have a unique experience and perspective based on their values and jobs that help shape their child's life experiences (Yosso, 2010).

Additionally, restorative justice primarily focuses on healing over punishment (Wadhwa, 2010). Restorative justice consists of global indigenous context influences and can be practiced in restorative circles or peer mediation (Pranis, 2005). Restorative circles teach students how to confront their issues and do so peacefully (Wadhwa, 2010). Critical race theory and curriculum are important in creating culturally sustaining and revitalizing school practices. Equally important is the role of school leaders who engage in culturally responsive leadership practices.

*Culturally Responsive School Leadership*

Culturally responsive school leadership is the theoretical framework in which this study resides. This section describes the importance of culturally responsive school leadership and each of the four components of the theoretical framework: critical self-reflection, promotion of culturally responsive/inclusive environment, developing culturally responsive teachers, and engaging students and parents. Culturally responsive school leadership theory derives from Ladson-Billings' (1995) concept of culturally relevant pedagogy and Geneva Gay's (1994) notion of culturally responsive teaching. These two theories focus on what actions teachers should engage in to create an inclusive learning environment for students of color. Gay (2010) explains that impacting pedagogy

through cultural responsiveness is important but cannot solely improve outcomes for students of color. School leadership must be culturally responsive, as leadership sets the course for how schools can and should address improving outcomes for students of color (Gay, 2010). School leadership, alongside quality teaching, is essential for educational reform (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006).

Effective principals must recognize the educational inequities among African American and Latinx students and lead in a manner to address those inequities. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) articulated three reasons culturally responsive leadership is needed. First, closing the achievement gap among African American and Latinx students is now a central issue in the United States. Secondly, the need to address the achievement gap among African American and Latinx students has driven legislative initiatives and reform efforts across the country. Thirdly, schools will continue to become more racially and culturally diverse (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). The principal has the most information and awareness about the necessary resources and can support and implement reforms at the campus level. Considering the organizational structure at a campus, the principal is at the top of the organizational structure. As a result, the principal is accountable for whether the school is successful or not (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). The leadership responsibilities of the principal are expansive. Leading through a lens of equity is essential to ensure that African American and Latinx students receive the same quality of education as their more affluent peers. Within the culturally responsive school leadership theory, four qualities describe how CRSLs should lead with a lens of equity. The following sections describe each of these four qualities of CRSL.

*Critical Self-Reflection*

The first quality of CRSL is that leaders critically self-reflect on their leadership behaviors. For this study, two critical self-reflection qualities are particularly important: continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts and critical consciousness. The first component of the framework is CRSLs are committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts. In an in-depth qualitative multiple case study, Guardiner and Enomoto (2006) examined six principals leading urban schools that supported ELL refugee students. Each principal had been at their campus for at least seven years working in urban schools. Guardiner and Enomoto's study aimed to identify principals' qualities that consisted of high expectations for students of color while understanding the inner workings of affirming diversity and student achievement. Specifically, Guardiner and Enomoto's study's findings revealed "tasks" to understand cultural knowledge and contexts. Participants all self-identified that they were not prepared to be CRSLs. The participants noted that they focused on addressing student concerns regularly and learned some valuables lessons as they all had experience leading in urban schools.

High expectations for all students is also an important theme from the Guardiner and Enomoto's study. This task suggested that principals fostered a position in which they and their staff challenged stereotypes and traditional thinking of low expectations for students of color. In so doing, CRSL did not allow terms such as "ELL" and "low-income" to determine how CRSLs views students of color. One principal in the study indicated that closing the gaps among low-income and ELL students set high expectations for all students. (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Principals also had to focus on changing the perspective of their teachers. The participants in the study indicated that

29

teachers often carried a deficit view of their students because they were poor students. The principal indicated that the teachers' thinking needed to shift to believing that all students can learn and achieve regardless of socioeconomic status.

Critical consciousness is another important part of critical self-reflection. Critical conscience is the self-actualization process of understanding race issues (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Recognizing one's privilege based on race and its impact on other races is one example of critical conscience. Self-reflection is essential when dealing with matters of race (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Additionally, self-reflection is key in driving "transformative action" for students of color (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Dantley (2005) describes transformative action in that the leader reflects the critique of self and self-correction (Dantley, 2005, p. 665). Critical consciousness is about leaders in urban schools engaging in learning and understanding how race impacts student learning.

*Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Environments*

CRSLs promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments through relationship building and an inclusive campus vision. Building relationships is one way principals can promote cultural responsiveness. Building relationships with students as a CRSL is a theme highlighted in the literature. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) conducted a study in which a CRSL was shadowed for several days. One of the primary themes in their study was the importance of building relationships. The participant shared that building relationships supported reducing anxiety in students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). The study noted that students of color often hesitated to assimilate into other social interactions "for fear of making a mistake," whether it was due to a language barrier or being criticized in general (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 187).

Relationship building is a way to build trust and allow students to take academic risks in class. Ensuring that relationships are built on trust and respect is another theme that emerged. When modeled by the adult, trust and respect are reciprocated by the student (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

CRSLs promote an inclusive instructional vision. Principals should demonstrate a deep concern for inclusive instruction by supporting teachers in their instructional practice to be inclusive and culturally aware in their classrooms (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Supporting teachers' instructional practices includes collaboration between the teacher and their instructional leader and consistent classroom observations with provided feedback (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Webb-Johnson (2006) suggested relationship building is a critical component of an inclusive instructional vision. Teachers must be supported in building relationships with the students as a part of their instructional practice. Webb-Johnson noted how often African American students are often mislabeled based on perception rather than understanding the student need based on their instructional practices in the classroom (Webb-Johnson, 2006). Culturally responsive and inclusive environments are important elements that effective principals promote on their campuses.

*Culturally Responsive Teachers*

CRSLs develop culturally responsive teachers by providing responsive, professional development opportunities. Culturally responsive pedagogy is an essential element to ensure that students of color receive a rigorous, inclusive, and equitable learning experience in the classroom. Ginsberg (2005) notes that students' cultural experiences should be a part of the learning experiences for students of color, increasing

their motivation to learn. Teachers must have the capacity to provide this type of instruction to students consistently. Ginsberg highlights motivation as a chief determiner for increasing student learning and provides a framework that principals can leverage to increase their teachers' capacities to provide culturally responsive pedagogy for their students. Table 2.1 below describes Ginsberg's framework of motivational culturally responsive teaching. The framework's general purpose is to support students' learning interests by "providing inclusion, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning and engendering competence" (Ginsberg, 2005, p. 221).

Table 2.1

*Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching*

| Inclusion | Attitude | Competence | Meaning |
|---|---|---|---|
| Clear routines, procedures, and rituals are established. | The teacher provides instruction per the student's experiences and feedback. | The teacher provides criteria for success for all learning activities. | The teacher ensures active participation that challenges the student. |
| Students feel comfortable in the learning environment. | The students play a role in decision-making about the learning experiences. | All grading policies and fair and equitable. | The teacher uses rigorous questioning strategies beyond sampling recalling information. |
| The teacher treats all students with fairness and respect. | The teacher validates the opinions of their students. | The teacher models real-world connections as part of their instruction. | The teacher increases understand by building on prior knowledge. |
| The cultural lived experiences of the students are represented in the classroom. | Not applicable | Assessments include the perspectives of the students representing multiple ways of mastering a learning standard. | The teacher provides praise for rigorous responses and encourages this behavior. |

Note: This table is adapted from (*Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000)*

Providing opportunities for professional development is another way CRSLs can develop culturally responsive teachers. Wlodkowski (2003) suggests that a culturally responsive teacher's motivational framework should be followed when establishing professional development for teachers. Teachers should experience the motivational framework components for culturally responsive teaching: inclusion, attitude, competence, and meaning in their own professional development experience. Teacher motivation is just as important as student motivation (Ratey, 2001). When establishing professional development for teachers, principals should provide the purpose of professional development and clear outcomes to help increase motivation (Wlodkowski, 2003). Professional development facilitators can enhance adult learners' meaning in two ways. First, posing a problem that exists on the campus is a way to enhance meaning wanting to address a problem or a need. For example, wanting to increase speaking and writing opportunities for ELL students is a problem that could help enhance meaning for the teachers. The second is creating a simulation. Addressing the problem consists of teachers participating in role-playing that mimics the challenges and experiences in their classrooms. The last component of Wlodkowski's framework, engendering competence, states that professional development should assess the professional learning experience effectiveness. Principals need data to support how well teachers will apply the skills teachers have acquired (Wlodkowski, 2003).

*Engaging Students and Parents*

CRSLs engage students and parents by finding connections between the community and school (Khalifa et al., 2016a). Research indicates the schools that collaborate with the community demonstrate positivity and are culminating in a new type

of transformation principals (Ishimaru, 2013). Cooper (2009) provides an example of how principals can draw connections between the community and school through bridge-building. Principals who build bridges between the community and the school do so by creating "caring and emancipatory spaces for students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders in the school" (Lopez et al., 2006, p. 67). Additionally, principals can also create collaborative spaces with parents and community members to gain input about on-campus initiatives such as fundraising (Cooper, 2009). Lastly, building relationships with businesses within the community to provide services and the students and families of the school is another way to make connections between the school and the community (Cooper et al., 2009). Community-based organizations can model the relationships that need to exist between schools and the community (Warren, 2005).

The major tenets of CRSL: critical self-reflection, responsive and inclusive environments, culturally responsive teaching, and engaging students and parents are tenets that effective principals utilize to ensure they are leading equitably. The CRSL tenets guide school leaders to leverage when creating a productive learning environment specifically for marginalized students. CRSL also increases urgency and awareness for principals who lead in urban schools that allow them to respond to the school and the community's needs.

*Conclusion*

The challenges for principals who lead in urban public schools are immense, but success is possible. Not every principal is successful, so it is essential to study those who are effective in that they are leaders who close the achievement gap among students of color through culturally responsive school leadership. The literature review highlighted

the inequities in urban public schools and demonstrated how they continue to expand the

achievement gap among African American and Latinx students in urban communities.

Additionally, the literature gave value to school leadership's importance in urban public

schools and described the challenges facing principals in urban public schools. The

literature review concluded by describing the components of a culturally responsive

school leader. Chapter Three describes the methodology and explains why the

methodology is most important for this multiple case study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

*Introduction*

The purpose of Chapter Three is to explain the rationale for this study's research design and provide details about the sampling, participants, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter Two noted the inequities that challenge urban public schools and identified the practices that can enhance the principal's beliefs and abilities to be an effective, equitable leader. The literature review additionally emphasized the need for principals in urban public schools to be culturally responsive, instructional leaders, builders of effective teams, data-driven decision-makers, and communicators of high expectations. Principal effectiveness leads to increased student achievement for the students served in the school. This study described the qualities of effective principals in urban public schools.

Additionally, this study provides a leadership framework that principals can leverage to intentionally address the needs and challenges of leading an urban public school. One goal of the study was to provide a clear and concise description of effective principals' beliefs and best practices in urban public schools. Thick, rich descriptions of the data highlighted the beliefs and practices leveraged by effective principals to enhance school improvement. Chapter Three explains the researcher's perspective and positionality, theoretical framework, the research design and rationale, site selection and participant sampling, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, ethical

considerations, and the limitations and delimitations. Each section describes the researcher's actions as they align with the research literature.

This research study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of effective school principals in YES Prep Public Schools, and how are those beliefs manifested in their schools?

2. What are the practices effective YES Prep Public School principals leverage to help increase school improvement?

*Researcher Perspective and Positionality*

I have served as a campus principal within YES Prep Public Schools for the past four years. My experiences as a leader of an urban public school have shaped my beliefs and practices as a principal. I believe that there are no effective schools without effective principals. Additionally, I believe that effective principals, specifically in urban public schools, need to be culturally responsive, effective team builders, instructional leaders, data-driven decision-makers, and communicators of high expectations in their schools. My interest in this study connects to my professional practice as a school leader.

I believe that all students, regardless of their zip code, should have an equitable education that prepares them for college and will give them opportunities to live choice-filled lives. As both a principal and former teacher, I have seen the ineffective impact leadership can have on a school, contributing to the widening of the achievement gap (Blase, 1987). I have a close connection with the participants and the study site. The participants in the study are all principals with who I have worked over the past four years. The study's participants all serve on the district's principal team and work together, often sharing practices and resources that help them lead their schools. The five principals in the study are also Lead Principals within YES Prep. Lead Principals serve as

37

mentors to Resident Principals. Resident principals are individuals who are aspiring to become campus principals. Each Resident Principal is assigned to Lead Principals who support and manage them throughout their residency. The participants are also on the Principal Advisory Committee, in which we provide input and help with decision-making at the district level. Lead principals are the most experienced group of principals in the district. The participants were purposively selected for this study due to their experience and effectiveness in the principal role. The study participants have a purpose in informing both the research problem and research questions in the study (Creswell, 2016).

*Theoretical Framework*

The study utilized the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Theory (Khalifa, 2018) as a theoretical framework. In qualitative research, researchers use a theoretical lens in which the study is grounded. The researcher can study issues that question race, gender, and class about marginalized groups (Creswell, 2017). Specific to this study, the CRSL provided a framework to explore the qualities and practices of highly effective principals in YES Prep schools. The study emphasized four elements of CRSL: critical self-reflection, promotion of inclusive spaces, developing culturally responsive teachers, and engaging students and parents.

CRSL informed the design of the research questions for this study. The research questions focused on exploring effective school principals' beliefs and practices and how those aligned with the CRSL framework. The CRSL framework also shaped data collection. Interviews and observations were used to explore if and how effective principals' beliefs and practices aligned with the four components of the CRSL framework. Interview questions were designed to gather descriptive data about

participants' beliefs and practices regarding their ability to critically self-reflect, develop

responsive and inclusive environments and culturally responsive teachers, and engage

students and parents. Interview one question focused on critical self-reflection and

responsive and inclusive environments, and interview two questions focused on

developing culturally responsive teachers and engaging students and parents.

Observations allowed the researcher to gather data related to developing responsive and

inclusive environments and culturally responsive teachers. Table 3.1 outlines which data

collection procedures were utilized to examine each part of the framework. A framework

analysis was used to analyze data collected from interviews and observations. The

framework analysis consisted of comparing data collected in the study to the CRSL

framework to see where the data aligned and where it diverged from in the CRSL

framework. The CRSL framework was used to explore effective principals' beliefs and

practices as they worked to create equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Table 3.1

*Alignment of Data Collection Procedures to CRSL Framework*

| CRSL Framework Component | Critical Self-reflection | Responsive and Inclusive Environments | Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers | Engages Students and Parents |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data collection method | Interviews | Interviews | Interviews | Interviews |

*Research Design and Rationale*

   This multiple case study aims to understand and describe the qualities of effective

principals who lead urban public schools. A qualitative design was most appropriate for

this case study for two reasons. First, qualitative research uses theoretical frameworks to

address the research problems and research questions. Second, qualitative research is an emerging process that requires data in the natural setting that is "sensitive to the people and places in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). A qualitative research design allowed the researcher to create patterns and themes through data collection (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research design allowed the researcher to collect data in a natural setting. The site for data collection was in the natural setting in which YES Prep principals lead.

A case study was the best qualitative research methodology for this study because a case study methodology can best represent the social constructivist worldview (Merriam, 2009). Also, case studies directly address both the research problem and the research questions through data collection and analysis procedures that uncover themes and patterns (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A case study aided in addressing the purpose of this study to describe and understand the qualities of effective principals and provide a framework that codifies these effective qualities. The social constructivist worldview allowed for the creation of broad research and interview questions to enable the participants to develop their understanding of the phenomena that is occurring. This study involved asking the participants several open-ended questions to allow the researcher to collect data in the participant's natural setting (Creswell, 2014). This qualitative multiple case study primarily collected data though participant interviews and participant observations.

*Site Selection and Participant Sampling*

Describing a phenomenon's depths is a key function of qualitative research (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). This study's site was at YES Prep Public Schools Table 3.2 below describes each YES Prep campus site in the study.

Table 3.2

*Participant Site Profile*

| School Profile | School A | School B | School C | School D | School E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year Founded | 2009 | 2019 | 2012 | 1998 | 2015 |
| Number of students | 967 | 300 | 410 | 977 | 667 |
| Number of staff | 88 | 33 | 36 | 83 | 74 |
| Principal years of experience | 5 | 5 | 10 | 4 | 6 |
| Grades served | 6-12 | 6-7 | 6-8 | 6-12 | 6-10 |

Participants selected for this study were purposely selected because they were all principals at YES Prep schools with a Texas Education Agency (TEA) accountability rating of an "A" or "B." There were five participants selected for this study based on these criteria. Their participation ensured a rich, thick description of the collected data could best describe their experiences related to this study. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants and sites that can purposefully inform the study's problem and research questions (Creswell, 2014). The participants in this study all have shared experiences and qualities of effective leadership. All participants have been in the principal role for at least five years. Each participant was invited to participate and given details about the study. Participants were asked to complete a consent form indicating their willingness to participate in the research. Elements of the consent form included the rights for participants to withdraw from the student at any point, an explanation of the study's purpose and its data collection procedures, protection of confidentiality, associated risks, benefits from participating in the study, and signatures of the participants and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The following section describes the data collection process.

*Data Collection Procedures*

The data collection process for this study consisted of 45- minute interviews with each participant. The researcher served as the key instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2017). Interviews occurred between the researcher and the study's participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on the campus of each participant. Interviews that were not able to be conducted on campus due to the COVID-19 pandemic were conducted via Microsoft Teams.

*Interviews*

The interviews were semi-structured in the form of open-ended questions to allow for the participants' specific views and opinions to be collected (Creswell, 2014.) For this study, each participant participated in one or two interviews. Interviews allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p.34). Due to the global pandemic of COVID-19, interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Each interview was forty-five minutes in length. The researcher applied a semi-structured interview protocol to ensure that each interview is consistent but also flexible. Semi-structured interviews provide a structure that allows for flexibility in responses from the participants(McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The interview protocol is based on connections to the study's theoretical framework:  Culturally Responsive School Leadership (Khalifa, 2018). Table 3.3 provides the interview questions as well as the literature review connection.

Table 3.3

*Interview Questions and Connection to the Literature Review*

| Question | Literature Review |
|---|---|
| How often do you reflect on your leadership behaviors, and what do you reflect on specifically? | Gooden and Dantley (2012) |
| How would you describe your understanding of your students' cultural contexts? | Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) |
| How do you work to change a teacher's perspective when they present the negative mindsets of their students? | Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) |
| How do you build relationships with your students? | Kahlifa (2016) |
| How do you set expectations around relationship building with students? | Mahdlangobe and Gordon (2012) |
| What are the actions you take and the priorities you set around your instructional vision? | Scheurich (1998) |
| Is culturally responsive pedagogy a part of teacher professional development? | Khalifa (2016) |
| How does your campus build relationships with parents? | Khalifa (2016) |
| What does culturally responsive school leadership mean to you? | Khalifa (2016) |
| How do you ensure that consequences for discipline are issued fairly and consistently? | Sammons et al. (1995) |
| Does your campus practice restorative justice as a part of your disciplinary practices? | Mullet (2005) |
| What is your process for building an effective leadership team? | Singh et al. (1997). |
| How do you use data as a part of instructional decision-making? | Stronge (2008) |
| What actions or tasks do you delegate to your leadership team | Hargreaves & Fink (2003) |
| What role does your leadership team play in decision-making? | Singh et al. (1997) |
| How do you communicate and uphold high expectations for your campus? | David et al. (2006) |

Each interview started with an icebreaker question at the beginning, followed by specific interview questions. Probing questions were asked to allow the participants to explain their responses in more detail. Space was provided after each question to all notes to be captured by the researcher. Each interview closed out with a thank you note to honor the participant for their time (Creswell, 2009). Follow-up interviews were required and also occurred virtually. Each audio/video interview was recorded with the permission of the participants to ensure reliability. The researcher transcribed the audio from the interview recordings. Interviews were an integral part of the study, as they increased the engagement between the researcher and the participant beyond what observations can capture. The interviews occurred during the first semester of the 2020–2021school year.

*Data Analysis Procedures*

Preparing and organizing data are essential data analysis components in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). While this section primarily focuses on how the data was analyzed, it is essential to note that data analysis and collection occurred together (Merriam, 1998). Since this is a multiple case study, each case was analyzed with diligence to ensure that each principal's story was captured authentically (Patton, 2002). The researcher, both inductively and deductively, analyzed the collected data. The collected data is inductively analyzed to allow for patterns and themes to be formed. All gathered themes went through a coding process to represent figures, tables, and discussions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Specifically, the researcher applied Creswell and Poth's (2016) data analysis spiral. Table 3.4 describes the spiral that was applied to the analysis of the collected data.

Table 3.4

*Description of the Data Analysis*

| Data Analysis Step | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Managing and organizing the data | Organizing data with the use of a naming system using Microsoft Excel |
| Reading and memoing emergent ideas | Taking notes capturing reflections, and summarizing field notes. Notes were captured in the margins and the excel file. |
| Describing and classifying codes into themes | Identify and describing codes into themes using the leadership framework. |
| Developing and assessing interpretations | Making connections of the data back to the literature and theoretical framework. |
| Representing and visualizing the data | Reporting out the study's findings |

Once all data was collected, the spiral process's first step was to manage and organize the data. All data was organized in files and kept in a secure storage file. A naming system was used to ensure that all data materials could be easily accessed within the database (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The second step was to read and memo emergent ideas. As the researcher analyzed the data, descriptive and reflective note-taking occurred, and all field notes were summarized. The researcher used the summarized notes to develop codes. Within the second step, the researcher read through the transcripts several times. Reading through the transcripts is an important action to do before breaking the data into parts and themes (Agar, 1986). Memoing is the next component of the second step. The role of memoing goes beyond simply summarizing the data, but rather memoing provided an opportunity to truly synthesize the data into emerging ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In the memoing process, the researcher started by making notes in the transcripts' margins, and phrases

such as self-awareness, develop team, and progress monitoring were some of the notes captured in the memoing process.

The third step was to describe and classify the codes into themes. In this step, the researcher sorted the data into codes and then finalized the codes. This step is important for "describing, classifying, and interpreting the data" (Creswell & Poth, p. 189, 2016). The researcher analyzed the data by creating descriptions of the data, applied codes, developed themes, and provided an interpretation of the data solely based on what was seen in the data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher saw elements of the framework repeated throughout the interviews, so data were coded according to the framework (culturally responsive, data-driven, instructional leader, high expectations, build effective leadership teams).

The fourth step to develop and assess interpretations was used to understand the data logically. Lincoln (1985) describes the fourth step as lessons learned by the researcher. The researcher used this step to determine meaning in the analyzed data's emerging themes and patterns (Patton, 2014). Specifically, the researcher read through each case to better assess the emerging themes across each case. Coaching, self-awareness, and leading through others were emerging themes captured by the researcher in this step.

The fifth and final step represents and visualizes the data as a process for assembling what was discovered in the data. The researcher used a comparison table to compare the study's participants' similar qualities and practices (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Specifically, the study uncovered six findings in the data. Table 3.5 outlines each finding and its descriptions.

Table 3.5

*Description of the Findings*

| Finding | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Finding One | Effective principals at YES Prep are culturally responsive as self-reflective practitioners. |
| Finding Two | Effective principals at YES Prep are data-driven decision-makers. |
| Finding Three | Effective principals at YES Prep are instructional leaders. |
| Finding Four | Effective principals at YES Prep communicate high expectations. |
| Finding Five | Effective principals at YES Prep leverages practices to build effective leadership teams. |
| Finding Six | The YES Prep principal team's culture is a dynamic development culture that embodies communities of practice. |

When analyzing written data, the researcher captured notes while reading and made notes in the margins (Humerman & Miles, 1994). Once notes were collected and read, specific information was highlighted that aligned to address the study's research questions (Wolcott, 1994). Additionally, all field notes were summarized. Lastly, themes and patterns were captured through a system of concrete coding by identifying themes to the corresponding qualities in the framework in figure one and themes corresponding to the theoretical framework (Madison, 2005).

*Data Validation*

Data validation strategies were used to ensure that all collected data is valid. Creswell and Poth (2016) state, "validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and determines whether findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, participant, and reader" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 198). It is essential in data validation

that more than one strategy is applied to enhance the researcher's ability to accurately assess the study's findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher applied three different validation strategies to the study: member checking, detailed, thick descriptions, and clarifying bias. Triangulation was also used to test and ensure data validity. Specifically, the researcher used method triangulation that consisted of data collection through interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Member checking was used to ensure that the researcher has accurately captured the participant interviews. Since this is a multiple case study, the researcher needs to check with each principal involved. While the interview questions were the same for each participant, the responses were all different. The researcher used member checking to allow for changes to be made to the transcripts if necessary. The study leveraged detailed, thick descriptions of the data. For example, the researcher conducted an individual case analysis on each participant interview to provide thick, rich descriptive data. Semi-structured interviews allowed descriptions of the participants' experiences individually and collectively through captured themes through the detailed, thick descriptions.

*Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations for both data collection and analysis are discussed in this section. Ethical considerations for data collection include minimal disruptions to the study site and participant protection. The researcher gained permission from all participants involved in the study. Permission was given through email confirmation to the researcher. As the study sites are schools, the researcher avoided impacting the general school day by limiting distractions to the learning environment. For example, the researcher avoided distracting students while in a classroom observation with the

principal. The researcher discussed the purpose of the study and shared how data was collected and used. This ethical consideration prevents the researcher from deceiving the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The study participants shared information about their leadership behaviors and decision-making as leaders to be reviewed and assessed within the study. In reporting out of the study's findings, it is important not to reveal information that would jeopardize the participants' professional careers. Participants' names were assigned as aliases. Additionally, sharing the study's findings with the participants is an ethical consideration used in this study. Each participant had the opportunity to check the findings according to their participation in the study.

*Limitations and Delimitations*

This study presented four limitations. These limitations include limited time, the effects of a global pandemic, a limited sampling procedure, and multiple cases in a qualitative design. First, while qualitative research enables the researcher to collect rich descriptive data to tell the participants' stories in the study, there is a limited amount of time in which the descriptive data can be collected (Stake, 2005). Collecting rich and descriptive data from five participants required a lot of time, limiting the amount of data collected. Second, the effect of the global pandemic COVID-19 was an evolving limitation to this study. This study relied heavily on observations. Observations did not occur due to changes in the school schedule due to adjusting to the impact of COVID-19. The current challenges of the worldwide pandemic made observations challenging to conduct. A lack of observations limits the study's ability to capture the participants' actions as they occur. Third, a limited sample site presents another limitation in the study. The purposive sampling procedure only allowed for data collection at one central site:

YES Prep Public Schools. While the study collected data from five different YES Prep campuses, data collection from only one main site or district limits the generalizability of the study's findings (Creswell, 2016). Lastly, multiple case studies place limits on qualitative research design. Creswell and Poth (2016) note that multiple case studies can impact the depth of analysis of the collected data and take away the depth of a single case study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This study has five different case studies to collect and analyze data.

The chief delimitation in the study is the narrow focus on principals. For example, the study could have included focus groups with teachers that included their responses and principal effectiveness from teachers' perspectives. The study used student achievement data that showed consistent growth or sustained growth over four years to identify effective principals. As a result, the study narrowly focused on five effective principals' practices and beliefs in YES Prep Public Schools. Therefore, this study confines itself to interviews and observations of effective principals (Creswell, 2014).

*Conclusion*

This multiple case study provided an understanding and description of effective principals in urban public schools. Therefore, this study examined five effective principals in urban schools to determine their effectiveness by the effective qualities described in this study. Additionally, this study examined effective principals to inform current research with a specific set of codified qualities and practices used in urban school leadership. A qualitative case study was the most appropriate research design for this study. Data collection procedures were consistent with semi-structured interviews and observations of the study's participants. Data analysis was conducted using Creswell

and Poth's (2016) data analysis spiral to ensure that all data was strategically analyzed. Ethical considerations ensured that the study's sites were minimally disrupted, and the participant's anonymity was maintained. Lastly, the limitations and delimitations described the challenges endured in data collection and the prescribed delimitations and their support to the study. Chapters Four and Five examine the results of the study and discuss the implications of the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Implications

*Introduction*

Using a multiple case qualitative study design, this study explored effective

principals' practices and beliefs in YES Prep Public Schools. Interviews were conducted

with each of the study's participants to aid the researcher in answering the following

research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of effective school principals in YES Prep Public Schools, and how are those beliefs manifested in their schools?

2. *What are the practices effective YES Prep Public School principals leverage to help increase school improvement?*

This chapter accomplishes three things. First, each case is described through an

individual case analysis based on the interviews conducted with each participant using

the CRSL model. Second, this chapter provides a cross-case analysis in which emerging

themes are described. The cross-case analysis was conducted by capturing emerging

themes based on the literature and theoretical framework. Third, this chapter will address

the study's research questions in relation to the collected data, literature, and theoretical

framework. Lastly, this chapter provides implications and recommendations based on the

study's findings.

*Participants*

Table 4.1 provides a recap of each participant interviewed to remind the reader of

the study's participants. Participants selected for this study were purposely selected

because they were all principals at YES Prep schools with a Texas Education Agency (TEA) accountability rating of an "A" or "B." There were five participants selected for this study based on these criteria.

Table 4.1

*Participant Recap*

| School Profile | School A | School B | School C | School D | School E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year Founded | 2009 | 2019 | 2012 | 1998 | 2015 |
| Number of students | 967 | 300 | 410 | 977 | 667 |
| Number of staff | 88 | 33 | 36 | 83 | 74 |
| Principal years of experience | 5 | 5 | 10 | 4 | 6 |
| Grades served | 6-12 | 6-7 | 6-8 | 6-12 | 6-10 |

*Willie*

Willie is currently in his fifth year of leading his campus. He is also leading at his second YES Prep campus. Willie now leads before taking over the campus; Willie was the founding principal of one of the organization's partnership schools. A partnership school is a school that is partnered with a traditional public school. For example, the partnership school Wille lead is housed inside a high school in Houston's Aldine Independent School District. As a founding school principal, Willie grew the high school to include $9^{th}$ grade to $12^{th}$ grade. During this time, his campus was the first YES Prep campus to implement a one-to-one device program that allowed every student to access a computer.

Additionally, Willie's leadership enabled his founding campus to accomplish an A rating from the Texas Education Agency. Willie's partnership school was the first partnership school to achieve an accountability grade of an A from the TEA. There are a total of four partnership schools within YES Prep. Willie transitioned to leading his

second YES Prep campus because he was asked to take over a turnaround school. A turnaround school is any YES Prep campus with an accountability rating of a C or lower within this context. At the time of his transition, Willie transitioned to leading YES Prep's lowest-performing campus.

Willie participated in a 45-minute interview. He began the interview by describing what made him decide to become a principal. Willie did not always see himself as a principal. Before coming to YES Prep, Willie spent eight years in the Houston Independent School District as a teacher and an assistant principal. Willie notes that it was during his time as an assistant principal when he realized the impact leadership has on campus. "It was my time as an assistant principal. I got to see the impact I was able to have through my leadership with the growth and development of staff, students, and my personal development." He shared that his leadership experience as an assistant principal allowed him to see the necessity of school leadership and the need for leaders to enable positive change in their schools.

Willie responded to questions related to five themes revealed in the literature described as the codified practices of effective principals detailed in chapter three. Figure 4.1 below indicates the codified practices of effective principals. Each interview question captured each of these practices. The individual case analysis will describe the participant's responses based on each practice.

*Figure 4.1* Effective qualities codified.

*Culturally responsive leadership*.  The interview began with Willie responding to how often he spends time in critical self-reflection on his behaviors and practices as a principal. As mentioned in chapter two, critical self-reflection is an essential element of CRSL. As it relates to critical self-reflection, Willie describes how he reflects in three ways. First, Willie reflects on his abilities and practices as a leader.

> I'm in a situation where I'm looking to take the campus to a place it's never been. And for me, that requires me to be thinking all the time about the decisions I'm making and ask myself how are the practices and things that I'm putting in place are moving the needle forward.

Willie uses self-reflection to question the decisions he makes and question the practices he's employing related to increasing positive outcomes for his school. Second, Willie uses self-reflection to seek feedback and input from his teachers to support them better.

And so for me personally, I've spent a lot of time trying to get to know my staff, and where we could be better as a campus, what decisions can I make? What do they need from me to be able to do their best work? I want, this school to move in the right direction.

Willie uses the feedback he gains from his teachers to reflect on his practices as a principal.

Understanding the cultural context of students was discussed next. Willie explains how he understands his students' cultural context in two ways. The first is the shared identity he has with his students. The shared identity is rooted in being a minority, growing up in the South, and being a first-generation college graduate.

I think that many of my students and I have a shared cultural context in the fact that we're minorities in the United States. I think that we have a shared cultural context to some degree in lived experiences. I'm from the rural South. I have two working-class parents who did not go to college.

Willie acknowledges that he can connect to his students' cultural contexts through elements of a shared identity. Second, Willie gains a better understanding of his student's cultural context through being a learner himself. In Willie's reflection, he recognizes and calls out privileges he has had that his students may not have. "I'm not from a major metropolitan area. I've always lived in a house. I've always had two parents at home. I never worried about my lights getting turned off or water not working, and we never missed a meal." While Willie has some shared cultural contexts, he also recognizes that he grew up with privileges that many of his students do not have. He recognizes that is always a context to learn, even when you enter a place where there are shared cultural contexts.

Building relationships with students was discussed next. Willie described that authenticity and humanizing yourself are one way to build relationships. He notes that

56

kids want to know the "real" you. "Not being so serious all the time, and not always talking about academics and things like that, really getting to know the students, going to the games, being there." Relationship building for Willie is all about authentic and genuine engagement with students. As a principal, it is easy to get caught up in the job and forget that students want to know their principal.

Data-driven decision-making was discussed next in the interview. Wille uses data to drive decision-making for his campus in two ways. First, progress monitoring towards campus goals and second, accountability towards campus goals. Progress monitoring is important to Willie as it allows him to determine how on or off track in his campus towards meeting their goals. "When using data to make decisions, I spend most of my time reviewing the data tracking tools we use to progress monitor student achievement. I want to know where the gaps are and what trends exist in the data." Tracking progress towards Willies' goals is all about utilizing data to understand areas of concern to determine the best-targeted focus. Second, Willie uses data to hold his leadership accountable to ensure that his campus delivers on its students' commitments. He says,

> I want to make sure that we are doing our part to make sure that kids are growing and all the things that we're held accountable for. In leadership team meetings, we review data as a team and reflect on the shortcomings in the data.

Willie uses data to ensure that student achievement is at the heart of the work he and his team are doing to support their students.

*Instructional leadership.* Willie describes his instructional leadership in two ways. First, Willie believes his role as an instructional leader is to ensure that his teachers receive the best professional development possible. "I think I try to think about, How we can utilize our time with teachers to help them develop their craft as teachers." Willie

57

believes the way to improve instruction for students is to prepare teachers through sound professional development. Second, Willie described that instructional leadership is all about being present in classrooms and providing teachers with feedback on their instruction. "It's all about creating frameworks that allow for you to see it in the classroom, provide feedback, and provide specific coaching." Professional development for teachers and providing them with feedback regularly is how Willie defines his role as his campus's instructional leader.

*High expectations.* In Willie's interview maintaining high expectations was discussed in three ways. First, we discussed maintaining high expectations for staff as it relates to relationship building with students. Second, Willie shared how he maintains high expectations when negative mindsets are presented to students. Third, Willie described maintaining high expectations around discipline. Setting expectations for staff and students to build relationships is done programmatically. "We have an advisory program that allows teachers to get to know a small group of kids and set up meaningful conversations that allow them to build relationships and share common interests." The advisory program at Willie's school can manage how relationship building at his campus and its effectiveness. Negative mindsets can impact how a teacher interacts with their students.

Additionally, negative mindsets can lower expectations for students. Willie describes how he challenges negative mindsets and listens to teachers who present negative mindsets about their students to gain perspective. "You have to challenge the mindset daily, but you also have to be willing to listen to the other perspective." Willie highlighted that challenging negative mindsets also requires him to listen to the teacher's

perspective to understand better where they are coming from and understand their perspective to shift the mindset. Chapter Two of this study highlighted the disproportionality of discipline for students of color. Willie described the importance of aligning discipline beliefs with his team to ensure that disciplinary consequences are issued fairly and consistently on his campus. "We talk about what we believe. We have some aligned conversations. We go through scenarios first at the beginning of the year." Sharing beliefs, alignment, and practice is how Willie describes how his leadership team ensures equitable discipline practices.

*Build effective leadership teams.* Willie next discussed practices and beliefs of building effective leadership teams. Willie describes self-awareness, aligned values, and trust as key indicators in building an effective leadership team. Willie describes self-awareness in terms of being aware of your strengths as a leader and building a team that compliments your gaps. "My thoughts on building an effective leadership team is first you have to understand your strengths and what you bring to the table." Willie then comments on how to proceed in building out an effective team. "You need a mix of people that complement those strengths and people that challenge those strengths. The first step for any leader is self-awareness." Willie believes that self-awareness is an essential practice of building an effective team. Willie next described how building a team with individuals who share similar values is also important. "You have to get people around you who share some of what you value. I value hard work, preparedness, and professionalism." Willie continued to describe how values around hard work support building relationships with your team. "I think when hard work is valued, we can work together and build relationships with them through the work." Willie believes that hard

work as a shared value is a way he leverages building relationships on his leadership team. Relationships build as a result of work contributed to the team. Next, Willie discussed how he builds an effective leadership team through decision-making. Willie shared that creating buy-in and connection to the vision involves his team in decision-making for the campus. "I probably to a fault believe a lot in collective decision making. I want my team to have opportunities to give input and feel connected to the overall vision and where we are headed as a campus." Willie expressed the need to know how the decisions he makes impact teachers. Therefore, he needs his team to be a part of the decision-making to vet his team's impact. "I spend a lot of time with my team deciding to make sure I am aware of the impact campus decisions have on teachers." Willie builds an effective leadership team through sharing the responsibility of decision-making for his campus.

Additionally, Willie creates capacity on his leadership team through delegation of both tasks and decisions. "If I am doing everything, then I am limiting the capacity of others. I am going to set you up by setting up the framework and parameters. Everything else is up to you." Willie's ability to create capacity in his leadership team provides them with opportunities to take risks and be innovative to better support his campus.

Willie is a highly reflective individual who is committed to driving educational equity at the campus he leads. From his experiences as an assistant principal in HISD to his experiences in founding a YES Prep campus and taking over a struggling YES Prep campus, Willie leverages every leadership account. Willie demonstrated consistently in his interview that modeling, creating a team structure, and creating leadership

opportunities in his leadership are some of the practices he leverages the most. Next, Jane's experiences, the second participant employed as a principal, are described.

*Jane*

Jane is currently in her sixth year leading at her campus. She has been at her campus for the past 12 years. In this time, Jane has moved up the ranks at her current school. Before becoming the principal of her campus, Jane served as a teacher, Dean of Instruction, Director of Academics, and now principal. Before coming to YES Prep, Jane taught for two years in Banton Rouge, Louisiana. As a Principal, Jane has worked hard to make her campus one of the top-performing YES Prep campuses. She took her campus from a "D" TEA accountability rating to a "B" rated campus. Each year Jane's campus experiences student achievement growth that exceeds the previous year's performance.

In Jane's 45-minute interview, she began by describing what brought her into leadership. She reflected that watching other leaders she's worked for along with understanding the power of leadership. "I've worked for a lot of poor school leaders and a couple of good ones. The power that a school leader has to shape culture, shape direction, and create environments where learning can happen is crucial." Seeing both good and bad examples of leadership has played a role in the why and how Jane views leadership. Similar to Willie, Jane responded to interview questions based on the codified practices.

*Culturally responsive leadership.* Jane described that she uses self-reflection in two ways. First, she uses self- reflection to reflect on the impact her decisions have on her campus.

I mean, I think some of the things I think about, thinking about the impact of decisions on data, impact on lived experience, so around student and staff engagement. I think a lot about actions I take and priorities I set and whether they yield the results we want to see, and so, what's the impact on data? And then I think thinking a lot too, about the unintended consequences of decisions or programs I've made.

Determining the impact of decision-making on the overall student experience, teacher experience, and data impact is how Jane uses self-reflection to think about how she makes decision-making for her campus positively and negatively. Jane was not afraid to name that her decisions sometimes have undesired consequences, and she uses self-reflection to bring those impacts to the surface. Second, Jane described how she uses feedback from her team and staff to help her process the impact of her decision-making. "We have a lot of structures where we get feedback from people, where we look at data. Check-ins occur weekly around getting feedback and engaging in reflection and giving feedback two ways." Gathering feedback and digging into the positive and negative impacts of decision-making is how Jane employs the practice of critical self-reflection.

Understanding the cultural context of Jane's students was next discussed. Jane shared that it is first important to understand the school community's specific makeup to understand students' cultural context better.

The school community in which I serve is fairly diverse. There is a high Black homeownership rate in the neighborhood, so when I think about some of our student population's income level, we serve the gamut of students who have recently immigrated. We have families who have lived in Houston for multiple generations.

Jane recognizes that she has traditional families in the community for years and has immigrant families new to the country and the community in which they live. Second, Jane explains that her understanding of her students' cultural contexts also helps understand her students' lived experiences. "Often, we think that our student's

experiences are monolithic. There are some commonalities, but each student brings a lot of different lived experiences and perspectives to campus." Jane noted understanding students' unique experiences from the community and students whose families have immigrated to the United States. "I often think about the recent immigrant experience and their expectations of the school based on their lived experience as an immigrant. Their experience is very different from families how have been in the country." Jane recognizes that she has students who may identify as Black but have different lived experiences based on where they are from. For Black students, specifically, their experiences cannot be looped together simply because they are Black. The lived experiences of an African family that has recently moved to the US are completely different from a Black family with multiple generations in the community in which they live.

We next discussed the practices and beliefs around building relationships with students. Jane noted that she leverages the 11 years she has spent at her campus to build relationships with students consistently. "My ability to build relationships now comes from my connection to families over a long period knowing families, their stories, knowing older brothers and sisters, and leveraging those connections to get to know our students." Building relationships with students based on previous connections is how Jane finds opportunities to connect with her students. Relationships with a student's siblings make it easier to build a relationship with the new student. Jane taught several siblings of new students who start at her campus. She leverages those relationships to build new ones.

Jane next discussed culturally responsive pedagogy and teacher development. Building teacher skills and self-reflection are at the core of what Jane does to develop

63

culturally responsive teachers. Jane provided an example of teachers needing to have the skills to respond when students use hateful language towards staff and students.

> A major part of developing culturally responsive teachers is building skills in response to insensitive language, celebrating kids daily, knowledge teachers should have about different populations, knowing how to teach them, and knowing what students are bringing into the classroom.

Jane shared the other part of developing culturally responsive teachers is building in time for teachers to self-reflect. "I think, coupling it with a lot of space for reflection. So, a lot of space for discussion, reflection, processing, sharing of examples. I've seen some traction with that, with our staff this year." Skill building and self-reflection from the foundation in which Jane worked to develop culturally responsive teachers. Jane firmly believes that teachers need to have skills that make them more culturally responsive to their students' needs while reflecting on their teachers' practices.

> Building relationships with parents Jane described as something that is a work in progress.

> I would say that is a big area of growth. We do a good job in providing parents with key information and responding to their questions; however, we need to improve in gaining the parent's perspectives in an authentic way to make parents more a part of the decision-making process.

Additionally, Jane shared that having tenured leaders on her campus allows bridge building to occur between the school and parent because of the long-standing relationships that have been built over the years. "Leveraging those individual relationships frequently because there's a lot of trust in those long-standing relationships, and so we're able to both hear."

> When it comes to being a culturally responsive leader, Jane believes that culturally responsive should be a priority, reflecting on the positive and negative

consequences of decision-making. The leader should be a model of reflection. Jane

shared how important it is to reflect on the impact of decision-making and its impact on

the students and families her campus serves.

> In the decision-making process, I think it's thinking about who the voices you
> elevate, who are the voices you did not elevate, and the impact of that, and where
> you have to be careful about which voices you elevate? I think that's a question
> I've had to start asking myself this year.

Jane recognizes that her campus decisions have both positive and negative implications

on all involved stakeholders.

*Data-driven decision maker.* Jane described that data drives her decision-making

through goal-setting and progress monitoring. "I think it's part of the goal-setting

process. I think it's how you progress monitor. I think it's how you know whether or not

your theory of action is successful." Jane also mentioned that there must be a balance in

how much data to review to prevent data from being too overwhelming. "There's a

balance between looking at data so much that you get in data overload and not taking

action. Too much data can become challenging." Jane sees data as a metric to set a plan

of action that allows for an appropriate response to the issue at hand.

*Instructional leadership.* Jane described her instructional leadership in two parts.

First, creating an instructional vision must be grounded in data and reflect the goals that

need to be accomplished. Second, the instructional vision must account for the actions

necessary to accomplish the goal. "I think a lot about what are the goals that we believe

are ambitious and meaningful for our kids? And then thinking about, what are the steps

that we'll have to be able to take to get there." Using data to set ambitious goals and align

actions such that they support the instructional metrics are important components of

Jane's ability to be an instructional leader for her campus. Jane highlighted the need for the instructional vision to account for the lived experiences of her students. "There are a lot of practices that yield strong results but don't necessarily create the lived experience that we want to have in the classroom. And so also thinking about, what lived experiences do students crave in the classroom." For Jane, being an instructional leader is about goals and strategic actions. Additionally, Jane wants to ensure that her campus's instructional goals are aligned to inclusive of her students' lived experiences.

*High expectations.* Jane shared her practices and beliefs on relationship-building, addressing teacher mindsets, fair and consistent discipline consequences, and communicating high expectations to staff and students. Discussed next was how Jane maintains high expectations on her campus. Jane noted that building a strong mindset in her teachers about her students and building skills sets expectations for building relationships with students. "I think part of it is developing a mindset around the power of relationships, and the impact of relationships between teachers and students" Developing a mindset about student relationships grounded in understanding the power and impact of relationships is a critical piece for Jane when setting expectations for her staff. She also noted that building relationships with students makes it easier to support them and hold them accountable. "Building a relationship is not about being friends with the kid. It's also not about being someone who's there just to hold kids accountable and not revealing any of yourself." Jane knows that teachers must have the skills to support their students while maintaining boundaries. Still, it must also be about striking the balance of holding the student accountable while building professional and authentic relationships.

Working to change a teacher's negative mindset about kids was discussed next. When working with a teacher who presents a negative mindset, Jane shared that she tries to utilize the student's voice to counter a negative mindset. "I think a lot of it's sharing student input and so sharing, what is the lived experience of students in the classroom." Jane believes that if a teacher understands their students' perspective and experiences, they can move from a deficit-based mindset to an asset-based mindset. Jane described that she also sometimes sees a mindset of low expectations for students as a mindset that appears in teachers. "I also think, though, one of the things I've seen over time is the belief that low expectations are also the culturally competent thing to do." Jane indicated that teachers feel that they need to lower the bar for their students to accommodate them and support them. Jane often spends time working with teachers who have low expectations for students.

We next discussed the fairness of discipline policies across her campus. Jane noted that this had been a challenge at her campus, and she has used transparency to ensure that consequences for discipline are issued fairly and consistently. "Some things we've started to do differently this year is around discipline being very transparent." Jane described transparency of discipline by providing discipline updates to stakeholders. "Regularly, about every three weeks, we do a whole school discipline update that shares all of the suspensions, a summary of each." In Jane's reflection of past issues with discipline consequences, she has worked to address those issues in the current school year through transparency of all disciplinary decisions made on her campus.

*Build effective leadership teams*. When addressing the process for building out an effective leadership team, Jane shared that building an internal pipeline, adding to skills

sets void of her own, and seeking varied perspectives are ways to build an effective leadership team. Jane expressed her belief in promoting individuals who have worked at her campus for years as something very important to her in building her leadership team. "A value that I have operated on historically is I'm a firm believer in hiring from within. Seeing your peers grow into leadership provides a lot of hope and potential." Jane further emphasized that creating a pipeline for campus internal talent sets her up to hiring individuals who do not necessarily have the campus context that tenured staff on her campus has. "I think it lets me think about building my bench and not relying on external talent when you don't know what you're going to get." Contextual knowledge and campus experience are essential to Jane in building out an effective leadership team.

Jane believes that delegating actions and tasks to her team is a valuable part of building a strong leadership team. "I see my team a lot as the executors." I believe that it is important that members on my leadership team have ownership over campus systems they are responsible for." Individual ownership over systems related to her team's tasks and actions are leveraged by Jane in building an effective leadership team. Collective decision-making is also a part of how Jane builds an effective leadership team. Jane believes that major campus decisions should be made collectively by the leadership team. "Most major decisions, I would make alongside my team. I think I try to clarify for them, and they have significant input. They can provide their recommendations to any decisions we discuss." Additionally, Jane likes to have members on her team with particular expertise in certain campus topics to weigh decision-making heavily. "Particularly, if it's a place where they carry a lot of expertise or if it's a place where ultimately, the ownership of that issue, I feel comfortable with them owning, it even if the thing doesn't

go well." Jane believes in giving autonomy to the team leaders, especially when situations lend themselves to particular strengths that are on her team.

Jane is a strategic leader who believes in cultivating leaders on her campus to take on key leadership responsibilities. Jane's interview revealed that it is important that she see her leadership and decision-making through the lenses of how they will impact the students and families she serves. Jane's experiences, in large part, form her long-term success and commitment to the campus she leads. Jane has spent the past 11 years at her campus, and she is deeply invested in its success. Next, Sandy's experiences as a principal are discussed.

*Sandy*

Sandy is currently in his eighth year as a principal. Sandy leads one of YES Prep's partnership campuses partnered with Houston's Spring Branch Independent School District. He is in his third year as principal of his current campus. Previously, Sandy is served as principal at one of YES Prep's highest performing campuses for five years. His leadership of this campus played a significant role in the school's success. Sandy entered education back in 2001. He contributes his tenure in education to his love of being an educator and his commitment to social justice as to why he is still in education. In Sandy's 45-minute interview, he shared his perspectives on being a CRSL.

*Culturally responsive leadership.* Sandy described his practice of being a critically self-reflective leader in two different ways. First, Sandy shared that he spends time reflecting on his behaviors and biases as a leader and how those reflections can improve him. "Daily, I reflect on my behavior and my biases. I think particularly after challenging situations. I ask myself, what did I do well, what could I have done better?"

69

Sandy uses self-reflection to reflect on his behavior and biases. Additionally, Sandy utilizes self-reflection to explore how he is doing well as a leader and identifies places to improve. Second, Sandy explained how important it is to gain feedback from others on his performance as a principal to better reflect on his practices and behavior as a leader. "I also appreciate getting others' input. I'll often ask other folks to give me feedback on how I did." Sandy believes gaining feedback from those he works with is a way to take critical reflection to the next level.     Next, we discussed Sandy's understanding of his student's cultural context. Sandy leverages his 20 years of serving in low-income communities in understanding his student's cultural contexts. "I've worked in low-income schools for 20 years now, and so I think that I do understand pretty well the challenges faced by low-income families." He also notes that his experience is not enough to understand his student's cultural contexts fully. "I don't think it's enough time to have a completely clear picture." Sandy realizes that although he has spent his entire career serving schools in low-income communities, he still has much to learn to understand his student's cultural contexts better. Through his experiences, Sandy describes that every family he has worked with as a leader understands the value of a good education and has gained trust with YES Prep to support their students' educational goals.

> Our families understand how important education is. They know that their kids
> need it to have the kind of lives they want for them. I think that they trust YES
> Prep to provide their kids with the education that they value so much.

While Sandy indicated that he still has much to learn about his student's cultural contexts, he has spent time working with parents to understand better their values for education and how YES Prep can support what parents want to be true for their children.

Building relationships with students was next discussed. Sandy attributes visibility, classroom observations, and communicating with parents as ways he works to build relationships with students. Sandy believes in constantly being preset in the hallways at every transition. He uses this time to connect with students quickly. He also greets his students every morning as they enter the school. "Being highly visible just about every passing period in lunch every day, I think it starts there with visibility, which is something that anybody can do." Sandy leverages small but yet high-impact actions daily to connect and build relationships with his students. Sandy described how he uses classroom observations to connect more deeply with his students. "I think going into classrooms, observing, looking at what students are doing, I think it helps students understand that I care about what they're working on in class and I'm aware of it." Observing classrooms and talking to students about what they are working on in class supports how Sandy elevates how he builds relationships with students. Sandy also believes that talking with parents is also a good way to build relationships with students. "I think like just being involved in conversations with parents when there are behavior issues that convey to kids that we want what's best for them." Communicating to parents about what will best support their student is Sandy's leverage to build a relationship with both the student and the parents.

Sandy next discussed culturally responsive pedagogy and teacher development. Sandy firmly believes that rigor is at the heart of culturally responsive pedagogy. "I think the most important aspect of culturally responsive pedagogy is rigor." Sandy displayed that culturally responsive pedagogy must be grounded in believing that all kids can learn and be successful. "All of our kids can learn anything and have limitless potential, and

everyone here needs to believe that." Professional development of teachers related to culturally responsive pedagogy is also rooted in maintaining students' high expectations daily. Spending time with teachers on how they can support their students to grow is how Sandy's school develops his teacher's cultural responsiveness. "We coach teachers to push their kids and demand excellence and push their kids to grow every day." Developing culturally responsive teachers is all about belief and high expectations for Sandy.

Building relationships with parents is accomplished by promoting partnerships between the parents and school, consistent communication with parents, and holding parent meetings. "It is our responsibility as educators to deliver great instruction to students and push them towards college readiness, but it is not our responsibility alone. We need ownership from kids and parents." Sandy spends time explaining to parents that the success of their child requires commitment from all involved stakeholders. Additionally, Sandy uses parent communication through phone calls and meets to support building relationships with his parent. "We call a lot when kids are doing the right thing and doing the wrong thing, and we ask parents to help us improve things or reiterate different messages including positive ones to kids." Sandy believes that interactions with parents must consist of both positive and constructive in building sound relationships with parents.

When asked what it means to be a culturally responsive leader, Sandy described that a CRSL should be committed to equity and anti-racism. "It means that I, as a leader, am committed to equity, committed to anti-racism." Additionally, Sandy noted that CRSLs must ensure that there is programming to support both teachers and students in

72

creating a school where everyone is accepted. "Leaders must have a plan, and that involves programming for teachers and programming for students, and the result of that commitment and the plan is that all staff members, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender." It is important to Sandy that he leads a school in which difference is accepted and appreciated.

*Data-driven decision making.* Sandy uses data to make instructional decisions in two ways. First, he reviews data consistently to identify trends. "As a team, we look at unit exam data, we look at common assessment data, and we try to identify trends." Varied forms of summative assessment data are reviewed better to determine the instructional gaps between teachers and students. Additionally, Sandy uses the identified trends to determine the goals and course of action he needs to address the data trends. "Then, we come up with goals and strategies in response to those trends in data." Sandy also uses data to address equity gaps for different populations of students. "We saw that our ELs and SPED students performing at a disproportionately low rate and completing work at a disproportionately low rate. So, set a goal related to that." Using multiple data points, identifying trends, and using data to support other student populations is how Sandy uses data to increase student achievement.

*Instructional leadership.* Sandy believes that he must first set a clear vision with achievable and rigorous goals as an instructional leader. "I set goals based on what we've achieved in the past and what I think that we can achieve in the future." As an instructional leader Sandy also believes that lesson planning, feedback, and data tracking of student performance support his ability to be an instructional leader for his campus.

Lesson planning is especially important at his campus. "I know that lesson preparation is the foundation of excellent teaching. Though some schools have figured it out, and it's just a habit, it's not yet for us, and so I identified that as a strategy." Feedback and data tracking are also ways that Sandy drives his instructional leadership. "Continuing to create a culture of feedback and pushing teachers to be aware of their data daily in terms of how their kids are performing and taking action is another priority for our campus." Sandy wants all of his teachers to be strong lesson planners with systems to daily track student mastery to ensure that his campus is reaching its student achievement goals. Collaboration with his school's instructional team and classroom observations is another way Sandy leads his campus instructionally. "The role that I play is to be aware of what's going on with my instructional team, be at every meeting, be a contributor, and ideally observe a lot of classrooms." Playing an active role on his school's instructional team and getting into classrooms to observe instruction also help support Sandy's ability to be an instructional leader on his campus.

*High expectations.* Sandy stated that vision, values, professionalism, and student focus are the foundation in which he sets expectations around building relationships with students when setting expectations for his staff around building relationships with students. Sandy described that shared values lived out by all staff are important. "One of our values is kindness and respect, and another is school pride and safety. I talk about what it means to embody those values and what it looks like." Sandy spends time aligning his staff to the school's values, but he also spends time explaining what the values look like in action with students.

Sandy addressed negative mindsets with teachers in three ways. First, when working with a teacher who presents a negative mindset about the students they are teaching. Sandy first believes in showing value and respect to the teacher. "I think it's important for them to understand that I value them, I respect them, I hired them because I believe in their potential and feel like they're mission-aligned." Displaying empathy and compassion is a starting point for Sandy when working with negative mindsets. Sandy believes that everyone can change, and it must first start with the leader displaying a degree of care and compassion for the person. Second, Sandy explained that he directly challenges the mindset while also being patient with the person. "I think just sharing honestly about my perception of their mindset, why it's problematic, and what needs to change. I think being open to the process, taking some time has been helpful." Being direct about the mindset while also giving time to the mindset to shift is how Sandy supports his teachers. Sandy understands that while a negative mindset needs to be changed, this process consists of patience from the leader.

Next, Sandy shared how he ensures that consequences for discipline are issued fairly and consistently. Sandy noted hiring, visibility, and being involved in major discipline issues are ways in which he instills fair discipline practices on his campus. Hiring is the first place Sandy begins in ensuring consistency for discipline. He credits hiring a strong Director of Student Support to ensure that discipline practice is fair and consistent. The Director of Student Support is responsible for leading school culture and discipline. "I think it starts with hiring. I hired an awesome DSS who I believe in and trust, and I work closely with her." Hiring someone trustworthy and aligned to the campus values allows Sandy to ensure that the person leading culture and discipline is

aligned with him related to addressing discipline issues on campus. Sandy described his willingness to get involved with major discipline issues to ensure that input is given on all decisions made on major discipline issues. "I also get involved when issues escalate." Working alongside his director of student support in major discipline issues is a way to increase the consistency of disciplined practice and an opportunity for Sandy to guide his director. Sandy also reviews discipline data regularly to review inequities that may exist in their discipline practices. "We also have tons of data to look at because of our system of demerits, and so if there ever is a disproportionate amount of consequences given, I can access the data easily and intervene." Sandy takes an active approach on his campus to ensure that discipline of students done with fairness and consistency from reviewing data supporting his director and directly getting involved with escalated discipline issues.

*Build effective leadership teams.* Sandy's process for building an effective leadership team is a process that involves alignment to values, trust, and input. Sandy believes that first, identify what values are important to him and then creating a vision and hiring leaders who align to that vision. "First, get clear on my values and what's important to me. Second, create the vision for the school where we need to go and then choose leaders who are aligned." Sandy is persistent about hiring leaders who are aligned and warns against hiring individuals who are not aligned to your value.

> When you have folks whose values aren't consistent with your own or aren't consistent with the values that you want for school, it's not possible, regardless of how good a coach you are, because I have tried that, and I have not succeeded. Sandy builds a leadership team that shares the same values as shared values align the team with its vision and goals.

Sandy describes trust as to how he builds his leadership team. "A strong leadership team requires everyone on it to trust each other." Trust is how Sandy builds a

team that is accountable to each other and the school's goals and vision. Finally, Sandy described that giving his leadership team opportunities to give input and have autonomy is essential in building a strong leadership team. "I need to create the vision with my team so that they feel invested and see aspects in the vision that they came up with or promoted or that they believed in." Sandy provides opportunities for his leadership team to give input on the school's vision. Team ownership of the school's goals helps support the school's overall success. Giving autonomy to his team is a way Sandy avoids micromanaging his team. "I give autonomy to high performers. I trust my people to do their job." The distribution of responsibility to the leadership team provides opportunities for creativity and innovation for a school when leaders have autonomy in decision-making for the campus.

Sandy is a thoughtful and intentional leader who sees educational equity through the lens of race unique to his perspective. His interview revealed that being an anti-racist leader is important to him. Sandy is a reflector of his privileges and works to stay self-aware. As a leader of one of YES Prep's highest performing campuses and now a leader of an emerging partnership campus, Sandy has a unique set of skills and experiences that make up the type of leader. Next, Neil's perspective and experiences as a principal are discussed.

*Neil*

Neil is in his fifth year as a principal. In his second year of leading a YES Prep secondary campus, Neil was founded in 2019. As a founding principal, he is responsible for growing the school each year until it is fully grown. A YES Prep secondary campus supports grades $6^{th}$-$12^{th}$. Before leading this campus, Neil was the principal at YES

Prep's middle school partnership campus. Neil leads the middle school campus that is partnered with Aldine ISD. Neil brings a unique set of skills to the principal role. Neil's role before becoming a principal was director of campus operations. In this role, he was responsible for all school operational elements, such as school safety and building functionality. Typically, principals in YES Prep have a school culture or academics background. Neil brings a unique perspective to the role because of his operational background. Additionally, Neil was an instructional coach with Teach for America before joining YES Prep. In Neil's 45- minute interview, he provided his perspectives on the essential elements of CRSL.

*Culturally responsive leadership.* Neil began by describing his process as a leader who engages in self-reflection. Reflecting on his biases, the impact of his leadership on his campus and his ability to lead his team are the things Neil reflects on as his campus principal. Neil named that identifying his biases was something he did not do early on in his leadership career. "It took me a while to get to the place to be able to name what my biases are and how do they play out in my leadership." Neil further commented that reflecting on his biases is not a one-time act. "I have to reflect constantly, and I think it depends what work I'm doing." As a self-reflective leader, Neil acknowledges that reflecting on and owning your own biases is challenging and a process that one must engage in regularly. Neil described that he also reflected on his ability to lead his leadership team effectively. "I reflect more often on how am I leading my leadership team? How am I leading my check-ins with my directors? Those are the people who are leading the largest functional areas." Neil laments that he recognizes the importance of

each leadership role and its impact on his campus through reflection. Finally, Neil shared

that he must reflect on his own beliefs and practices as a leader.

> I spent a lot of time trying to emulate and copy the work of the principals that I had seen before versus pause and say, What do I believe is true? What does that mean for me?" Sometimes in leadership, leaders can get lost in adopting other leaders' practices and beliefs that may not necessarily align with their leader.

Neil uses self-reflection to ground himself in what he believes as a leader.

Neil next discussed his understanding of his student's cultural contexts. Neil

quickly noted that there are gaps that he needs to close in the area of understanding his

student's cultural contexts. "I would probably say that my perception of it is higher than

my complete understanding." However, Neil leverages his experience in working in

communities of color.

> I have historically worked in schools that are predominantly Latinx. When I first started teaching, I taught in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas.  I taught one white student in two years in the classroom, and the rest were all Latinx.

Neil's experience in serving in predominately Latinx communities provides him

with some understanding of cultural contexts. Additionally, Neil's understanding of his

students' cultural contexts occurred through the impact of their geographical location.

"Depending on how close you are to the airport, it changes the demographics. A lot of

immigrant families closer to the airport. I understand how location impacts experience

when you're in a large urban center like Houston." While Neil acknowledges that his

experiences are different from that of his students, he gains a better understanding of their

cultural context through understanding the variances of experiences based on where you

live.

Neil next shared his perspective on building relationships with students. Neil

noted that as a principal, he learned, through feedback mainly from a teacher on his

campus, that he first needed to model what building relationships with students looks like.

> This is something that I had to learn the hard way. I reflect on a teacher in my first year as a principal who said to me in her midyear meeting, "You continue to hold us accountable to hold kids accountable, but I don't see you holding kids accountable. You keep telling us to monitor in the hallways during passing periods, but you are in your office."

Receiving feedback from his teacher pushed Neil to be intentional about modeling building relationships with students. Neil notes using common spaces to model how he builds relationships. "As a principal, that means I love morning duty. I love lunch duty. I love dismissal duty." Second, Neil builds relationships with his students by making the most of time outside of the classroom. "I'm not teaching a class for 45 minutes every day with them. But how am I making the most impact of the time that I do have with them and being present?" Third, Neil builds a relationship with students through building relationships with families. "Build relationships with kids by building relationships with their families. If a parent calls, emails, or wants to talk to me, that's my priority because I want that parent to know that I'm a champion for their kid." Neil does not hesitate to make himself available for parents as he sees them as a gatekeeper to building a relationship with their child.

In response to developing culturally responsive teachers, Neil highlighted that a shared definition of what culturally responsive needs to be clarified. "responsive must be a shared definition. I think we have to define, as an organization, what does that means to us." Neil felt that jargon often clouds our understanding of culturally responsive teaching. "There's a lot of lingo that gets thrown out, but how do we agree on what that shared thing is? It's not just a fly-by-night thing." Neil's stance on developing culturally

responsive teachers must first be grounded in a shared understanding of the meaning behind being culturally responsive.

Neil described his understanding of CRSL in three ways. First, Neil stated that it is important for the principal to promote a school with demographics that reflect the demographics of the community. "One thing that's top of mind right now, for me, as we have been in a perpetual season of recruitment and enrollment, is, do the demographics represent the demographics of the community that we serve?" Neil further noted that there is a gap in serving Black students at his school, of which many are a part of the community in which his campus is located. "So, for us, really focusing on how are we recruiting and making our presence known to Black families in areas close to our school." Neil acknowledged that there is work to recruit more Black families who live in his school's enrollment zone. Second, Neil believes that hiring a diverse staff is important. "I think that this year I have an incredibly diverse staff. I mean, we have multiple staff members who are in their first-year teaching but are coming from other industries who have 20 plus years of experience." Neil also believes that the staff should also be reflective of the student body. "If kids are going to be successful, they need to see people who look like them and who share experiences like them to be successful. The role I can play in hiring is doing that." Lastly, Neil shared that CRSL is also about learning and understanding the community you serve in. "Then I think for myself is getting to know the community and interact." Demographics that are reflective of the school community, hiring a diverse staff that also reflects the student body, and learning the community is how Neil sees and understands the role of a CRSL.

*Data-driven decision maker.* Neil next shared his beliefs and practices on being a data-driven decision-maker. As the instructional leader of his school, Neil uses data to support struggling teachers and students. "Who are the teachers of concern that we need to provide additional support to? What professional development do we need to provide? Who are our students of concern, and are they getting the interventions and support that they need?" Neil also uses data to determine the type of professional development teachers need, determine a plan for teacher development, and decide how to provide support to struggling students. "How are we spending our time and aligning our calendars to match the teacher development that we need to have and the areas that the school that needs to push?" Using data to make instructional for Neil is all about ensuring that both teachers and students who need additional support can get it. Neil uses data to determine teacher development to set his campus up to accomplish its student achievement goals.

*Instructional leadership.* Neil went into great detail, describing his approach to instructional leadership. Neil began by describing that it first sets the bar for what instruction needs to look like at his campus. Coupled with setting a bar is creating an instructional that aligns with the bar or expectations. "Our number one priority every day is that kids learn. They need to learn something about themselves, friends, or something new they are learning in class. We hold a bar that is set around a universal vision." Student learning experiences are at the core of what Neil wants to be true about his campus's instructional vision. Second, Neil's instructional vision ensures consistency through creating strong instructional systems. "The other thing is how do we create consistency for kids and build instructional systems that are replicated across every classroom?" A student should know what to expect from the classroom to the classroom,

and strong instructional systems help ensure that students have a consistent learning experience.

*High expectations.* When it comes to maintaining high expectations for his campus, Neil stated that first, he must name the impact and the realities of working with students. "I think framing for my staff, your work is all about people, and you can't teach kids if you don't have a relationship with them. They're not going to do the work for you just because you tell them." Neil deeply believes that his teachers must understand that building relationships with students is challenging but necessary if teachers want to make any gains. Neil also maintains high expectations by modeling the expectations he holds teachers accountable to. "Modeling is important. I'm not going to ask my teachers or leaders to do anything that I wouldn't be doing. And I expect the same thing from all my leaders. You need to be modeling what we're doing." Neil consistently values being a model in every way for his teachers. If they see his interactions with students, they are better able and more willing to replicate those actions.

Neil next discussed working with teachers who present negative mindsets about their students. Neil first shared that negative mindsets must be called our, coupled with explaining that a teacher's work is student-centered. "You have to call out the mindset and share with them. We're doing work for kids and about kids. This work is not about us as adults." Neil takes a firm approach when addressing negative mindsets. Teachers must be able to put aside their differences about kids to best support them. Second, Neil explained that he tries to gain clarity of the mindset through questioning. "I try to push and pull from the teacher. What is leading you to this? Where has that gone?" While Neil

is firm on his stance in addressing negative mindset, he still leverages compassion for the teacher by understanding the perspective held about any one student.

Last, in this section, Neil discussed how he ensures that discipline issues are issued fairly and consistently. Neil named that he wants to be looped in on all suspensions that occur.

> I want to know about suspensions before the people on my team decide and communicate with families. Because, one, I want to have their back, and two. I want to make sure that the kids are a fair shake and there's due process.

Neil's involvement with suspensions allows him to support his team where needed while also ensuring that the student is treated fairly in the process.

*Build effective leadership teams.* Neil's process for building an effective team begins with engaging in healthy conflict. "One is creating a space where people feel comfortable engaging in conflict. We have to build a space where they can be authentic and are not afraid of saying or doing something that is going to offend someone." Neil sees conflict as a way to solve problems and determine solutions. Second, Neil believes that his leadership team members must go beyond the scope of their roles to best support the school. "My directors need to be committed to being whole-school leaders. You cannot be just the leader of your functional area." Neil creates ownership and collaboration by building a leadership team that can function both within the scope of their role and beyond the scope of their role. Lastly, Neil explains that he must build successors on his team.

> You are on the bench of being the principal. If that's your trajectory or not, that's fine. But you're on that bench at this school. You need to be committed and ready to do that. So, it's also about making sure that people know.

Neil has a strong belief in all of his team members existing as "whole-campus" leaders. Neil builds a team driven by healthy conflict, leading outside of their roles, and being prepared to step in as principals and be prepared to do so at any moment.

Neil's unique experience as a campus leader over school operations coupled with leading a partnership school and founding a new secondary campus make up his unique leadership perspective. Neil's interview revealed that coaching leaders, creating consistency through systems are some of the essential practices of Neil's leadership. Neil is a reflective leader dedicated to building a growing campus that recognizes all identities and supports his community equitably. Next, Allison's principal experiences and perspectives are discussed.

*Allison*

Allison is in her 4th year as principal at her campus. Allison's ascension to principals all occurred at the campus she currently leads. Allison's campus is the flagship campus for YES Prep, being the organization's first campus. Additionally, Allison's campus is one of the highest performing campuses in YES Prep. A majority of the accolades earned by YES Prep started with the campus Allison leads. Before becoming the principal of her campus, Allison was the director of academics before becoming the dame campus principal. Allison was responsible for the instructional initiatives of the campus and leading the instructional team for the school. In the 45-minute interview, Alison shared her perspectives on being a school leader in an urbanized community.

*Culturally responsive leadership.* Allison shared three ways in which she engages in critical self-reflection. First, she reflects on her ability to communicate with her team and with her campus.

> My job as principal isn't to be the technician of things that are happening on campus, and it is how well I can communicate and motivate people to move in the direction of the vision that I want to see.

For Allison, self-reflection is about how she communicates in a way that drives results through other people. Allison lamented that she is constantly reflecting on how well she articulates herself to accomplish campus goals. "To what extent am I able to express myself effectively and then see outcomes in their work." Spending time to reflect on how words influence change and action is a key driver of self-reflection for Allison. Second, Allison shared that she engages in self-reflection about her actions to get results on her campus. "When I don't see the outcomes that I need, I think back, what was effective about that, or where did I miss the mark? I think that that happens a lot, just naturally." In the interview, Allison dives deeper into her actions as a leader when her campus outcomes are not met. Lastly, Allison shared how she takes opportunities to engage in self-reflection with her manager. A manager in this context is Allison's Head of Schools. A Head of Schools is a manager of principals. "I am very grateful to have a really strong manager who forces reflection in our check-ins every week. There are so many opportunities to be reflective in my practice, for sure." Effective principals must be effectively managed and pushed to reflect on their leadership practices.

Next, Allison shared her understanding of her student's cultural contexts. Allison shared that she understands her student's cultural context based on a shared identity and being from the community she serves.

> Our campus right now is 97% Latino, Hispanic. I have the honor of being the leader of this campus, as a Latina, and as someone who grew up in this neighborhood. My understanding is part of who I am for some of our students, especially our students who are second or third-generation American.

Allison displayed a great sense of pride in leading a school in a community that she grew up in. Allison sees herself as a part of the community connected through bonds of shared identity. "The community is something that I'm familiar with. I grew up in the same churches as a good number of our students. There are current students here who are family friends." Allison sees herself as a community insider, and being on the inside helps her understand her student's cultural contexts. Allison, however, shared that while there may be some shared identities, there are also identities in which Allison does not have the same lived experience. Understanding the cultural contexts of immigrant families is an experience not lived by Allison. "I have to push myself to learn with our more recent immigrant families because that's not been my experience, and just learning more about the particular challenges that are on undocumented students face."
Allison also noted that while her school has a small population of African American students, it is also important for her to gain a better understanding of their cultural contexts as well. "We have an incredibly small African American community. So, taking time to be intentional about connecting with those students is equally important to me." Allison leads a campus with one of the highest Latinx populations. African American students at her school are a minority within a minority. Allison recognizes this and works to better connect with African American students and understand their cultural contexts. In learning to understand her students' cultural contexts, Allison noted that she tries to understand parent's perspectives better.

> I have learned most as a principal in connecting with parents. While they are very interested and invested, they want to hear more about what we're doing to help their kids feel safe and seen and valued, and whole in their children's academic success.

Allison recognized through her connecting with parents that academic success is not the only measure for parents. It is easy to lead with an academic achievement mindset working for a college-ready school district and miss that parents care about academic success and how their kids feel daily. Allison shared that parents also care about the cultural initiatives of the school. "They're a lot more interested in the work that we're doing on the cultural side of the school." In Allison's reflection on interactions she has had with her parents, she realized that she has to push herself to understand cultural context beyond academic success.

Allison next shared how she builds relationships with her students. Allison shared that this is an area in which she has to push herself. As a classroom teacher, Allison explained that it was much easier for her to build relationships with students and how it has become challenging to do this as principal. "As a teacher, my way of building relationships with students was by doing the work with them." Allison counters the challenge of building relationships with students as a principal by connecting with students through classrooms. "As an instructional leader, my way of connecting with kids is through the work as well. Sitting at a table, doing a poetry analysis, working on an algebra problem, or talking to the kids about what they are learning." Additionally, Allison notes that she also tries to find opportunities to connect with small groups of students. "I do try to look for little ways that I can connect with small groups of kids, whether that's attending a club meeting or making sure that I put on my calendar, at least one game for every sport." For Allison, building relationships with students comes with observing classrooms and finding opportunities to connect with smaller groups of students to build meaningful relationships with students.

Culturally responsive teacher professional development was discussed next. Allison indicated that culturally responsive development for teachers is something that is not explicit at her campus. However, Allison shared that teachers' responsiveness at her campus is centered on teachers using data to respond to their students' needs. "We do have mechanisms in place, and it's part of our data dive process for teachers to have a moment where they're checking in with kids about things that are working and not working." Teachers using data to respond to their student's needs are a part of how instructional development for teachers, which for Allison translates to responsiveness to their students' needs. Second, Allison highlighted that culturally responsive at her campus is all about gaining student input. "I know that getting student input consistently is a cornerstone of culturally responsive teaching. I would say that's the one that is mostly being carried out right now." While culturally responsive pedagogy is not currently explicit in the development of teachers at Allison's school, there are systems to ensure that teachers are responsive to students' needs through data collection on students and gaining the students' input.

Next, Allison's understanding of CRSL was discussed. As a CRSL, Allison believes that it is her responsibility as principal to ensure that there are measures in place to ensure that all students feel safe. Allison shared that there are times in which kids commit actions that attack the identities of others. She noted as a CRSL, she needs to involve herself in these types of issues actively. "Anytime that we have had a situation on our campus where a student has used racist or homophobic language, I have asked to be personally involved." Allison knows as a CRSL that she has to be engaged when there are situations where students' identities are not respected. Allison, as a CRSL, has taken a

stance that all identities are to be valued and respected. "I want to make sure that the

parents and the students are hyper clear on our stance as a school regarding how we

honor and respect people regardless of whatever beliefs you have at home." Addressing

issues that negatively impact a student's experience at school is a responsibility Allison

takes seriously and sees this as a hallmark of her ability to be a culturally responsive

leader.

*Data-driven decision maker.* As a data-driven decision-maker, Allison first

described how she reviews different data sources weekly, individually, and with her

leadership team.

> I call it the school health check. It's like, where are we on unit tests? Where are
> we for disciplinary infractions? What do detention numbers look like? What does
> attendance look like? As a team, we do it on my own so that I'm prepared for that
> meeting and making sure that my team is on the same page as I am. It informs
> what my calendar looks like.

Allison looks beyond student achievement data. She considers student achievement data

and school culture data to get a clear understanding of her campus's performance. Next,

Allison expressed that she responds to data by collecting additional data from classroom

observations.

> If I see low data, I'm in that classroom quickly. I want to put my eyes on problems
> to help people get to a solution. Low data points are not my responsibility to fix,
> but I am accountable to them.

Allison constantly uses data to determine her school problems and works with her team to

address the problem.

*Instructional leadership.* When setting the campus's instructional vision, Allison

first reviews the campus's previous year's performance to review both success and gaps.

90

"We took a look at our performance last year, and we identify places where we had success to determine what needs to be replicated and what needs to change." Second, when setting the instructional course for her campus, Allison carefully assesses her campus talent placement. "I review data of strong performing courses and work to maintain retaining talent in those courses." Additionally, Allison reviews courses in which change needs to happen and works with those teachers to place them in courses more aligned to their strengths and address the campus's needs. "Algebra I and English I was courses that needed a teacher change. We have talent conversations with teachers from the perspective of our student's experience and educational trajectory." Allison believes that it is necessary to shift talent in courses that are not performing well and these decisions and conversations account for what is best for her students' success. Second, Allison uses progress monitoring to continually assess student achievement on her campus to be responsive to her campus's student achievement needs.

> We set up a cadence of when we're going to look at data to set thresholds when we need to intervene. If we're 20 percentage points below on any given unit test, there's an action that needs to happen beyond the teacher.

Allison uses progress monitoring to determine when and how she needs to support a course and teacher. Additionally, she accounts for what actions beyond the teacher her instructional team needs to take.

*High expectations.* Allison discussed maintaining high expectations for her campus in three ways. First, Allison maintains high expectations, ensuring that each staff member believes in YES Prep's mission. Ensuring this belief for Allison comes with how she hires.

91

It is important for me to hire individuals who believe in the capacity of all students to do college-ready work and who understands that our society tells low-income and students of false-color stories about their capacity. It is our job to help the student build counter-narratives.

Allison firmly believes that being aligned to YES Prep's mission means that any staff member she hires must demonstrate a high degree of belief in working towards an equitable education for all low-income students of color. Allison also shared that she often spends time communicating beliefs to her staff. "I am constantly reiterating this message for staff in written and verbal communication." Allison also believes that teammates should be comfortable in challenging each other when team members express a lack of belief in students. "I believe it is important for me to push my staff to challenge when they hear each other talk about students in a way that show a lack of belief in the capacity to grow." Maintaining high expectations for Allison's campus is grounded in ensuring that all adults who have access to her students believe that redefines what is possible for low-income students of color.

Second, Allison describes that providing clarity and training for her staff around expectations must ensure that students have a consistent learning experience at her campus. "I want to get clear about our academic and behavioral expectations for students and communicating these frequently to all stakeholders, especially parents, so that they can hold themselves, each other, and our leadership team accountable." Allison clarifies expectations specifically to the student's academic and cultural experience at her school. Additionally, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are provided that same clarity to ensure that accountability of those expectations can be upheld. Allison also ensures that her teachers receive opportunities to increase their capacity as teachers to maintain high expectations. "Making sure that our teachers who are teaching at the highest levels are

constantly building their expertise and investing money in them for external professional development opportunities." Allison wants to ensure that teachers who teach higher-level courses such as advanced placement courses in high school are developed to maintain rigorous expectations for students taking these courses. Rigorous expectations align with her belief in building college-ready students.

Lastly, Allison shared that observations and feedback are a practice she utilizes to maintain high expectations. "Observing and co-observing classrooms with leaders to make sure that we align on the bar is a top priority of mine," Allison observes instructions individually. She includes her campus leaders to ensure that classroom instruction is aligned with the expectations set at the beginning of the school year. Allison also noted that follow-up is also essential when observing classrooms. "Instructional leaders who are observing classrooms must also be able to notice, name and coach a teacher when their classroom is not meeting the mark." Digging into the specific actions and practices employed by teachers across Allison's campus is carried out by instructional leaders who must also be prepared to step in a coach through gaps in a teacher's classroom.

*Build effective leadership teams.* Finally, Allison shared her practices and beliefs around building an effective leadership team. Allison noted that it is important for her to build a leadership team that shares campus ownership.

> Hiring people who understand what their role as a leader on campus is. I'm not hiring you to be the director of your department. I'm hiring you to be a leader on this campus. The success of whatever goals we have set is your success.

Allison makes it explicit in her hiring of her leadership team that they understand that they are taking on a role that requires them to be an active leader of the campus beyond

93

the specific departments they lead. Allison credits hiring practices as an important precursor in building an effective leadership team. Allison believes that her leadership team must operate as one unit. "It's explicit in the hiring, and it's explicit in our initial meetings. I think having a conversation that there was no weak link on this team. Your peer success is your success." Hiring the right people for her team is how Allison ensures that she builds and maintains an effective leadership team. Second, Allison builds an effective leadership team by giving her leaders the autonomy to decide what impacts the campus. "I empower the directors to make as many how decisions as possible. I see myself as making the what decision, as in what does success look like." Allison provides the vision for her team and allows them to make the campus decisions within her vision's confines. Allison believes in setting clear expectations for her leaders when she gives them decision-making rights. "When I give people assignments, I want to be crystal clear about what's expected of them as the leader of the building." Allison works to build effective leaders on her team by clarifying what is expected of them to minimize the amount of change that occurs through leaders' decision-making on her campus.

Allison is a methodical leader who deeply cares about ensuring that all students can feel safe and accepted at her campus. She leverages being a member of the community from her time grouping up to her long-standing time as a leader at her campus to lead effectively through her values.

Collectively all of the participant's perspectives and experiences as principals were centered on self-awareness and reflection. Additionally, humility and compassion were revealed in their interviews. Each principal commits to YES Prep's mission, and they have demonstrated that they are willing to take risks to decide to do right by all

students. Each participant has proven success in leading an urban school. Individually, each case presented a different and unique story that led to each participant's leadership roles. Next, a cross-case-case analysis is provided.

*Cross-case Thematic Analysis: Emerging Themes*

Each of the five participants responded to interview questions that provided their perspective about principals' effective practices and beliefs (culturally responsive leadership, data-driven, instructional leader, high expectations, and build effective leadership teams). This section will highlight and summarize the three emerging themes that developed across all participant interviews. Coaching emerged as a theme across all cases. All participants described ways in which they coached teachers as well as members of their leadership teams. Self-awareness emerged as the second theme. Participants described the importance of self-awareness as part of their practices as leaders. Third, leading through others emerged as a theme. Participants shared that they often delegate responsibilities and decision-making rights to members of their leadership teams.

*Coaching*

Instilling capacity in leaders through sharing responsibility, decision-making rights, and coaching was the first emerging theme across participant interviews. All participants shared that modeling development practices such as coaching talent enabled their leaders to take school ownership, make campus decisions, and coach their leaders through observations and feedback. Willie stated, "I'm going to see you do it. And I'm going to give you feedback along the way. because you're going to ultimately, ideally, be a campus leader one day." Willie's leadership is all about coaching and developing his

95

leaders to be future principals. Jane stated, "I think that seeing your peers grow into leadership provides a lot of hope and potential. I think it lets me think about building my bench." Like Willie, Jane believes in cultivating leaders on her campus to set them up to be future campus leaders. Sandy stated, "I put a lot of time into preparing for meetings, preparing for check-ins, which results in us being productive, people feeling confident in me, people growing in the way that they want to." Sandy believes in using individual touchpoints like check-ins with his directors to coach and develop them according to their development vision. Neil stated, "If we're truly building a bench of future school leaders, I think it's how we coach up our people and how people see that level." Like the previous participants, Neil believes that his job as a coach of other leaders is to prepare them to lead their campus in the future. Again, coaching campus leaders to become future principals was a common theme shared across in some capacity by each leader interview. Allison stated, "It is on me to support anyone on the leadership team who is struggling, I'm here to help lift you, and I'm here to help problem-solve with you." Allison believes that she has a duty and responsibility to providing coaching and support for her leaders. Coaching campus leaders to become future school leaders and providing ongoing feedback for development purposes are practices leveraged by each participant.

*Self-Awareness*

Self-awareness appeared as a theme across the participant interviews. Self-awareness began with self-reflection to increase their awareness of their leadership behavior and practices. Willie stated that self-awareness is always the first place to begin when reflecting as a leader. Willie values a strong degree of self-awareness and believes that any effective leader must begin with being self-aware of their leadership capabilities.

96

Jane stated, "I think there's a level of awareness that our leaders carry, and I think that's the one strength I would share." Jane indicated that self-awareness is a collective strength of her entire leadership team. Sandy indicated self-awareness through reflection on bias and leadership gaps. "Daily, I reflect on my behavior and my biases. I think, particularly after challenging situations, I asked myself what did I do well, what could I have done better? I also appreciate getting others' input." Sandy pushes himself to be self-aware by engaging in reflection on his own biases and increasing his awareness of his capabilities as a leader by assessing both strengths and gaps. Neil noted that his self-awareness stems from being aware of his biases and their impact on his work. "I spent a lot of time trying to emulate and copy the work of the principals that I had seen, and I think that the shift was a result of reflecting on those things and my bias." Neil noticed that emulating other principal actions was not necessarily a practice he needed to leverage but rather becoming aware of how emulation impacted his performance as a principal and recognizing the biases he carries as a leader. Allison shared that self-awareness occurs through mindfulness. "I think I'm also a person who, one of my mindfulness practices is journaling. This helps me to be more aware in general of who I am as a leader." All participants use reflection to become more aware of their biases as leaders and their impacts as leaders of their perspective campuses.

Second, the student's cultural context was another area of self-awareness noted by the participants. Willie stated, "I think that in many spaces, particularly just understanding the cultural context from my students, I have to enter that space as a learner." Willie is aware enough to know that he needs to understand better his students' cultural context from a learner's position. Jane highlighted that self-awareness around her

student's cultural context occurred with a shift in understanding that each student's experience is different even though many students have a shared cultural context. "I think a lot about students' experiences as a monolith there are some commonalities, with student experiences. But each of those populations brings different lived experiences and perspectives to campus, and I have to be aware of that." Sandy indicated that simply being aware that time is required to gain a growing understanding of his student's cultural context. "I would say it's evolving. I've been here at my campus for three years. While that's enough time to learn some things, I don't think it's enough time to have a completely clear picture." Being aware that time is needed to understand better provides the potential to leverage time to become better aware and understand the varied cultural context students have. Neil stated, "While I am aware of some of the cultural contexts of my students, I also understand that I simply do not share many of the lived experiences of my students." Neil provides another example of awareness around simply knowing that lived experiences are not necessarily shared. Allison stated, "I want to hear your voice because that has not been my lived experience. If I'm going to be a school leader for all, I need to hear that voice." The participants in this study acknowledged that they stand in a place where the knowledge they have a different lived experience from that of their students. Each demonstrated self-awareness in recognizing that their experiences are different. Still, they are also aware that they have to be in a place to learn and understand how their experiences are different.

*Leading Through Others*

Leading through others is the final emergent theme. Each participant shared how they lead through others. Specifically, each participant noted how they would often

delegate the campus's key responsibilities to their leadership team. Willie stated, "this is your territory because, at the end of the day, I claim part of my job is to be a leader. If I'm doing everything, then I'm limiting the capacity of others." Willie believes that as the principal, he must get things done through his leaders and that he needs to build their capacity to carry out key responsibilities of the campus.

Similarly, Sandy described how he allows the academics team at his campus to have full control over his campus's instructional decisions. "I try to ask myself a lot, what are things that I'm doing that I don't need to do? So, when it comes to academics, I rely on my instructional team to do almost everything." Sandy removes himself from tasks that do not necessarily need his direct involvement and leads the corresponding team to carry out tasks and make decisions. Neil stated, "I think that I push them to be the owners of their areas. They have a lot of decision-making rights over their areas of purview." Again, here Neil indicates that his leadership team has decision-making rights and can also leverage their expertise in any given area. Allison stated, "I see myself as charting the course and then helping us correct when we veer. I empower the directors to make as many how decisions as possible." Each participant recognizes that it is a responsibility for them to the leader through their campuses' leaders. Participants lead through others by delegating responsibilities, generating shared ownership, and empowering their leaders to make decisions within their own experiences to help support school success. Coaching, self-awareness, and leading through others were the emerging themes that persisted across all cases. Coaching was used as a tool to develop both leadership and instructional talent. Self-awareness is a practice each participant used to remain grounded in their values while also being aware of their behaviors and practices as a leader and the impact

of their leadership on their perspective campuses. Leading through others was demonstrated through each participant's willingness to engage their leadership teams in decision-making and delegating high-impact responsibilities. Next, the discussion section highlights the findings from the data.

*Discussion*

In this multiple case study, I used the participants' interviews to provide a rich description of the data. Individual case analysis and cross-case analysis were leveraged to provide the data used in the study. The participants were selected for this study because of their success as principals of urban schools. According to the Texas Education Agency, all of the schools they lead are currently lead or have lead are "A" or "B" schools. Additionally, each has accomplished accolades for their schools that address students of color's student achievement gap. Lastly, three of the five participants lead a second YES Prep campus due to their previous success at another YES Prep campus. Each participant's story was told through individual case analysis, and cross-case analysis revealed common themes that emerged across all cases. In the following section, I highlight a discussion of the study's findings related to the theoretical framework and the literature. Additionally, I provide implications of the study and recommendations to help principals and district leaders understand that there are specific qualities that must be inherited by principals who lead in urban schools and want to do so effectively.

This study's research questions were designed to help urban public-school leadership understand how to improve urban schools through a set of beliefs and practices. The central questions addressed from the data and stories of the five participant principals were,

100

1. What are the beliefs of effective school principals in YES Prep Public Schools, and how are those beliefs manifested in their schools?

2. What are the practices effective YES Prep Public School principals leverage to help increase school improvement?

The results of this study led to six key findings: The beliefs and practices of effective principals at YES Prep are consistent with effective principals' eh codified qualities (culturally responsive, data-driven, instructional leaders, communicating high expectations, and building effective teams. Table 4.2 illustrates the findings aligned with the literature and the theoretical framework.

Table 4.2

*Connection of Findings to the Literature and Framework*

| Findings | Literature | CRSL Framework |
|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Culturally Responsive | Continuous learning of students' cultural contexts (Gardiner & Enmoto, 2006) | Critical self-reflection (Khalifa, 2018) |
| Data-Driven | Increasing school improvement (Stronge, 2008), (Barlow, 2012), (Marsh, 2006), (Van den Hurk, 2014), (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) | Using data to track and discover academic and trends (Skrla, 2004) |
| Instructional Leader | Providing instructional feedback to teachers (Spiro, 2013), (Fink & Resnick, 2001), (Krasnoff, 2015) | Culturally responsive teacher development (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000) |
| High Expectations | Providing staff transparency on realities (David et al., 2006), (Gerhart, 2011), (Lucas & Valientine, 2003), (Saphier, 2017) | Leader for social justice |
| Build effective leadership teams | Shared responsibility (Mendels, 2012), (Lambert, 1998) | |
| Team and Community | Community of Practice (Wenger et al., 2002) | |

*Finding 1: Effective Principals at YES Prep are Culturally Responsive as Self-Reflective Practitioners*

All principals explained how they engage in critical self-reflection by acknowledging that they all have different contexts of their students and must continually be learners. One of the main goals of critical self-reflection is for leaders to display humility in recognition of their background and differences in their students to realize their role in the complacency of ignoring the marginalized voices (Khalifa, 2018). The participant's ability to continuously engage in learning the students' cultural context is similar to the Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) study participants. Each of the study's five participants is all principals who lead in urban schools. During their interviews, both Willie and Allison recognized that while they have some shared cultural contexts of their students, there were still lived experiences and privileges that they experienced differently from their own lived experiences.

Additionally, Allison expressed that while she also grew up in her students' community, she did not share her immigrant students' experiences, and that was a cultural contextual learning gap that she needed to close. Socializing immigrant students into schools in the US was an emerging theme from the Gardiner and Enomoto study. The study's participants shared how they worked to learn about their specific cultures and experiences (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Within the literature, principals need to be aware of their immigrant student's experiences through critical self-reflection. Jane, Sandy, and Neil also shared that their schools served immigrant students. All were able to acknowledge that these students have a different experience from that of other students with similar cultural contexts and needed to be mindful of them when making decisions. In a leadership framework provided by Gooden and Dantley (2012), self-reflection is

described as the "motivation for transformative action." The participant's responses are consistent with the literature. Each participant shared how they use self-reflection to think about actions and decisions made and their impact on their campuses. Dantley (2005) notes that transformative action void of transformative correction is unproductive. Specifically, Jane, Sandy, and Neil's engagement on self-reflection of their immigrant students' experiences and how they make decisions indicates that transformation actively comes through the impact of their decision-making on immigrant students. All participants shared how self-reflection impacts how they make decisions to support campus improvement—using reflection to determine the most appropriate agenda for one's campus and creates an opportunity to put forth practices that address its students' needs (Gooden & Dantley, 2012).

*Finding 2: Effective Principals at YES Prep are Data Decision-Makers*

Data helps inform, progress monitor, and determine the actions that need to be taken to address student achievement gaps (Stronge et al., 2008). Each participant indicated data as a source for decision-making about instruction. Barlow (2012) identified six steps for schools leaders to use data effectively: building a foundation for the data-driven decision, establishing a culture of data use and continuous improvement, investing in data management systems, selecting the right data, building school capacity for data-driven decision making, and analyzing and acting on the data to improve performance. Participant's responses aligned with Barlow's six steps. However, one step that was not revealed in finding one is step three: investing in data management systems. While all participants shared that they use a progress monitoring system, they did not necessarily name specific data management systems to monitor student achievement. School leaders

must have talent on campus dedicated to support with data management (Balow, 2017). Participants did note that their instructional teams were responsible for managing the campuses' data. Participants were specifically asked to explain how they used data as a part of instructional decision-making. Willie shared how he uses data to assess how his campus hits his instructional team's instructional targets. Jane indicated that she uses data to set goals and monitor progress. Using data to set goals is consistent with the current literature across ,multiple studies that schools districts and school leaders use data to set campus improvement goals (Marsh et al., 2006). Additionally, there is alignment between monitoring student progress and student achievement (Van den Hurk et al., 2014). Sandy shared that he uses data to determine trends across formative assessments. He also noted that data is used to develop instructional action plans. Neil uses data to determine how to support the instruction of teachers with low-performance data. Allison shared that she uses data to determine a cadence for classroom observations to help teachers with their instruction. Data allows principals to focus on improving instruction, student learning, and eliminating distractions that prevent schools from accomplishing positive results (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Lastly, effective principals use data to ensure student achievement data equity and accountability (Skrla et al., 2004). Equity and accountability of data suggest that leaders should review student achievement data for gaps of specific student populations and openly discuss reasons for the data and take steps to address the gaps within the data (Skrla et al., 2004). Participants in the study shared how they use data to address gaps within certain populations of students in their schools, such as ELL and immigrant students.

*Finding 3: Effective Principals at YES Prep are Instructional Leaders*

All participants demonstrated in their interviews that they are instructional leaders due to their intentional focus on providing instructional feedback to teachers. Spiro (2013) provided five practices that make principals effective instructional leaders. One of which is improving the instruction of teachers. "Good instruction is the foundation of any successful school. Effective principals monitor the instruction in the classroom" (Spiro, 2013, p. 30). Each participant expressed how they are constantly observing classrooms and providing teachers with feedback. Observing classrooms and providing teachers with feedback often negates administrative tasks that prevent the principals from getting into classrooms (Fink & Resnick, 2001). Responses from each participant indicated that classroom observations and feedback are a practice often utilized. Willie and Jane shared that he utilizes teacher performance data to intervene in a teacher's classroom to support improving instruction. Sandy shared that he spends his time creating a culture of feedback in which teachers regularly receive feedback on their classroom instruction and develop their abilities to analyze their student data. Neil shared how he observes the instructional systems in classrooms to ensure a consistent student learning experience. Allison noted that she observes instruction to determine potential teacher shifts she may need to address student achievement gaps in core courses in high school. Effective principals spend a significant amount of time in classrooms observing teachers and providing feedback  (Krasnoff, 2015).

*Finding 4: Effective Principals at YES Prep Communicate High Expectations*

CRSL communicated high expectations to their staff without regard to a student's racial background or socioeconomic status. CRSL should model and practice high

expectations (Gerhart et al., 2011). Leaders who communicate high expectations for all students have to be willing to confront deficit-based thinking in teachers to close the achievement gap in their schools (Saphier, 2017). Each participant shared that communicating high expectations is an essential practice leveraged in the campuses they lead. Each participant expressed that they model the expectations they expect to see from their staff. Modeling expectations for staff provides teachers and students with clarity on how each should conduct themselves (Lucas & Valentine, 2003). Willie indicated that he models the expectations that he communicates to his staff. Jane indicated that she is consistently present in common spaces and classrooms to assess how high expectations are communicated from teachers to their students. Another part of communicating high expectations is communicating the realities of working with low-income students of color, especially when negative mindsets present themselves in teachers. David (2006) indicated that at ineffective schools' teachers indicated low expectations for their students and did not accept responsibility for their student's lack of success. Negative mindsets should be directly addressed, and effective principals must also consider the perspectives of their teachers (David et al., 2006). All participants indicated that they directly interact with teachers who present negative mindsets—countering negative mindsets with high expectations on what students can achieve while also embodying compassion and empathy when listening to a teacher's perspective about their students. All participants expressed how it was equally important to consider their teachers' perspectives to help clarify their understanding while also working with the teacher to shift their mindset by steadily communicating high expectations that all students must be held to regardless of the student's race and socioeconomic background.

*Finding 5: Effective Principals at YES Prep Leverage Practices to Build Effective Leadership Teams*

The fifth finding revealed that all the participants practiced sharing their leadership responsibility with their team leaders. Lambert's (1998) description of leadership capacity as a shared responsibility aligns with the participant's responses. Specifically, she notes that "leadership is a shared endeavor; school change is a collective endeavor, and leadership requires the redistribution of power" (Lambert, 1998, p. 9). Second, each participant expressed how they delegate responsibilities to their teams and decision-making rights. Effective principals leverage the talent of those around them and support them in taking more responsibility for the campus's success (Mendels, 2012). The literature also revealed that schools with high achievement results provide consistent opportunities for other leaders to input their campuses' decision-making (Mendels, 2012). Willie shared how he learns and understands his team's strengths to complement areas of gaps he may have. Willie also expressed his value of collective responsibility and how often he spends time coaching his team to be confident in taking on the campus's responsibilities. Jane expressed her value in developing leaders who can execute the campus's responsibility while also managing systems that support campus success. Sandy shared that he uses individual check-ins with members of his leadership team to support and develop them. Also, Sandy shared that he often gives the academics team total responsibility for the instruction goals of his campus on this team. Both Neil and Allison noted that he spends time developing his leaders to be campus leaders beyond their specific individualized leadership roles.

*Finding 6: The YES Prep Principal Team's Culture is a Dynamic Development Culture that Embodies Communities of Practice*

This particular finding was generated based on the study's participants' roles and responsibilities and was a finding that the researcher did not anticipate. A key role of each participant is they serve as Lead Principals for YES Prep. As mentioned previously, a Lead Principal is a successful tenured principal. Lead Principals work as a team of mentor principals to aspiring or resident principals. Through their common and collective works and their impact on YES Prep, the study found that the Lead Principal team embodied characteristics of communities of practice. Wegner (2002) describes communities of practices in three fundamental elements: a domain of knowledge, a community of people, and shared practice. Table 4.3 describes each dimension.

Table 4.3

*Descriptions of the Fundamental Elements of Communities of Practice*

| Fundamental Element | Description |
|---|---|
| Domain of knowledge | Establishes a sense of common identity. Inspires member contribution and engagement to the learning and actions of the community. |
| Community of people | Community members build relationships through trust and respect. Members are vulnerable within the group and share ideas |
| Shared Practice | Community members share practices that contribute to the success of the community. |

The study participants as Lead Principals are a shared community of members who engage in community and development as it relates to mentoring and developing

resident principals. Within the domain element, there is a shared identity, and all members are grounded by purpose and values (Wenger et al., 2002). As Lead Principals, each participant shares mentors' identity and is driven by values and beliefs aligned to improving schools.

Within this element, community members form the community of practice through trust, respect, and vulnerability. "The community creates the social fabric of learning" (Wenger et al., 2002, p.18). Community members have a normed level of respect for one another and are not hesitant in acknowledging learning gaps to learn from the community at large. All participants described how they use trust, respect, and vulnerability through their schools' practices and beliefs.

In the shared practice element, community members contribute practices and knowledge to the group aligned to any given expertise in their practice (Wenger et al., 2002). For example, each of the study's participants described their application of their expertise of their practice and beliefs based on the leadership elements (culturally responsive, data-driven, instructional leader, communicates high expectations, and builds effective leadership teams). Their unique perspectives of leadership contribute to the shared practice of the community of practice. These perspectives can be used to collaborate on development for resident principals.

*Implications*

This study's results provided several implications for different stakeholders to better support urban schools and their leaders. For Urban school principals, implications and recommendations are to:

- Support teachers in building their cultural context of their students by promoting critical self-reflection

109

- Cultivate and develop leaders to have a greater influence on campus improvement

For District Administrators, implications and recommendations are to:

- Provide development opportunities for principals to grow in areas of CRSL

- Provide and support principal development and mentorship opportunities to aspiring principals in the district.

The implications and recommendations for each of the stakeholders are detailed in the next sections.

*Urban School Principals*

The participants in this study all identified their ability to better understand their student's cultural contexts through engaging in critical self-reflection. This conclusion is supported in the literature and appears to be essential to being a CRSL (Dantley, 2005). Understanding students' cultural context allows leaders to act against the marginalization of low-income students of color. A lack of understanding of students' cultural context leads to silencing the voices of the marginalized and widening the achievement gap (Khalifa, 2018).

The researcher recommends that urban school principals support their teachers in understanding their students' cultural contexts by promoting critical self-reflection in their schools. Principals have a unique as leaders in that they can set the course of professional development for teachers. Additionally, effective principals cultivate environments in which leaders and teachers assume responsibility in achieving the school's mission  (Krasnoff, 2015). Participants in the study revealed how self-reflection impacted their practice as leaders and pushed them to have difficult conversations pertaining to low expectations. Therefore, principals can create similar reflective

110

opportunities for their teachers as a part of their overall development in becoming culturally responsive teachers. The practice of developing into a culturally responsive teacher is a practice to account for all of their students' experiences to capitalize on teaching knowledge and skills (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Developing culturally responsive teachers, school leaders must create and communicate a vision that supports their teacher's ability to be critically self-reflective (Khalifa et al., 2016). Participants in the study described the impact of self-reflection not only on themselves but on teachers as well.

Urban school principals should spend diligent time cultivating their leadership team to be campus leaders. Scholars highlight the need for this particular implication in the study. "Building effective teams in the context of learning, enriching and sustaining is essential for the art of leadership to succeed." Participants in the student shared how they spent time cultivating the leaders on their teams. This particular implication all so gives credence to a leader's ability to empower other leaders. Empowerment requires shared responsibility and input on key decisions (A. Lincoln & Keller, 2018, p. 70). Principals who are willing to increase power in their leaders to make decisions and have influence results in better learning outcomes for students (Mendels, 2012). Participants in the study continued to display a willingness to develop their leaders and share power by delegating their leaders' decision-making rights.

*District Administrators*

District administrators such as superintendents and chief school officers have an opportunity as district leaders to support principals and campuses in engaging in critical reflection (Khalifa, 2018). This study recommends that district leaders provide

development opportunities for principals to be more culturally responsive in their leadership. Leadership development opportunities that address race, language, and culture enable principals to be more culturally responsive (Khalifa et al., 2016). Literature in adult learning contains that creating learning or development environments in which leaders can reflect on their knowledge gaps allows one to engage on a deeper learning level ( Kim, 2020). Participants in the study provided examples of knowledge gaps they have as a result of engaging in self-reflection.

This study also recommends that district administrators provide and support principal development and mentorship opportunities to aspiring principals in the district. This study has described the impact of the principal role on campus to drive school improvement. Creating a pipeline in which aspiring principals can be mentored and developed emphasizes the importance of ensuring schools consistently have prepared principals. Zachary 2005, denotes the impact of mentorship and success:

> In a mentoring culture, transforming learning and leveraging experience is a way of being and a gateway to becoming. The nature of organizational life is often fast-paced, but if the opportunity to discover and make meaning out of daily experience is present and valued, an organization's collective level performance is raised with remarkable results (Zachary, 2005, p. 26).

District leaders have the power to create a mentoring culture that creates sustainability and persistent results for schools. The literature asserts that aspiring principals who are prepared to lead effectively develop through a strong mentoring program. "Most likely, effective new principals have been rigorously prepared and deliberately mentored in well-designed programs that immerse them in real-world leadership experiences where they are challenged to excel" (Gray et al., 2007, p. 5). The study's findings revealed that effective principals spend time developing their leaders. As such, district leaders should

112

invest time and resources in developing aspiring principals developed at the campus level.

*Summary and Conclusion*

Effective principals who lead urban public schools embody beliefs and practices that help support school success. This study's six findings revealed that effective principals are culturally responsive, data-driven decision-makers, instructional leaders, communicate high expectations and build effective teams. The sixth finding revealed the benefits and impact of communities of practice. The findings were organized based on each participant's stories and their connection to the study's literature and theoretical framework. The literature revealed qualities and beliefs that are persistent with school success in urban public schools. Through interviews, the participants described their beliefs and practices as leaders who demonstrated congruence with the literature. The literature and study suggest that effective leadership in urban schools must entail components of CRSL. Leading schools that address the achievement gap of low-income students of color requires leaders to be culturally responsive, data-driven decision-makers, instructional leaders, communicate high expectations and build effective leadership teams. The discussion section of this chapter indicates the use of these qualities to support school improvement.

CHAPTER FIVE

Distribution of Findings

*Executive Summary*

This study addressed the expanding achievement gap among African American and Latinx students and the lack of high-quality principals in urban public schools. Low-preforming urban schools in low-income communities have a major impact on widening the achievement gap, and often urban schools are led by low-skilled leaders (Meyers & Sadler, 2018). In the United States, the achievement gap among African American and Latinx students is expansive compared to their White counterparts (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). African American and Latinx students make of over 40% of the public school. Additionally, by 2035 students of color will be the majority in public schools (NCES, 2007). Principals leading in urban schools are often unprepared to respond to the challenges of leading urban schools. Urban schools primarily consist of poor students of color, mainly African American and Latinx students  (Posey, 2009). Current research concludes that unprepared urban school principals lack instructional leadership qualities and lack the culturally responsive leadership qualities essential to successfully leading urban schools. Research indicates that the principal's role has a significant impact on the school's success or failure.

Principals need to be culturally responsive instructional leaders more than managers is ever-growing in the current literature. As a result of the shift, urban school leaders struggle in responding to the challenges of leading an urban public school (Fink & Resnick, 2001). The purpose of this multiple case study is to describe and understand

114

the qualities and beliefs of effective principals in urban public schools at YES Prep Public Schools. The study used existing literature to examine how effective principals at YES Prep lead to increased schools' positive outcomes. The study addressed two research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of effective school principals in YES Prep Public Schools, and how are those beliefs manifested in their schools?

2. What are the practices effective YES Prep Public School principals leverage to help increase school improvement?

*Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures*

The research design for this study was a qualitative multiple case study. A qualitative case design was used to address the research questions using a theoretical framework and an emergence process containing the participants' stories (Creswell, 2013). This multiple case study design used purposive sampling to select the study's five participants. The study was limited to principals within YES Prep Public Schools. Specifically, participants were selected based on being highly successful principals with proven student achievement results.

Data collection involved 45-minute- long interviews with each participant. All interviews were semi-structured and included open-ended questions. Data were analyzed and coded inductively, and patterns and categories were formed. Results were written for each case, and emerging themes were determined through pattern matching. Data validation occurred through member checking, thick, rich descriptions of the data, and clarifying bias. Ethical considerations for the student included protecting the participant's identity and minimizing disruptions to the study site. Limitations include the impact on

time and availability due to the global pandemic of COVID-19. Observations were not collected as a result of restrictions due to the pandemic.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (Khalifa, 2018) served as the study's theoretical framework. The framework provided a set of four key elements that grounded this study's ability to provide an understanding and descriptions of qualities effective principals used to drive school improvement: Critical self-reflection, promotion of inclusive spaces, developing culturally responsive teachers, and engaging students and parents).

*Summary of Key Findings*

The study revealed the following six key findings:

1.  Effective principals at YES Prep are culturally responsive as self-reflective practitioners.

2.  Effective principals at YES Prep are data-driven decision-makers.

3.  Effective principals at YES Prep are instructional leaders.

4.  Effective principals at YES Prep communicate high expectations.

5.  Effective principals at YES Prep leverages practices to build effective leadership teams.

6.  The YES Prep principal team's culture is a dynamic development culture that embodies communities of practice.

For the first finding, in addition to self-reflection on biases and behaviors, each participant described how they engage in critical self-reflection to understand their student's cultural contexts better. Within this finding, participants described their gaps of knowledge of their student's cultural context due to engaging in self-reflection.

With regard to the second finding, participants in the study named progress monitoring and goal setting to drive decision-making to address campus instructional needs. Participants described how they used progress monitoring to support struggling teachers improve their instruction.

For the third finding, participants explain their instructional leadership through the lens of classroom observations and feedback to teachers. Additionally, participants described how each worked with their instructional leadership teams to determine professional development for teachers and delegate key responsibilities to campus instructional leaders to help support and improve instruction across the campus.

Regarding the fourth finding, participants named that they communicate high expectations through modeling and providing feedback to address teachers who lower expectations.  Specifically, each participant described how they combat teachers' negative mindsets that breed low expectations for students. Participants also communicate high expectations through vision setting for the campus.

In the fifth finding, each participant described how they develop effective leadership teams by creating a culture of shared responsibility for the campus's success. Participants also described that they focus on building teams that expand their leadership influence beyond the scope of their specific role.

Finally, in the sixth finding, participants in the study serve as Lead Principals or mentors to resident principals. The Lead Principal team functions as a collective team committed to developing future principals in the organization. Also, the lead principal team works collectively to create professional development opportunities for aspiring

principals. This team also works in collaboration with district administrators to provide input on district-wide decision-making.

*Informed Recommendations*

Based on the study results, there are several recommendations for urban school principals and district administrators of urban school systems. This study recommends that:

1. Urban schools should invest time in developing teacher's understanding of their student's cultural contexts.

2. Urban schools should invest time in cultivating an effective leadership team.

3. District administration should invest financially and programmatically in developing a principal mentorship program that focuses primarily on developing future principals who are culturally responsive instructional leaders.

With regard to the first recommendation, urban school principals can do this by promoting and providing opportunities for teachers to engage in critical self-reflection. These opportunities can occur through professional development opportunities or teacher check-ins with their instructional leader.

Secondly, this study recommends that urban public-school district administrators should invest in professional development opportunities for principals to be developed in the area of critical self-reflection. Professional development opportunities could include bringing in scholarly speakers who engage in CRSL research and engaging in self-reflection activities at principal district meetings.

With respect to the district administration, the ever-evolving expansion of the achievement among African American and Latinx students in poor urban communities and a lack of high-quality leadership in these schools calls for a need for urban school

leaders to be culturally responsive instructional leaders. Current literature and the findings of this study indicated a leadership framework of practices and beliefs that urban school leaders can leverage.

*Findings Distribution Proposal*

The findings distribution proposal section highlights the target audience, the proposed distribution method and venue, and the distribution of materials. Specifically, the target audience indicated the specific audience for which the study is intended. The proposed distribution method and venue denotes how the study is presented as well as the goals of the presentation. Finally, the distribution of materials describes the materials used to present the study's findings.

*Target Audience*

The target audience for which this study is meant is district administrators and urban school principals. District administrators are target audience members for two reasons. First, district administrators, specifically Superintendents and Chief Schools Officers, can invest in developing current and future principals. This study can be leveraged to create professional development opportunities for current and aspiring principals utilizing the leadership qualities and beliefs described in this study. Second, district administrators can set a principal selection process to hire principals who currently embody or has the potential to embody the qualities and beliefs described in the study. District leaders can create a rigorous and equitable hiring process that aligns with the CRSL framework.

Urban school principals are the second intended audience group. Urban principals can utilize this study to impact their practices as principals. The scholarly research and

participant's stories provide practical and real-life leadership practices that can positively impact school improvement in urban schools.

*Proposed Distribution Method and Venue*

The researcher will aim to present the study's key findings and recommendations to key stakeholders within YES Prep Public Schools. The presentation will occur during the beginning of the year strategic meeting between members of the program team and the schools' team. These stakeholders include the CEO, Chief Schools Officer, the Chief Program Officer, and the Managing Director of Leadership Development. The researcher will inform key stakeholders of effective principals' qualities in urban public schools based on scholarly research. The researcher will present key findings of the study and recommendations for the district based on the study's findings. Additionally, other key stakeholders for distribution are all YES Prep Principals. YES Prep principals will be presented with the findings of the study at the beginning of the year principal retreat. Lastly, the Texas Charter Schools Association is also a distribution venue. Distribution to TCSA would occur at the TCSA Conference in the fall.

A 30-minute presentation will be delivered in the form of a power point presentation to key stakeholders at the strategic leadership team meeting. The goals of the presentation will be to provide a concise description of the research problem, the purpose of the study, the findings of the student, and recommendations provided for YES Prep based on the study's findings.

*Distribution Materials*

The materials for distribution used for this study include a PowerPoint presentation and a presentation manuscript. The materials capture the goals of the study

along with the study's findings. The materials provide a comprehensive understanding of the details of the study.

The findings of the study will be presented to the executive leadership team of YES Prep Public schools. The researcher facilitates the study's findings by using a power point presentation with an accompanying handout. The meeting is a virtual meeting conducted through Microsoft Teams.

*Conclusion*

The increasing achievement gap among African American and Latinx students and lack of high-quality leadership in urban public schools was the essential problem this study aimed to address. This study started by describing the qualities and beliefs of effective principals in urban public schools. Specifically, the study provided the experiences and stories from five effective principals within YES Prep Public Schools. Participants described practices and beliefs aligned with the leadership elements described in the study (culturally responsive, data-driven, instructional leader, communicates high expectations and builds effective leadership teams). This study's findings concluded that the study's participants engage in practices and beliefs consistent with the CRSL framework.

Effective leadership of urban public schools requires principals to engage in the difficult work of addressing the challenges of urban schools in a way that dismantles low expectations and provides rigorous learning experiences for all students. The research conducted in this study provides urban school leaders with research practices that support school improvement. The success of an urban school rests upon its leader's ability to be effective.

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