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PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS IN NASSAU
COUNTY, NEW YORK

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

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Submitted Date March 19, 2020

Approved Date March 19, 2020

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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS IN NASSAU COUNTY, NEW YORK

Judith A. LaRocca

Research reveals that school leadership is the second most important in-school factor impacting student achievement, with greater impacts seen when principals' leadership practice is focused on learning. Research also shows that leadership practices in the area of principal supervision and supporting principal leadership have a positive impact on student achievement. This qualitative phenomenological study utilized concepts from sociocultural learning theory to frame understandings of the lived experiences of principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York. The rationale for this study stems from a moral imperative to address gaps in learning and achievement in disadvantaged groups through effective educational leadership practice. The purposefully selected sample included ten superintendents who were identified from the 56 public school districts in Nassau County, New York. Interview transcripts from superintendents responsible for supervising elementary principals practicing in K-6 and K-5 schools were coded to identify significant statements, resulting in over 425 individual coding references. The analysis and interpretation of the findings were organized into four analytic categories found within the conceptual framework: (a) leadership support, (b) role of principal supervisor, (c) student achievement outcomes, and (d) principal leadership. Findings show that principal supervisors' practice includes robust support for principals' professional learning and an emphasis on fostering

responsive relationships with principals. Superintendents often support principals by including other central office administrators in supervision. Participants understand the importance of principal leadership and its impact on student achievement outcomes, especially principals' practice that emphasizes a focus on teaching and learning. The lens of sociocultural learning theory informs the extent to which these practices are performed. Along with these findings, this research identified that a specific role for supervising principals is not clearly defined and practitioners do not use a standard or framework that defines leadership practice focused on learning in their principal supervision work. Recommendations from this study have valuable implications for central office leaders who want to support principals' leadership through research-based principal supervision practice that can ultimately impact student achievement outcomes and reduce persistent achievement gaps for students in Nassau County public schools.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to *all* women who have had a hand in shaping the woman I am. Notably, my maternal grandmother, Anna Josephine Fenton Remy. At a time when women had little choice for themselves, my grandmother and her three sisters obtained college degrees, even holding advanced degrees in counseling and nursing. In my view, my grandmother was never able to fully invent herself, as her life's work was in her commitment to raising seven children. At the time my mother sent me off to school, my grandmother asked my mother what she wanted for her future. She took my mother to register for college, watching me at night, ensuring that my mother would successfully earn her bachelor's degree in elementary teaching. In fact, my mother began her career in the same elementary school I was attending. She was teaching and I was learning. A few years later, I proudly watched my mother, Nancy Ann Remy LaRocca, graduate with a master's degree in special education and literacy. Such is this family dedication to the transformative power of education, both in teaching and learning. I am honored to be a part of, and a product of, this legacy, having been lifted up by those before me. To my mother, you have been, and always will be, the wind beneath my wings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work grew from the seed of an idea to this final product thanks to the guidance of Dr. Anthony Annunziato and my dissertation committee members, Dr. Mary Ellen Freeley and Dr. James Campbell. I am indebted to the Nassau County superintendents who contributed to this research through their participation. It would not have been possible without your support. I would also like to acknowledge the professional groups in Nassau County that are always so generous with their time and expertise, the Nassau County Council of School Superintendents (NCCSS), the Nassau County Association of District Curriculum Officials (NADCO), and the Nassau Association of School Technologists (NASTECH). The spirit of collaboration in these groups is alive and well, and has been a constant source of support for me throughout my tenure as a central office administrator. I would also like to thank the New York State Council of School Superintendents for honoring me with the 2018 Raymond R. Delaney Memorial Scholarship and assisting me with continuing my course of study.

I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me throughout this process, especially my mom and dad, who have always been there encouraging me. My work family has cheered from the sidelines, while my cohort family created a supportive environment as we all pushed forward. I am especially thankful for the limitless love of my husband Joel, and my son Eric, who waited patiently for the journey to conclude.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In education today there is ongoing and continued interest in increasing student achievement. To many, there is a moral imperative to addressing gaps in learning and achievement for students in disadvantaged groups. According to John Hattie's latest meta-analysis of in-school factors that affect student achievement reports teacher efficacy among the most impactful in-school factor for student progress, with an effect size of 1.57 (Hattie, 2017). In other studies, researchers examined the impact of leadership on student achievement and found it was the second most important in-school factor, with most leadership at the school level falling to the work of the principal (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010).

Re-defining the work of educational leadership has been a recent focus of professional organizations since the National Policy Board for Educational Administration published the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders in 2015 (NPBEA, 2015). The Council of Chief State School Officers published the first standards for educational leaders in 1996 (NPBEA, 2015). These standards underwent a "modest update in 2008 based on the empirical research at the time" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1). In 2015 the National Policy Board for Educational Administration published new standards, on the basis that "the world in which schools operate today is very different than the one of just a few years ago" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1). These standards "have been recast with a stronger, clearer emphasis on students and student learning, outlining foundational principles of leadership to help ensure that each child is well-educated and

prepared for the 21st century” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 2). Of particular note in the document is that educational leaders must provide “unwavering attention to students . . . with one question always in mind. How will this help our students excel as learners?” (NPBEA, 2015, p.3).

In contrast to previous models of principal leadership in which the focus was on managing or running the building, under the new model of instructional leadership a student-centered focus is at the forefront of principals’ work. The days of simply following district mandates, purchasing supplies, and making sure the playground was safe and lunch was served have passed. Today, it is expected that principals not only manage, but also perform effectively as student-centered instructional leaders. What arises is a question of how a principal understands this shift as it relates to their work and subsequently, who should support them in this shift of practice? The role of the principal supervisor and how the role must change to support principals’ focus as a student-centered instructional leader now surfaces as an educational issue.

In recent studies, the roles of the central office and the principal supervisor have emerged as a promising solution to support the student-centered instructional leadership work of the principal. In their recent 2015 Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards report, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) recognized recent research that suggests that principal supervisors can impact student achievement results by helping principals grow as instructional leaders (CCSSO, 2015). They also noted in their report that there is a “need for a clear and practical definition of what a principal supervisor should know and be able to do in order to improve the effectiveness of the

school leaders with whom they work” (CCSSO, 2015, p. 2). The CCSSO understands there is a knowledge gap, which the Wallace Foundation identified in their 2015 report, *Building Principal Pipelines-A Strategy to Strengthen Educational Leadership*, that is “if principal supervisors in districts shift from overseeing compliance to sharpening principals’ instructional leadership capabilities, and if they are provided with the right training, support and number of principals to supervise, would this improve the effectiveness of the principals with whom they work?” (Syed, 2015, p. 10-11). The CCSSO understands that this shift in practice to redesign the role of principal supervisors will require a transition period, and timing will depend on local capacity (CCSSO, 2015).

Existing research in this area was limited to six districts participating in the Principal Supervisor Initiative funded by the Wallace Foundation. Principal supervisors, through their own statements about their practice in supervising and supporting principals, have provided further insight as to the extent that their practice reflects this new paradigm. This study has sought to understand what principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York believe their role has been in supporting elementary principals under the paradigm of learning-focused leadership. Exploring the range of themes that emerge from interviews with principal supervisors will inform new understandings about their current and future work.

Problem Statement

Policymakers and central office leaders need to make decisions about how to address this new scholarship of practice for principal supervisors as they work to support expectations of the principal as a learning-focused leader. New professional standards

for educational leadership (NPBEA, 2015) have been clear regarding the role of the principal. Although new professional standards for principal supervisors (CCSSO) were published in 2015, it is not clear that central office leaders who supervise principals have recognized the new standards and consequently may not have adjusted their practice. This lack of recognition may be due to the more popular focus on teacher practice, as the number one in-school factor relating to student achievement. Failure to recognize the current research around educational leadership, and in turn, its implications for principal supervision, may negatively impact student achievement.

Although the paradigm that principals are expected to be student-centered instructional leaders has taken hold, a question remains as to whether the practice of principal supervision has shifted to support the new expectations of the principal. With this question in mind, the focus of the study becomes clear. An analysis of the interview data from current principal supervisors in Nassau County indicate the extent to which the practice of principal supervisors aligns with expectations outlined in the most current research. This research study adds to the base of knowledge to guide the practice of principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York, and in turn serves to inform professional educational organizations that support principal supervision, such as the Nassau County Council of School Superintendents, district human resource administrators, and the Nassau Association of District Curriculum Officials.

Theory

This research is grounded in sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Within this, assistance relationships as described by Honig (2008, 2012) frames the type

of practices the principal supervisor engages in as it relates to providing leadership support to principals. Assistance relationships have been linked to improvements in people's work across settings (Honig, 2012). The concept of appropriation (Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia, 1999) frames a principal supervisor's capacity or level of attainment with leadership support practices. Levels of appropriation help identify the degree to which a principal supervisor incorporates research-based leadership support practices into their daily practice (Honig, Venkateswaran, & McNeil, 2017).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to analyze the self-reported work of principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York. This research analyzes the alignment of themes that emerged from interview data about the practice of principal supervisors to support the work of the elementary principal as a student-centered instructional leader. The results of the analysis in this study can inform the work of professional groups whose members perform the responsibilities of supervising principals.

Research Questions

To guide this phenomenological study, and examine the perceptions of principal supervisors with regard to the significance of their role in supervising principals and their impact on student achievement, the following research questions were addressed:

1. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand their principal supervisor role and the practice of leadership support?

2. To what extent do principal supervisors understand how their role in learning-focused leadership and the leadership support process is connected to student achievement outcomes.
3. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand or recognize the learning-focused leadership practices of principals?

Overview of Methodology

This qualitative research used a phenomenological study design. In using a phenomenological approach, the meaning of the lived experiences of principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York (Creswell, 2015) can be described. This study used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2015) to select participants for the study. All participants are individuals who supervise elementary principals in public school districts in Nassau County, New York. Data collection included interviews that were transcribed using the Rev application. The data were analyzed using NVivo 12 software for MAC.

Significance of the Study

The Council of Chief State School Officers, through their *Our Responsibility, Our Promise* (CCSSO, 2012) report, has articulated higher expectations for principals to be instructional leaders who improve student learning and achievement. Recent research suggests there will need to be a fundamental shift in central office practice to include the principal supervisor as the teacher of principals (Honig, et. al, 2017). This study explores principal supervisors' beliefs about their role to determine to what extent their practice aligns with current research regarding learning-focused leadership and leadership support practices. The study identifies trends in current practice that may inform the future

practice of principal supervisors. The results provide an important reference for those seeking to understand the current practice of principal supervisors, which illuminates the needs of principal supervisors to align their work with new research-based professional standards. Practical applications of the findings of this study could include the creation of a knowledge base to guide future principal supervisors' practice, future design of professional development for principal supervisors, and recommendations for superintendents regarding alignment of district resources to improve the role of the principal supervisor in the district.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in this study was to collect data from principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York and analyze the data for patterns and trends. The researcher also examined the alignment of themes that emerged from the analysis of principal supervisors' practice as it related to supporting the work of the principal as a student-centered instructional leader.

Researcher Assumptions

Based on my own experience as a principal supervisor in Nassau County, New York, I assume that principal supervisors in Nassau County will not have a formal understanding of current research-based practices in principal supervision that have emerged over the past fifteen years. Despite having worked as a central office administrator with elementary principals for ten years, my own knowledge of research-based practices for principal supervision was nonexistent at the time when I was tasked with supervising principals. At the start, I had no awareness of the formal practice of

principal supervision. In my experience, principal leadership is discussed often in the field, such as at conferences and in educational journals, however, practices around supervising principals is not. I began my own work by referring first to documentation of the evaluation requirements of principals in New York State under the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) regulations. This was my initial foray into supervision and was the basis of my first year of work as principal supervisor. My assumption is that other currently practicing principal supervisors will have had a similar experience to my own.

Definition of Key Terms

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). This is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the United States; provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. Author of the 2015 Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (CCSSO, 2015).

Distributed leadership. Instructional leadership that is shared among different staff in the school building and across levels of the system (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010).

Instructional leadership. Intentional efforts at all levels of an educational system to guide, direct, or support teachers as they seek to increase their repertoire of skills, gain professional knowledge, and improve their students' success (Knapp, et. al., 2010).

Leadership. The shared work and commitments that shape the direction of a school or district and their learning improvement agendas, and that engage effort and energy in pursuit of those agendas (Knapp et al., 2010).

Leadership support. Is intrinsic to learning-focused leadership, explicit and focused support for leadership work. Leadership acts that are essential dimensions of a leadership system that guides the improvement of teaching and learning (Knapp et al., 2010).

Learning-focused leadership. Learning improvement is the central priority of leadership (Knapp et. al., 2010).

Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (MPSPS). Released in 2015 by the Council of Chief State School Officers. A set of eight standards for principal supervision that gives attention to sharpening principals' instructional leadership, and that is grounded in the new definition of principal work found in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 (CCSSO, 2015).

National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). A non-profit alliance of major member organizations committed to the advancement of school and school-system leadership. Member organizations represent the educational administration profession and include the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National School Boards

Association (NSBA), and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) (NPBEA, 2015).

Principal supervisor. Direct supervisor of the principal. Works to shape principals' instructional leadership capabilities (CCSSO, 2015). The principal supervisor may have other administrative titles, such as area leadership director or area superintendent. For this study, the role is called principal supervisor.

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). Released in 2015 by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). A set of standards that are student-centric and outline the foundational principals of leadership to guide the practice of educational leaders so they can move the needle on student learning and achieve more equitable outcomes (NPBEA, 2015).

Scholarship of Practice. The forms of knowledge produced by scholars engaged in the scholarship of application, discovery, and integration to contribute to the development of a knowledge base to guide professional practice. One task for the scholarship of practice is to take such forms of knowledge and make them available and accessible to practitioners (Braxton, 2005).

The Wallace Foundation. National philanthropic organization that seeks to improve education and enrichment for disadvantaged children. One key initiative is school leadership and strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement (The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH AND THEORY

The literature review part of this chapter includes two areas of focus, principal leadership and principal supervision. In the first area of focus I discuss the importance of the principal's leadership on student achievement, principal leadership types, school contexts, models, and practices and professional standards for principals. In the second area of focus I discuss principal supervision, the impact of evaluation on principal supervision, the role of the central office in principal leadership and supervision, and models, and practices and professional standards for principal supervisors. In this chapter a theoretical framework, conceptual framework, and visual model are presented along with a summary of the review of literature.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks are applied in this study. The first framework is sociocultural learning theory that has its roots in the work of Vygotsky (1978). Ideas from sociocultural learning theory regarding assistance relationships as described by Honig (2008, 2012) ground the study as it relates to the work of the principal supervisor in practicing leadership support for principals. From activity theory, I use the concept of appropriation, as applied by Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999) with regards to identifying the principal supervisor's capacity to fulfill the leadership support role. Knapp (2008) notes that sociocultural learning ideas and related frameworks show "an enduring tension between attention to the individual and the collective, and between 'designs for learning' and the actual lived experience of learners" (p. 528).

Sociocultural learning theory. Sociocultural learning theory and the subsequent activity theory are historically linked to the work of Vygotsky. His work around the social nature of learning has further led to additional concepts in sociocultural work. These theories describe learning and development as mediated processes (Daniels, Cole, & Wertsch, 2007). Sociocultural learning theory includes the idea that to understand learning processes, it is necessary to look at the sociocultural context within which individuals learn. Sociocultural learning theories describe learning in ways that apply to a social practice view of principal supervisors' leadership support (Engestrom, 1995; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 1998). According to these theories learning occurs through participation in activities or communities, and learning is situated in everyday social contexts and in the context of their practice (Wenger, 1998).

Activity theory. Activity theory (Engestrom, 1995) draws from sociocultural learning theory. This theory looks at the relationship between individual and collective action and is applicable to work settings (Knapp, 2008). Because activity theory looks at the social settings in which learning occurs, it is helpful for describing the role of the principal supervisor in leadership support.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) view that learning is situated, or as a process they term *legitimate peripheral participation*. In situated learning a novice will engage with experts and move toward full participation in a community of practice. There is a process of moving from novice to expert practice, and learning will have more than one, particular, observable shift (Honig et al., 2017). This highlights a difference between instruction as an individual's acquiring of knowledge within the mind and learning that

happens through engagement with people and artifacts or tools within particular activities. Individuals and communities incrementally change their practice through the ongoing negotiation of meaning (Knapp, 2008). What is useful about this view is that various degrees of learning can take place (Honig et al., 2017). In this way we can make meaning of the capacity of principal supervisors with leadership support.

Appropriation. Using ideas from activity theory, Grossman et al. (1999) apply the concept of appropriation and identify five degrees of appropriation, or “the process through which a person adopts the pedagogical tools available for use in particular social environments and through this process internalizes ways of thinking endemic to specific cultural practices” (p. 15). The five levels of appropriation described are (a) *lack of appropriation*, (b) *appropriating a label*, (c) *appropriating surface features*, (d) *appropriating conceptual underpinnings*, and having (d) *achieved mastery*. Levels of appropriation ground this research by helping to describe the extent to which a principal supervisor practices leadership support.

For some principal supervisors there may be a lack of appropriation where there is no change in practice or no understanding of leadership support. A principal supervisor with a lack of appropriation may not be aware of leadership support practices. Also, in this case the principal supervisor may reject the ideas of leadership support and may not comprehend its importance. Appropriating a label may occur when the principal supervisor can discuss elements of learning-focused leadership with their principal but only talks about it and does not change their work practice. At this level, a principal supervisor may only talk to their principal about elements of learning-focused leadership,

but not provide any actual leadership support. If a principal supervisor occasionally uses processes of leadership support but does not change practice consistently, they may appropriate surface features. In this case, a principal supervisor may provide material resources to the principal but does not exhibit other activities of leadership support, leaving the principal without full leadership support. At this level, the principal supervisor is making some effort to grasp the process of leadership support but is succeeding in doing so only in one area or at the surface level (Grossman et al., 1999).

A principal supervisor that appropriates conceptual underpinnings demonstrates their understanding of the ideas of learning-focused leadership and leadership support, why these practices matter and begins to apply these ideas in new situations (Honig et al., 2017). At this level a principal supervisor may understand all levels of leadership support and may wish to practice this work but may not be in an environment that allows this. There may be time constraints or other pressing work for the principal supervisor. Systems at the district level may prevent the principal supervisor from practicing leadership support fully. In cases where systems support the work of the principal supervisor and they appropriate conceptual underpinnings there may be evidence of learning-focused leadership happening at the principal level.

Principal supervisors who consistently practice leadership support and understand what learning-focused leadership is and why these practices are important for equitable student outcomes have achieved mastery. In a district where the principal supervisor has achieved mastery, there is likely evidence of high levels of learning-focused leadership among the principals. Even though a principal supervisor has developed a conceptual

understanding of leadership support, they may be unable to use the tools in their work with principals. There is a distinction between appropriation and mastery, where mastery may take time to develop, and only occur after several years of practice as a principal supervisor (Grossman et al., 1999).

Assistance relationships. Sociocultural learning theory identifies forms of assistance that support participants' engagement in activities. Within the novice-expert model, these assistance relationships work to help novices participate more fully in a particular activity (Honig, 2008). For the proposed study, this means that a principal supervisor will practice leadership support at a deeper level than simply offering information or resources to the principal. This assumes that the principal supervisor is the expert and that the principal is the novice, which may not always be the case. Principal supervisors may themselves need additional support in order to model the high-quality teaching and principal learning-focused leadership practices that the assistance relationship assumes (Honig, 2008).

Honig (2008, 2012) and Honig et al. (2017) draw from sociocultural learning theory and specifically identify assistance relationships that may support the learning process and movement along the various degrees of appropriation from novice to expert practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Honig et al., 2017). These assistance relationships include (a) *modeling*, (b) *valuing and legitimizing peripheral participation*, (c) *creating and sustaining social engagement*, (d) *developing and using tools*, (e) *brokering*, and (f) *joint work*.

Modeling provides an example for the novice and involves demonstrating actions and thinking in order to build a conceptual model for new ideas that can also serve as a performance standard (Collins, Brown, & Holum, 2003; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). The principal supervisor may model or demonstrate practices, rather than just talk about them or direct principals to participate. The modeling and observation process leads to deeper engagement through enabling the learner to build a conceptual model of the task before they execute the task themselves (Collins et al., 2003; Honig 2012). Modeling calls attention to the practice and engages learners in discussing the rationale for the practice, making the thinking visible (Collins et al., 2003; Honig 2012). Modeling may increase the likelihood that the principal as a learner may take note of the practice as they may have a clearer understanding of why the activity is important (Honig, 2012).

Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss learning as a process where a novice can move to deeper engagement in practice through legitimate peripheral participation. This allows the participant to see themselves as valued in the activity regardless of their capacity (Honig, 2008). It is through this process of peripheral participation that a principal can see their capacity in relation to mastery and progress towards more challenging practices (Honig et al, 2017). The sociocultural learning theory concept of growing from novice to expert contrasts with other education reform frameworks that simply identify low performance. These labels and subsequent penalties have been shown to have a negative impact, working against efforts to improve through learning (Honig, 2008).

Central to sociocultural learning theory is that social engagement is essential to learning, that an individual's interactions with others and within communities of practices

is where construction of meaning takes place (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this way, the principal supervisor must provide and facilitate social opportunities that support these interactions so that conversations among community members may take place. This dialogue allows for participants to challenge others' understandings and assumptions about problems and solutions and can lead to fundamental changes in practice (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Honig 2008, 2012).

Principal supervisors can use tools, such as standards for educational leaders, to engage principals with new ideas. Tools can help principals think more deeply by presenting ideas in practical or conceptual forms (Wenger, 1998; Honig et al., 2017). Grossman et al. (1999) identify conceptual tools that include *principles, frameworks, and ideas* that can frame thinking around a particular idea and practical tools of *practices, strategies, and resources* that are specific to a particular activity (Honig et al., 2017). These tools can help principals understand what to do and not do, and serve as jumping off points for changing ideas and applying them in new settings or in new ways (p. 6).

In assistance relationships a participant may operate as a broker when they bring in new ideas or resources that can further learning in the relationship (Honig, 2012), an activity sometimes referred to as bridging. The participant may also buffer the relationship from unproductive influences or interference from external forces (Wenger, 1998). In addition to internal work, a principal supervisor may look externally and bring in information from outside the district or connect schools with new information or expertise from other schools or organizations (Honig, 2008). In this way, Honig (2012)

states, “participants increase and protect the resources available to support learning” (p. 740).

Learners are more likely to participate with deep engagement in activities that they view as important or when importance is reinforced by social or cultural contexts (Honig, 2012). This differs from traditional supervisory relationships where a principal supervisor may require improvements in instructional leadership and only monitor and assess the principal’s progress. This type of *assessment relationship* (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991) contrasts with joint work or engagement in activities that all community members find valuable (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa, & Goldsmith, 1995; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003; Wenger, 1998). In a joint work approach, a principal supervisor would assist in supporting the principal in a partnership such that the work is the responsibility of both participants and that both parties see value in the work (Honig, 2012), thereby deepening participation in particular work practices.

Literature Review

Principal leadership matters. The 2013 document, *Leadership Matters* (NASSP& NAESP) describes timely research that makes the case that “great schools do not exist apart from great leaders.” The question of whether school principals improve educational outcomes continues to be of interest to education researchers. In the current educational landscape, this interest is driven by a strong need to diminish ongoing and persistent gaps in achievement between social and ethnic groups to achieve equitable outcomes for all students. Practitioners and researchers continue to ask whether principal

leadership has a significant impact on student outcomes, whether or not the effects are direct or indirect, and what types of leadership are successful.

Many recent studies on principal leadership add to the body of research that has focused on the relationship between school leadership and student outcomes. Based on findings from several newer studies, researchers have made the case that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2010). Various versions of basic leadership practices have been identified and reported in the literature as being performed by successful school leaders (Robinson, Lloyd, & Row, 2008; Robinson, Hohepa, Lloyd, 2009; Day et al., 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Researchers have identified impacts on student outcomes that occur indirectly through leaders' ability to improve teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2008) as well as small but significant positive direct effects (Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Research findings indicate that leadership varies with the context in which leaders work (Leithwood et al., 2008; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). School leadership types also matter (Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al, 2008) and that the school leaders' influence is greater when it is shared or distributed (Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). Through this section of the review of literature, it is clear that contemporary research over the past fifteen years has increasingly shown a link between effective principal leadership and improved student achievement.

Direct and indirect effects. In the late 1990s and early 2000s there was a general consensus among researchers that leadership had a positive and indirect impact on

student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). In 2003, Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger stated that although literature can be found supporting this connection, there continued to be doubts because empirical data still had not firmly answered the question of how principal leadership matters. To this end, Witziers et al. (2003) conducted three quantitative meta-analyses of 37 international studies from 1986 to 1996 using a direct effects model. Studies included in the meta-analyses had common research design elements; each focused on the study educational leadership and had a valid and reliable measure of educational leadership, along with an explicit and valid measure of student achievement.

In the first meta-analysis Witziers et al. (2003) included all studies and analyzed them simultaneously. Results indicated that school leadership has a positive and significant effect on student achievement with a z score effect size of 0.02 and 0.04 for the sample without including the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) scores. Although significant, these are very small effect sizes. Further results showed that study characteristics, such as country had variation. Results without the IEA data indicated a larger 0.11 effect size for studies in primary education in the United States. In the second meta-analysis, the researchers included a subsample of studies where educational leadership was a one-dimension concept. Results of this analysis did not show any positive and significant relationship, with an effect size of 0.01. The third analysis was a series of small meta-analyses, one for each subdimension of educational leadership. The subdimensions were identified using the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) instrument from Hallinger (1994), and

included defining and communicating mission, supervising and evaluating the curriculum, monitoring student progress, coordinating and managing curriculum, advise and support, visibility, promoting school improvement and professional development, and achievement orientation. These results show small effect sizes but indicate several leadership behaviors with a positive and significant relationship to student outcomes for four of the behaviors. The effect sizes ranged from 0.02 to 0.19 with supervision and evaluation at 0.02, monitoring at 0.07, visibility at 0.07, and defining and communicating mission at 0.19. Of note was a negative effect size in the area of conducting activities aimed at improving the school, with a possible explanation that this may be seen in low achieving schools. Witziers et al. (2003) conclude, “we do believe that these findings show some evidence for the statement that educational leadership (really) matters for student achievement. However, its direct contribution to student outcomes is small” (p. 412).

In similar work, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) introduced a balanced leadership framework based on a meta-analysis that examined the effects of leadership practices on student achievement. The quantitative analysis included 70 studies from a 30-year period from the early 1970s to 2003. The 70 studies included 2,894 schools, 1.1 million students, and 14,000 teachers. Along with the meta-analysis the authors reviewed theoretical literature on leadership and used their own professional knowledge. The result was the identification of 21 leadership responsibilities that can be associated with student achievement. This framework provided concrete examples that principals would use to be effective.

Waters et al. (2003) found that there was a relationship between leadership and student achievement with an average effect size of 0.25. This difference in leadership would result in a mean student achievement score that is 10 percentile points higher. Like Witziers et al. (2003), an additional finding of the study shows that leaders not only have a positive influence on student outcomes, they can also have a negative influence. This may occur when the leader focuses on the wrong practices or miscalculates the significance of the change they are implementing. The study's authors found a range of impacts with the highest impact being 0.50, that would translate into a 19-percentile point increase in student achievement. At the low end, a correlation of -0.02 was found, which may have to do with principals not understanding the right focus of change even though they had demonstrated competence in leadership practices.

Waters et al. (2003) also concluded that leaders must have the right focus of change to improve schools and student achievement. The authors noted that selecting practices and strategies that are not best for their initiatives will likely result in a negative impact, as evidenced by the low correlation of -0.02 found in their research. Results showed that 20% of the variability in student achievement was tied to 11 practices. At the school level these include a guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback, parent and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism. At the teacher level, instructional strategies, classroom management, and classroom curriculum design matter, and at the student level, home environment, learned intelligence/background knowledge, and motivation matter.

The authors identified these as a place to focus leaders' improvement efforts, as these practices can have a positive impact on student achievement.

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) assert that successful school leadership is critical to effective school reform that results in improving student learning. Their work aims to build a knowledge base regarding effective school leadership. Large-scale quantitative research studies that were reported between 1980 and 1998 by Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b, 1998) as reported in Leithwood et al. (2004) support the effects of leadership on student learning. The findings show that the combination of direct and indirect effects of school leadership on student outcomes is small but significant and explains three to five percent of the variation. The total amount of variation of all school-level variables is 10–20% (Creemers & Reezigt, 1996), so although this seems small, leadership explains up to one quarter of the variation. As classroom factors explain about a third of the variation in student achievement (Hill, 1998), school leadership is second to the classroom in affecting student outcomes.

Leithwood et al. (2004) make clear in their review of research that leaders contribute to student learning indirectly by their influence on other people or on the organization. They note that research that has tried to quantify direct effects has generally failed to find any effects. Research that uses a chain or path type view of linking leadership practices to student learning are often research designs that show effects of leadership. Additionally, evidence regarding what practices educational leaders should pay the most attention to include instructional practices of teachers, school

mission and goals, teachers' participation in decision making, and the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Leithwood and Jantzi's (2008) quantitative study used path analytic techniques to investigate links connecting state, district, and school leadership to learning, assuming that most leadership effects will be indirect. Using stratified random sampling techniques, 180 schools from 45 districts in 9 states were identified and two sets of survey data from 96 principals and 2,764 teacher respondents were collected. Three years of student achievement data in language and math were also included. The authors hypothesized that leaders' self-efficacy (LSE) for improving instruction and student learning and the collective capacity of colleagues across schools in the district, leaders' collective efficacy (LCE), as having significant effects on student learning. Similar to the three practices of successful leadership presented by Leithwood et al. (2004), the conception of school leadership used in the study included, *setting directions*, *developing people*, *redesigning the organization*, and added the category of *managing the instructional program*.

Results on the effects of leader efficacy on student learning using three leader efficacy measures (LSE, LCE, combined) and three years of annual student achievement data (2003, 2004, 2005) show that LSE is not significantly related to any estimate of student achievement. There was a significant relationship with each year's annual achievement scores, the percentage of students at or above proficiency, for the combined efficacy measure (0.28, 0.24, 0.25), and two of the three annual scores for the LCE measure (0.33, 0.29). In this study, moderating variables show that district size and

secondary schools both had a dampening effect on the strength of the relationship for both LSE and LCE. This is to be expected as district and school size have been shown to make a difference in almost any focus of research and as elementary schools are often more sensitive to leadership than secondary schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). The author's claim that weak but significant effects of efficacy on student achievement are "most certainly indirect though their effects . . . is comparable with what has been reported from other studies of school leader effects on learning and other student outcomes" (p. 522).

Continuing with the idea that the impact of leadership on learning occurs indirectly by shaping conditions that contribute to effective teaching and learning, Heck and Hallinger (2014) added the assumption that leadership effects unfold over time. Their study used a three-year longitudinal data set from 60 primary schools in one state in the United States. The quantitative research design used a multi-level cross-classification modeling approach that examined "paths" that link school leadership to student learning.

Results about a direct effect of leadership on year-end achievement and growth of student math scores indicated that leadership does not directly affect ending math achievement or growth when controlling for other variables. When looking at mediated effects, where the effect of leadership on student outcomes is through its relationship with the mediator, the effect of the school's instructional environment on ending math achievement was statistically significant ($y = 14.690$, $p < .05$), but the direct effect was again, not statistically significant. The indirect effect of leadership was statistically significant with an effect size of 0.15. Heck and Hallinger (2014) conclude that the

effects of leadership on school outcomes in math were fully mediated by the school's instructional environment.

For this study, at the classroom level, results suggest that both teachers contribute to ending math achievement when controlled for school, classroom, and student demographics. Having two consecutive teachers one standard deviation above the mean would result in a 22.247 increase in ending math achievement compared to students who had two teachers of average effectiveness. Additionally, leadership had a significant moderating effect on the size of the second teacher's effect ($y = 6.523$, $p < .05$) with an effect size of 0.124 (Heck & Hallinger, 2014).

Heck and Hallinger (2014) note three limitations to the study. The three-year duration of the study presented a limitation in analyzing longitudinal effects, along with using a survey to assess teachers' perceptions of instructional practices. Heck and Hallinger (2014) note that the surveys were reliable, however lesson logs or classroom observations would have been preferable. The use of value-added measures was also noted as a limitation.

Conclusions of the study were that instructional environment and teacher effectiveness are positively and directly related to students' ending math achievement. Additionally, teacher effects matter and having two successive teachers with high effectiveness had 0.43 SD higher in math achievement. Instructionally focused leadership was indirectly but significantly related to ending math achievement through its positive effect on the instructional environment (Heck & Hallinger, 2014). Heck and Hallinger (2014) found that the relationship between leadership and achievement was

fully mediated, showing no direct effect of leadership in any of their empirical tests (Heck & Hallinger, 2014). Leadership is shown to enhance the direct effect of teachers on student math achievement. Heck and Hallinger (2014) note that these findings shed light on the role of leaders in enhancing consistency in teacher effectiveness and that the relationship is fully mediated. Using this information along with other research on known positive impacts to student learning represent reasonable areas to target for leaders. Additionally, the conditions that indicated the context of an individual school should also be considered in determining which target may provide the greatest impact to school improvement (Heck & Hallinger, 2014).

Leadership types. In 1979, Edmonds noted that effective schools had “strong administrative leadership without which the disparate elements of good schooling can neither be brought together nor kept together” (p. 22). The 1982 review of related literature by Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee further expanded on the successful schools movement and the focus on instructional leadership along with the role of the principal in “coordinating and controlling the instructional program” (p. 34). Policymakers readily received these early works that presented considerable ambiguity, with respected critics questioning the assertions about the extent to which the instructional leadership model was applicable to the principalship (Hallinger, 2011). Subsequently in the 1990s and 2000s, researchers studied instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and shared leadership constructs. This section reviews recent research that has led to consistent patterns regarding leadership types that lead to school

improvement and student learning. Later in the chapter I examine newer constructions of leadership models that fully incorporate these leadership features.

Marks and Printy (2003) studied the relationship between transformational and shared instructional leadership in restructuring elementary, middle, and high schools, along with the effect of transformational and shared instructional leadership on school performance. The study sample included 24 elementary, middle, and high schools, eight at each grade level, and represented 16 states and 22 school districts, mostly urban and with substantially economically disadvantaged and minority enrolled students. Quantitative and qualitative instruments were used in the design, with 910 teachers (80%) returning a survey. Interviews and on-site observations were also conducted along with document analysis. Interrater reliability for observations of classes was 0.78, and interrater reliability for assignment rating was 0.77 for social studies and 0.70 for mathematics.

Results of a scatterplot representing the relationship between transformational and shared instructional leadership show that transformational leadership with the behaviors it implies are a necessary, although insufficient, condition for shared instructional leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003). If a principal did not have the capacity for communicating a vision and building consensus with teachers, then the principal would likely not be able to share decisions with teachers in instructional matters in the shared instructional leadership model. Results of student performance showed that low leadership schools averaged -0.67 SD on pedagogical quality, compared with the limited leadership schools scoring at the mean, and integrated leadership schools scoring well

above the mean at 0.86 SD ($p \leq .01$). For authentic achievement the low leadership schools mean was -0.83 SD, for the limited leadership it was 0.21 SD, and for the integrated leadership it was 0.85 SD, ($p \leq .001$) (Marks & Printy, 2003). These results indicated that low leadership tended to be found in small schools with low achieving, low income, minority students (Marks & Printy, 2003). A limitation of this study was that the data came from schools that were restructuring, and therefore the results could not be generalized to other schools.

Shared instructional leadership was absent in schools that lacked transformational leadership, and shared instructional leadership will not develop unless it is intentionally fostered (Marks & Printy, 2003). Additionally, an important outcome is what Marks and Printy term *integrated leadership*, transformational leadership with shared leadership, where teachers provided high quality pedagogy and students performed at high levels on authentic measures of achievement. According to Marks and Printy,

When the principal elicits high levels of commitment and professionalism from teachers and works interactively with teachers in a shared instructional leadership capacity, schools have the benefit of integrated leadership; they are organizations that learn and perform at high levels. (2003, p. 393)

In their 2006 study, Leithwood and Jantzi acknowledged that policymakers are likely correct in assuming that the success with which their policies are implemented during large scale school improvement has much to do with the quality of local leadership, especially leadership at the school level. Their discussion acknowledged the progress regarding school leadership made in the fifteen years before their study, while

pointing to several problems. At this point the concept of instructional leadership is still more a “slogan rather than a precise model of leadership that would lend itself to empirical inquiry” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006, p. 202). Other educational experts writing on educational leadership at the time, such as Sergiovanni (2000), offer compelling arguments, though speculative in nature. The authors argue that another area in the literature continues to be “leadership by adjective,” where a qualifier is added to the term leadership creating the impression some new form of leadership has been discovered (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). And lastly, much of the research regarding school leadership is case study based, leaving an insufficient foundation with which to build a full understanding of school leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). These are the reasons that Leithwood and Jantzi are compelled toward more large-scale, sustained research to provide more reliable support to leadership developers (2006).

Leithwood and Jantzi’s (2006) quantitative study included responses from 2,290 teachers in England from 655 primary schools on two surveys. Student achievement was measured using the British Government’s Key State 2 tests over 2 years (for numeracy) or 3 years (for literacy). The tests were given during the years 1997-2000. Samples were selected at random from England’s National Foundation for Educational Research database of schools. The surveys were Likert-type teacher surveys, one focusing on the National Literacy Strategies (NLS) reform and the other on the National Numeracy Strategies (NNS) reform. Path analytic techniques were used to analyze the results. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) use their own model of transformation leadership based on their previous research, and again include three broad categories of leadership practice

Setting Directions, Developing People, and Redesigning the Organization, that include nine specific dimensions of practice. The surveys also measured teacher capacity, teacher motivation, teacher work setting, and teacher classroom practices. The main purpose of the study was to test the effects of a transformational model of school leadership, effects on teachers, their classroom practices, and student learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Key findings of the Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) research were that transformational leadership had a strong direct effect on teachers' work settings and motivation for both NNS and NLS. Transformational leadership had a moderate and significant effect on teachers' classroom practices. Leadership, along with teacher motivation, capacity, and work setting explained approximately 25%–35% of the variation in teachers' classroom practices, but the model did not explain any variation in student achievement gains. One limitation of the study was that the teacher response rates were in the 21%–30% range, which the authors note are likely significantly underestimated due to not knowing the exact number of staff members when sending out the surveys, however, higher response rates would have given greater confidence to the study results. A second methodological limitation of the study was in using achievement gain scores for numeracy over two years. Tracking gains over a 2-year period may be unstable and tracking over 3 or more years would be preferable.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) drew several conclusions along with implications for future research which are worth noting. As is clear from the study results, school leadership has an influence on teacher classroom practice, and transformational

leadership seems to be a promising practice. At the same time, there may be a gap between changes in classroom practice and changes in student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). The authors note that within their leadership model, the sources of leadership may have come from different areas, raising questions about which sources of leadership are best suited to the delivery of which practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). They also state that the leadership effects in studies are typically low, as in their own, and suggest that large-scale studies of strong leadership versus overall leadership need to be undertaken in order to achieve better estimates of leadership effects.

Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe's (2008) meta-analysis research using 22 studies, looked at differences between transformational and instructional leadership. Findings from the comparison of transformation leadership and instructional leadership indicated that transformational leadership ($ES = 0.11$) had a smaller impact on student outcomes as instructional leadership ($ES = 0.42$). Additionally, other types of leadership had an effect size of 0.30. Instead of looking at leadership as a general construct, analyzing it as three different types allows for comparison and shows that the mean effect size for the impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes is three to four times greater than that of transformational leadership (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). A limitation of this study was that the outcome measures used for the transformation leadership studies were predominantly social outcomes, where the instructional leadership outcome measures were academically focused. Robinson et al. (2008) note that although caution is warranted in interpreting the evidence, the impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes is notably greater than transformational leadership and that in general, "abstract

leadership theories provide poor guides to the specific leadership practices that have greater impacts on student outcomes” (p. 658).

Where Marks and Printy (2003) conflate shared leadership with instructional leadership, Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) define shared leadership as teachers’ influence over, and participation in, school-wide decisions with principals. In their analysis of 2005 and 2008 survey data using state achievement test scores, the main findings showed that leadership practice targeted directly at teachers’ instruction have significant, indirect effects on student achievement and that teachers’ working relationships are stronger. This leads to a stronger professional community that in turn fosters the use of instructional practices that are associated with student achievement (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Although the findings are strong and positive, the authors note that they are complex and further analysis is needed regarding the potential effects of shared leadership, instructional leadership, and trust in the principal.

Wahlstrom et al. (2010) define distributed leadership as particular leadership practices, not job titles or formal roles and ask which people enact which practices, how patterns of leadership emerge and whether variation makes a difference for certain kinds of schools and students. Using survey data and data from interviews to identify practices and patterns of distributed leadership, school personnel rarely attributed leadership behaviors and influence to a single person. Based on the data, three patterns of distribution were observed in a particular school. The first pattern was that principals in these schools collaborated with influential teacher leaders and outside experts to address

particular improvement initiatives. The second was that principals in these schools work on multiple initiatives, but independently of the teacher leaders or outside change agents. The teacher leadership is limited to their content area or grade level expertise. The third pattern showed that principals in these schools kept administrative oversight of school improvement activities, making little effort to influence their implementation. Teachers were responsible for the improvement initiatives. With regards to role distribution, distributing leadership was not a means of reducing principals' workload. Even when there were many sources of leadership in a school, the principal remained the central source of leadership. Others who acted as leaders often did so in a limited capacity or for a specific initiative. Lastly, "no single pattern of leadership distribution is consistently linked to the quality of student learning" (Wahlstrom et al., 2010, p. 12).

The Learning from Leadership Project study (Wahlstrom et al., 2010) also included two investigations into instructional leadership by analyzing quantitative data from the teacher survey. In the first investigation, teacher level (elementary or secondary) was examined, and principals' actions were divided into two categories, *Instructional Climate* and *Instructional Actions*. Instructional climate included the steps principals took to set a tone or culture in their building that supported continual professional learning. Instructional actions were explicit steps that principals took to engage with individual teachers about their growth. Results of their analysis showed that these two categories are related but distinct. In high performing schools with high student achievement, all grade levels report high levels of instructional climate. Elementary school teachers that worked with highly rated principals reported high levels

of both instructional climate and instructional actions. Conversely, secondary school teachers, rarely reported that school-level leaders engaged in instructional action. Results of the study showed that out of 31 schools in the bottom 20% in the ranking for all principals on instructional actions, 20 schools were middle and high schools (Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

In the second investigation, four categories of core leadership practices that appear to be effective across contexts based on prior research were used including, setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. (I will revisit these in the next section.) Using classroom observation and interview data, Wahlstrom et al. (2010) identified specific practices that both principals and teachers believed made significant contributions to the improvement of teachers instructional practice. Results indicated that 92%–100% of principals and 67%–84% of teachers agreed on the importance of three specific practices, focusing the school on goals and expectations for student achievement, keeping track of teachers' professional development needs, and creating structures and opportunities for teachers to collaborate. In schools that had low scores on a measure of effective instruction, 38% of teachers gave more importance to the leadership practice of providing backup for teachers for student discipline and with parents compared to 18% of teachers in schools that scored high on the measure. This indicated that in schools with lower standards for instructional practices, teachers were more likely to express a need for resources than for support in developing their own expertise (Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

As discussed in this review and as is noted in the work of Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, and Brown (2014), previous studies show that instructional leadership accounts for higher gains in student achievement than transformational leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008), while transformation leadership has empirical support in school reform efforts showing significant effects on teacher practice (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Shatzer et al. (2014) sought to compare the effects of instructional leadership and transformational leadership on student achievement.

The Shatzer et al. (2014) study included 37 elementary (K-6) schools from three school districts in the Intermountain West. Participating teachers completed one of two surveys, either the transformational leadership questionnaire (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)) or the instructional leadership questionnaire (Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS)) to assess their principal's leadership practices. Five hundred and ninety teachers completed the Likert scale surveys, a 45% response rate. In addition to this, 23,738 students indirectly participated in the study through data collected from the statewide testing program. The MLQ measures eight leadership dimensions, each containing four items. The PIMRS evaluates 10 instructional leadership dimensions. Student achievement was measured using a criterion referenced test at the end of the school year covering topics of math, language arts, and science. The test had strong convergent reliability with the Stanford Achievement Test along with strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .79 to .95.

Results of the study indicated that instructional leadership scores explained more of the variance in student achievement, CRT-raw scores, 45.4%, versus 29% for transformational leadership. Instructional leadership also explained slightly more of the variation for CRT-progress scores, 27%, versus transformational leadership, 22%. These results align with the results of Robinson et al. (2008), who found that instructional leadership had a higher effect ($ES = 0.42$) than transformational leadership ($ES = 0.11$), supporting the conclusion that instructional leadership has a slight advantage over transformational leadership in relation to student achievement.

CRT-raw and CRT-progress scores were explained primarily by the principals' leadership ratings (26–52%), with the control variables of school context and principal demographics predicting a small non-significant amount of the variance (24% and 18%, respectively), showing that school principals do have an impact on student achievement (Robinson et al., 2008). Also, considering the student achievement results dealing with progress from the prior year, that may show that principals have more influence over the progress of students in their school than the impact of the school context, as that may be a stable characteristic. Principal leadership may be more dynamic and therefore have a larger impact on change, potentially accounting for the results for instructional and transformational leadership at almost twice the variance as school context. Specific principal behaviors associated with higher levels of student achievement included, monitor student progress, protect instructional time, provide incentives for learning, provide incentives for teachers, and make rewards contingent (Robinson et al., 2008). Like the Witziers et al. (2003) study, these practices seem promising for student

achievement, while the contingent reward dimension has been associated with increased student achievement by Robinson et al. (2008).

Limitations of this study included the relatively small sample size that prevented several of the analyses from reaching significance. Additionally, the study did not examine the situational factors associated with each school, with the authors noting that a different type of leadership may be appropriate for different stages of school development or school change. The CRT was also a one-year difference and a stronger measure would be a multi-year test score.

Shatzer et al. (2014) recommended that future research could examine new models of leadership in education, cautioning that modified theories of leadership have begun to replace the dated theories of instructional and transformational leadership. At the same time, they caution the simple integration of leadership practices or “leadership by adjective” as I have previously noted in this section, gives the false impression that something new has been created (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). The concluding ideas of Shatzer et al. (2014) regarding leadership within different contexts or situational factors of each school and new combined models of leadership are common threads in the most contemporary literature on school leadership. Proponents of these ideas make a case for a new mindset that moves away from choosing a leadership style toward adopting effective research-based leadership actions that allow leaders to adapt their style to meet the needs of those they serve (Freeley & Scricca, 2015).

Leadership practices, models, and standards. In the 2004 Executive Summary, *How leadership influences student learning*, Leithwood et al. make two important claims regarding leadership effects on student learning.

“1. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school.

2. Leadership effects are usually the largest where and when they are needed most.” (p. 5)

This underscores the value of changing or adding to leadership capacities in schools that continue to have persistent gaps in achievement between social and ethnic groups. Accordingly, leaders achieve this impact with three basic core practices of successful leadership, *Setting Directions, Developing People, and Redesigning the Organization*. While these practices are not sufficient for significant improvement, without them, not much would happen (Leithwood et al., 2004). Setting directions may include articulating a vision or forming agreement around goals and high expectations. Leaders must also provide support to individuals along with appropriate models of best practices. Thirdly, leaders must strengthen the school culture, build collaborative processes, and facilitate improvement (Leithwood et al., 2004).

In 2006, Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, and Porter created an analysis of the research base that “undergirds the emerging concept of learning-centered leadership” (p. 1). This project was undertaken to inform the development of a framework for evaluating school leaders and school leadership teams, the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-Ed). The learning-centered leadership framework included eight major

leadership dimensions (a) Vision for Learning, (b) Instructional Program, (c) Curricular Program, (d) Assessment Program, (e) Communities of Learning, (f) Resource Acquisition and Use, (g) Organizational Culture, and (h) Social Advocacy. It is important to note that the learning-centered leadership assessment conceptual framework and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (CCSSO, 1996), are significantly aligned, with the standards covered in the framework and the framework covering the standards.

Moving beyond leadership as a single concept and previous empirical research that recognized that the impact of leadership will depend on practices that a leader engages in was the focus of the work of Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008). They used a qualitative meta-analysis that analyzed findings from 27 research studies, published between 1978 and 2006, to look at the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. Two different strategies were used to identify leadership types and their impact. The first involved a comparison between two specific leadership types, transformational and instructional leadership, which I discussed earlier in the review. The second involved the identification of five dimensions of leadership and their relationship to student outcomes is discussed here.

Using 12 studies from the group, Robinson et al. (2008) inductively derived five leadership dimensions by reviewing survey items in the study which they listed and then grouped. This differed from the deductive approach of Witziers et al. (2003) in which they used 10 instructional leadership categories of the PIMRS. Once the five dimensions were derived from the 199 survey items, each item was then coded against one of the

dimensions and a mean effect size and standard error was calculated for each dimension. The leadership dimensions included, establishing goals and expectations, resourcing strategically, planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum, promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

Results of the 12 study meta-analysis show that promoting and participating in teacher learning and development had the largest impact on student outcomes ($ES = 0.84$), followed by establishing goals and expectations ($ES = 0.42$), and planning coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum ($ES = 0.42$), strategic resourcing ($ES = 0.31$) and ensuring a safe and orderly environment ($ES = 0.27$). These findings indicate that a school's leadership is likely to have positive impacts on student outcomes when the focus is on the quality of learning, teaching, and teacher learning.

Robinson et al. (2008) noted that while Leithwood et al. (2004) used a task-relationship distinction in their practices (setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization), the five dimensions identified in the Robinson et al. study indicate that relationships are embedded. For example, an effective leader must determine a goal (task focus) and at the same time do so in a way that faculty understands and becomes committed to the goal (relationship). Effective leaders must incorporate both the educational and relationship challenges into their problem solving (Robinson et al., 2008). As in earlier studies, all the leadership dimensions had indirect effects on students by focusing and coordinating the work of teachers and in some instances, parents.

Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, and Portin (2010) synthesized three study strands, the focus of which were learning-focused leadership in urban systems. The three study strands used qualitative inquiry strategies over a year and a half from the 2007–2008 school year and the beginning of the 2008–2009 school year. Visits were made to seven moderate-to-large urban districts with 15 schools selected within those districts. Interviews, observations of leadership events, and archival sources were investigated from three viewpoints that included, investment of staffing and resources in support of equitable learning improvement, development and exercise of distributed instructional leadership within the school, and transformation of central office work practices and the district-school relationship to develop and sustain instructional leadership capacity (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010). Two sets of themes emerged from these three study strands. The first was the practice of learning-focused leadership and what it meant for instructional improvement and the second involved the ways in which learning-focused leaders were supported (Knapp et al., 2010).

In learning-focused leadership practice there are five facets of leadership practice, a persistent public focus on learning, investment in instructional leadership, reinvention of leadership practice, new working relationships within and across levels, and evidence as a medium of leadership. Leadership support includes providing resources for leaders as well as teachers, engaging leaders in professional learning, fostering relationships with peers, attending to administrative needs in a responsive, differentiated way, and sponsoring and legitimizing leaders' work. Learning-focused leadership practice and leadership support, when practiced by leaders across the organization can be a major

influence on learning improvement (Knapp et al., 2010). Knapp et al. (2010) conclude that the data show that:

1. The capacity of the educational system to enhance the practices that produce student learning depends on leadership that focuses on learning improvement for both student and professional staff and that mobilizes effort to that end.
2. The power and sustainability of learning-focused leadership depends, in large measure, on the presence of a multi-level system of leadership support. (p. 27)

In this study, leadership outcomes were not traced to student outcomes over time, although the schools in the study were making progress on local measures. In the past these schools and districts had chronic low performance. While the authors do not draw a causal link between the leadership practices, it is likely that they are part of the outcomes. On page 28, Knapp et al. (2010) draw from Leithwood et al.'s (2004) work, noting that research has shown strong links between leadership activities that *set direction, develop people, and redesign the organization*. These were all activities that school leaders engaged in at the schools included in the study. Additionally, these three core practices helped school leaders through the leadership support systems that were in place.

Using a review methodology based on evidence from empirical studies, Hallinger's 2011 research-based leadership for learning model proposes four specific dimensions, (a) *values and beliefs*, (b) *leadership focus*, (c) *contexts for leadership*, and (d) *sharing leadership*. Hallinger recognizes that the key limitation in the work is the difficulty in linking leadership to its context, with little research available in this area. As

others have noted, situational context matters and applying findings must be done with an understanding of one's own particular school context.

In 2013, The Wallace Foundation, which has supported efforts to improve leadership in public schools by funding projects and issuing over 70 research reports, described five key practices that effective principals do well, including, (a) *shaping a vision of academic success for all students*, (b) *creating a climate hospitable to education*, (c) *cultivating leadership in others*, (d) *improving instruction*, and (e) *managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement*.

In 2013, Canole and Young provided a report that analyzed standards for educational leaders with the purpose of reviewing the 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards based on changes in context, research, and practice in education since 2007. Canole and Young (2013) analyzed data taken from surveys and focus groups that were part of the Wallace Principal Pipeline Initiative.

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) created the ISLLC to create the first set of national standards for educational leaders, which the NPBEA adopted in 1996 (CCSSO, 1996). The 1996 ISLLC standards emphasized instructional leadership responsibilities for administrators and provided states with leverage to make changes to leadership preparation programs (Murphy, 2003). As of 2005, 46 states had adopted or adapted the standards or used them to create their own state standards (Murphy, Young, Crow, & Ogawa, 2009; Sanders & Simpson, 2005), in effect making the ISLLC standards use by states essentially universal.

Criticisms of the 1996 ISLLC standards focused on a lack of connection to student achievement gains, omission of technology leadership, lack of specificity for criteria to be met, lack of consideration for context, and the assumption that leadership is singular (Canole & Young, 2013). Also noted was a failure to recognize the research base that the standards were formed upon (Canole & Young, 2013). Murphy (2005) justifies the standards, noting “the goal has been to generate a critical mass of energy to move school administration out of its 100-year orbit and to reposition the profession around leadership for learning” (p. 180). In order to address other issues, Sanders and Kearney (2008) created *Performance Expectations and Indicators for Education Leaders* to provide expectations for leaders. In 2005, the NPBEA voted to review the ISLLC standards, which were subsequently revised to better align with the research base on effective educational leadership at the time (NPBEA, 2006), and in 2008 a new version was adopted (CCSSO, 2008).

With rapidly changing and expanding expectations for education leaders driven by policy changes such as the Race to the Top (USDOE, 2009) initiative in 2009, the subsequent 2010 Common Core State Standards (CCSSO & NGA, 2010), and A Blueprint for Reform under President Obama in 2010, the CCSSO released the report, *Our Responsibility, Our Promise* in 2012 which aimed to prepare principals to meet the new demands. In response, states began to create new leadership expectations and indicators, notably visible in the Denver Public Schools Framework for Effective School Leadership Evidence Guide (Denver Public Schools, 2011; Canole & Young, 2013). These practices include, *Culture and Equity Leadership, Instructional Leadership,*

Human Resource Leadership, Strategic Leadership, Organizational Leadership, and External Leadership. Other standards such as, the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education’s Core Competencies and Key Processes, the McREL framework, New Leaders, and the National Board Standards for Accomplished Principals, influenced districts participating in the Wallace Principal Pipeline Initiative identify their own district leadership standards (NBPTS, 2010; Canole & Young, 2013). Although there are significant similarities among all of these standards and frameworks, Canole and Young (2013) note that “what makes the standards strikingly different is the amount of specificity that is provided pertaining to the heightened expectations within the education context” (p. 42).

As policy continued to change rapidly with President Obama’s 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act, along with additional empirical research regarding the impact of leadership on student achievement, new Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) were released to “articulate the leadership that our schools need and our students deserve . . . outlining foundational principles of leadership to guide the practice of educational leaders so they can move the needle on student learning and achieve more equitable outcomes” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1). The 2015 PSEL were developed from a review of empirical research with input from researchers and over 1,000 school and district leaders, along with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). As noted, “the 2015 Standards

embody a research- and practice-based understanding of the relationship between educational leadership and student learning” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 3).

Table 1 shows the minor update from the 1996 ISSLC standards (CCSSO, 1996) to the 2008 version (CCSSO, 2008), along with the 2015 PSEL (NPBEA, 2015). This progression mirrors changes in research about school leadership and its impact on student achievement noted in the proposed study’s review of the literature.

Table 1

Update in Leadership Standards, 1996-2015

Standard	ISSLC 1996 A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by:	ISSLC 2008 An education leader promotes the success of every student by:	PSEL 2015 Effective educational leaders:
1	Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is supported by the school community.	Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.	Mission, Vision, and Core Values ... develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.
2	Advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.	Advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.	Ethics and Professional Norms ... act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
3	Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.	Ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.	Equity and Cultural Responsiveness ... strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
4:	Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.	Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.	Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment ... develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
5	Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.	Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.	Community of Care and Support for Students ... cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic

6	Understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.	Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.	<p>success and well-being of each student.</p> <p>Professional Capacity of School Personnel</p> <p>... develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.</p>
7			<p>Professional Community for Teachers and Staff</p> <p>... foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.</p>
8			<p>Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community</p> <p>... engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.</p>
9:			<p>Operations and Management</p> <p>... manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.</p>
10			<p>School Improvement</p> <p>... act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.</p>

An outline of the progression of leadership dimension, practices, and models based on the literature from 2004 through 2013 is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Research Progression for Principal Leadership Practices, 2004-2013

School Leadership Research	Leadership Practices and Dimensions
Leithwood et al. 2004 3 Core Practices	Setting directions, Developing people, Redesigning the organization
Murphy et al. 2006 Learning-Centered Leadership 8 Dimensions	Vision for Learning, Instructional Program, Curricular Program, Assessment Program, Communities of Learning, Resource Acquisition and Use, Organizational Culture and Social Advocacy
Leithwood et al. 2006, 2008 4 Categories	Building vision and setting directions, Understanding and developing people, Redesigning the organization, Managing the teaching and learning program
Robinson et al. 2008 5 Dimensions	Establishing goals and expectations, Strategic resourcing, Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum, Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment
Day et al. 2010 8 Dimensions	Defining the vision, values and direction, Improving conditions for teaching and learning, Restructuring the organization: redesigning roles and responsibilities, Enhancing teaching and learning, Redesigning and enriching the curriculum, Enhancing teacher quality, Building relationships inside the school community, Building relationships outside the school community
Hallinger 2010 Leadership for Learning 4 Dimensions	Values Leadership, Leadership Focus, Context for Leadership, Sources of Leadership
Knapp et al. 2010 Learning-focused Leadership 5 Central Practices	Persistent public focus on learning, Investment in instructional leadership, Reinvention of leadership practice, New working relationships across levels, Evidence use as a medium of leadership
Wallace Foundation 2013 Principal as Leader 5 Key Practices	Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, Creating a climate hospitable to education, Cultivating leadership in others, Improving instruction, Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement

Context matters. As educators attempt to define specific aspects of leadership that impact student achievement, researchers have become sensitive to the context in which leaders' work takes place (Leithwood et al., 2004). Successful leaders who master the core practices of successful leadership (setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization) must address their work within the individual contexts of their school. Because context matters, it is important that practitioners do not take up a single story of leadership style. Practitioners must be careful not to fall into the trap of a specific leadership style or leader preparation that delivers one set of ideal practices. Leithwood et al. (2004) argue for further research in this area to determine how leaders exercise flexibility in working through different contexts. These include organizational context, student population context, and policy context. For example, elementary principals often have curricular knowledge at a similar level to their teachers, whereas a secondary principal might rely on department chairs. A rural school with a small student population will have significantly different needs than a large urban school with a diverse student population. Policy contexts can change over time with large scale changes happening to large groups of leaders such as with the implementation of Every Student Succeeds Act (USDOE, 2010).

Marks and Printy (2003), provide additional insight regarding school characteristics and leadership patterns. Schools that scored below the sample means for both instructional and transformational leadership were considered low leadership schools, with the other categories being limited leadership (high on transformational, low on shared instructional) and integrated leadership (high on both transformational and

shared instructional). These schools tended to be smaller than the other schools by 300-350 students and enrolled the largest proportion of poor students at 51%. The proportion of Hispanic students at low leadership schools was close to 30%, with 17% at integrated leadership schools and 11% at schools where leadership is limited. Student baseline achievement as measured by NAEP averaged -0.36 SD at the low leadership school, 0.13 SD at limited leadership schools, and 0.36 SD at the integrated leadership schools. For pedagogical quality, low leadership schools scored -0.67 SD, with limited leadership scoring at the mean and integrated leadership schools scoring well above 0.86 SD ($p \leq .01$). Here significant and systematically patterned differences are visible among the students enrolled at each of the schools by type of leadership, in which low leadership is found in smaller schools where students are poor, minority, and lower achieving (p. 388). Marks and Printy reference their 2002 work in which they found similar patterns, noting that in lowest achieving schools, administrators may be likely to centralize authority and control in an attempt to protect the school from further failure.

Leithwood et al. (2008) makes a case for responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which leaders' work. In applying the four core sets of leadership practices (building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program) it may be done in combinations based on the stage of turnaround for the school. The school may be at the end of a period of declining performance, or early turnaround or crisis stabilization and late turnaround where they are achieving and sustaining success, requiring differences in the application of the leadership practices. For example, a leader in the

early crisis stabilization phase may quickly develop short term priorities and directions, whereas at the late turnaround phase, they may involve staff more fully in developing the school's direction and creating ownership so the beliefs become widely held (Leithwood et al., 2008).

In the 2010 executive summary of the six-year Learning from Leadership Project, Wahlstrom et al.'s investigation makes clear that there is a relationship between context and effective leadership behavior. The researchers used data from a teacher survey containing measures of shared and instructional leadership that best related to student achievement. Their findings showed that as principal and teacher leadership focused on student learning decreased, poverty and diversity increased. Teachers in schools in larger metropolitan areas reported significantly less leadership. Larger districts with high-poverty student populations are most likely to experience limited leadership, and teachers in middle and high schools are less likely to trust their principals than elementary teachers. Wahlstrom et al. (2010) found that context matters because it can indicate whether teachers work with principals who practice leadership behaviors that support instructional improvement and student achievement. In summary, "the task of increasing leadership capacity appears to be one that will require additional attention from states and districts as they assume increasing responsibility for improving educational outcomes" (Wahlstrom et al., 2010, p. 26).

Principal supervision matters. From research showing that principal leadership impacts student achievement (Witziers et al., 2003; Waters et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008), there continues to be an ever-increasing focus on improving

principal leadership practices. National policy supports this drive, with the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) currently allowing federal funds to specifically be used for principal professional development, and the addition of newly outlined standards for principal supervisors by national education organizations (CCSSO, 2015). In this section of the review I show that leadership support through promising new practices in principal supervision is supported by recent research.

Principal supervision. Hvidston, McKim, and Mette (2016) studied principals' perceptions of their own supervision and evaluation within their own evaluation cycle. This quantitative study looked at differences in the perceptions of supervision and evaluation between novice and experienced principals. The researchers invited 275 elementary, middle, and high school principals from a Mountain West state to participate. Principals were able to participate regardless of gender or educational degree, with experience levels used to determine differences. The researchers used a 20-item online survey and 102 principals agreed to participate. The survey instrument included nine Likert scaled items on supervision and 11 Likert scaled items on evaluation.

A descriptive analysis showed that the principals agreed with all nine of the statements regarding principal supervision, all with means higher than 2.5. For the evaluation subscore, principals agreed with ten of the 11 statements, with all 10 having means higher than 2.5. An independent t-test comparing principals with three or less years of experience to principals with more than three years of experience indicated a significant difference in that novice principals viewed evaluation as more valuable than experienced principals. Additionally, novice principals believed that superintendents

used classroom walk-throughs to monitor classroom instruction more than experienced principals, with a significant difference and medium effect size between the two groups.

Results of the Hvidston et al. (2016) study show that principals in the Mountain West state are being supervised and evaluated, but future research on its effectiveness and the implication for professional development of principals is necessary to improve principal practice. The study also indicates a need for differentiated supervision for principals based on experience.

Johnston, Kaufman, and Thompson (2016) present key findings from their quantitative work on a Wallace Foundation-funded survey of RAND's American School Leader Panel (ASLP) that was administered online from June through October 2015. In the survey 175 school leaders participated. The response rate was 32%, indicating a limitation of the study as this is a small sample size. Participants were divided into three subgroups based on the size of their district, with small districts having less than 5,000 students, midsize districts having between 5,000 and 25,000 students, and large districts having more than 25,000 students.

The purpose of the report was to describe the types of support that school leaders receive while they are on the job. Support was categorized in three ways, supervision, mentoring, and professional development. Findings from Johnston et al. (2016) show that 56% of principal respondents were supervised by their district superintendent, 50% indicated that their district required mentoring for first-year principals, and 50% reported that professional development was available to them on a monthly or more frequent basis. Only 1% of principals stated that their district has none of the three forms of support;

31% reported that their district provided all three forms; and 68% of principals reported the availability of some but not all three forms of support. This suggests that there has been significant variation among districts regarding support available to principals.

When comparing principals who were supervised by their district superintendent to those supervised by someone other than the superintendent, the focus on instruction in supervisory meetings varied, with 17% those supervised by someone other than the superintendent reporting either “somewhat” or to a “great extent” higher focus on instruction. When principals were asked if they would increase the amount of time with their supervisor, the half that indicated they would, reported that their communication with their supervisor focused on instruction. Similarly, mentored principals (47%) whose mentoring focused on improving teachers’ instruction “to a great extent” also said that the mentoring was very valuable (63%).

When reviewing support for principals, variations arise depending on the district size, with 81% of principals in small districts supervised by their superintendent, 42% in midsize and 19% in large districts. When reporting an emphasis on instruction in communication with their supervisors, 52% of principals from small districts indicated little or no emphasis on instructional improvement with regards to supervisory contact. In large districts, 83% reported that mentoring was required compared to 61% in midsize, and 29% in smaller districts. With regard to professional development, 72% of principals in large districts reported professional development opportunities that occurred at least monthly, with 54% for midsize districts, and 31% in small districts.

The focus on district support was one limitation of the study, as principals may receive other forms of support, such as taking outside leadership courses or participation in peer networks that do not fall under the district authority. Implications of the study suggest that districts could be more consistent in their support of principals as instructional leaders. Smaller districts may need to consider alternate ways to support principals if their district structure is limited, such as online contact or multi-district cooperatives. The findings also clarify the need for maintaining an instructional focus for principal supervision.

Hvidston, McKim, and Holmes (2018) conducted qualitative research about principals' perceptions of their own supervision and evaluation and found several themes emerged from principals' responses. Ninety-five principals from elementary, middle, and high schools in a Mountain West state responded to two open-ended survey questions, "What are the greatest strengths of your own supervision and evaluation?" and "What recommendations would you give superintendents to improve your own supervision and evaluation?" (p. 214). The majority of principals in the survey, 76%, reported having more than three years of experience as a principal. In this study, the person who supervised the principal is referred to as the superintendent.

The two themes that emerged from the first research question, "What are the greatest strengths of your own supervision and evaluation?" were trust and communication and goal setting. Principals gave examples of a trusting relationship between themselves and their superintendent reporting "trust his feedback," "trust to problem solve," "turn to my supervisor when I need advice and support." Principals'

examples of communication with superintendents included, “meaningful conversations,” “open and honest conversations,” and “positive reinforcement and constructive criticism.” Conversely, some principals reported “none” and “I only listen to myself” showing a lack of trust and communication with their superintendents. With regards to goal setting, principals emphasized the importance of goal setting based on standards as a specific strength of their supervision and evaluation (Hvidston, McKim, & Holmes, 2018). Principals reported “I get to establish my own SMART goal to improve not only myself but our school” and the “opportunity to provide documentation or evidence of some of the things I do to lead the school.” Conversely there were principals who indicated that canned systems of evaluation were not useful and had limitations.

The two themes that emerged from the second research question, “What recommendations would you give to superintendents to improve your own supervision and evaluation?” were regular observations with feedback, and components of supervision and evaluation. Principals reported that observations should be regular, not random, and should allow the superintendent to see the principal in varied roles or performance activities such as when conducting staff development or engaging in instructional leadership. Feedback should be critical, allow for reflective conversation, and allow principals to know if they are on the right track. With regards to components of supervision and evaluation, principals indicated a desire to have meetings at the beginning of the year, revising goals, and frequent observations at school, and spending time in classrooms. Principals had different ideas about what data superintendents should collect, varying from no anonymous survey data to a model where all stakeholders are

given the chance to offer feedback. Principals noted that observation tools should be improved and may include a consistent rubric. Principals added that mentoring and support should be in place for new principals and that professional development was needed to grow as an instructional leader.

In the Hvidston et al. (2018) study, principals identified strengths of their supervision and evaluation and made recommendations for improvement. Implications of the study show that perceptions of trust and communication are important to the supervision and evaluation of principals. The participants identified goal setting as an important factor, such that principals and superintendents can understand how progress is occurring as part of the supervision and evaluation process. Regular observations with feedback based on authentic performances of principals and components of supervision and evaluation were identified. Understanding that the supervision and evaluation of principals should result in improved performance as evidenced by student academic growth, Hvidston, et al. (2018) recommended that as principal evaluation systems are implemented, recommendations from principals can provide insight into improving outcomes of principal assessment, further noting that “principals need to see these systems as valuable tools for improvement” (p. 224).

Using quantitative research methods Grissom, Blissett, and Mitani (2018) looked at principal evaluation data from the first four years of Tennessee’s administrator evaluation system, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), specifically the portion that uses scores from principal supervisors on an observation-based evaluation instrument. The researchers were seeking to understand more about the distributional

properties of the summative ratings, the characteristics of principals (e.g., race, gender, years of experience) identified as effective, and the extent to which they are a predictor of measures of student achievement. TEAM evaluation data for Tennessee principals from 2011–2012 to 2014–2015 were used in the study, along with other administrative and survey data provided by the Tennessee Department of Education. Summative ratings for all four years were used, where principals are rated on a five-point scale. The researchers used bivariate correlations and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models to analyze data to answer their research questions.

Analysis showed that the rubric and rating process tended to identify a single construct, rather than multiple distinct constructs. Evidence showed that the TEAM ratings result from an underlying perceived effectiveness construct that drives raters' ratings. The researchers concluded that the TEAM ratings can be reduced to a single dimension. In looking at principal and school characteristics, it was noted that two patterns emerged. First, that TEAM ratings increased with principals' experience. Second, principals with high numbers of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch tended to receive lower TEAM ratings. In schools with higher achievement gains, principals were rated more positively by their principal supervisor, indicating an association between TEAM ratings and student achievement growth.

Although evidence from this study shows that highly rated principals tended to work in schools with positive outcomes, the researchers did not conclude that having a principal with higher ratings drives more positive outcomes, indicating that positive correlation may be driven by higher performing schools being more likely to attract or be

assigned high-performing principals. The authors indicated that if the goal of the evaluation process was to address strengths and weaknesses, this system of evaluation did not provide that, and better means of providing reliable feedback should be considered. More research is needed to determine whether principal evaluation drives principal improvement and subsequently student achievement.

The role of the central office. Waters et al. (2003) found that there was an effect size of 0.25 between school level leadership and student achievement. Building on this work, Waters and Marzano (2006) completed a meta-analysis of research on superintendents, seeking to understand the strength of the relationship between leadership at the district level and average student academic achievement. Waters and Marzano also sought to determine what district-level leadership responsibilities and specific leadership practices are related to student achievement. They reviewed 27 studies for the meta-analysis that included 2,714 districts with rating data for 4,343 superintendents and 3.4 million student achievement scores.

Results showed that out of the 27 reports, 14 included information about the relationship between district-level leadership and student achievement, with a computed correlation of .24, significant at the .05 level. This predicts a 9.5 percentage points of student achievement growth if a superintendent improved his or her leadership abilities one standard deviation. Additionally, five district level-leadership responsibilities had a statistically significant ($p < .05$) correlation with average student achievement, including the goal setting process (.24), non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction (.33), board alignment with and support of district goals (.29), monitoring the goals for

achievement and instruction (.27), and use of resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction (.26) (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Waters and Marzano (2006) also found that two studies reported correlations between superintendent tenure and average student achievement where the weighted average was .19 significant at the $p < .05$ level. This may mean that the longevity of the superintendent had a positive effect on average academic achievement, with effects appearing as early as two years into the superintendent's tenure (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Findings from the Waters and Marzano (2006) study indicated that “superintendents, district office staff, and school board members can contribute to school and student success when they are focused on fulfilling key leadership responsibilities” (p. 20) and when they use the five leadership practices. School boards should take note of the impact of a superintendents' tenure and superintendents should consider the importance of remaining in a district long enough to see impacts on student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

In 2010, a team of researchers from the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington asked the question, “What does it take for leaders to promote and support powerful, equitable learning in a school and in the district and state system that serves the school?” (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). Researchers conducted three separate investigations using qualitative and mixed-methods strategies with overlapping samples from three study sites, Atlanta, Oakland, and New York City.

The Central Office Transformation investigation (Honig et al., 2010) specifically examined the reinvention of central office work practices and relationships with their schools to support the improvement of teaching and learning districtwide. The research team collected interview data during the 2007–2008 school year which included 282 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 162 respondents. Researchers also collected documents and coded their data using NVivo 8 software beginning with an initial set of broad codes taken from the sociocultural learning theory in the conceptual framework. A second coding phase involved substantiating categories with at least three different data sources (interviews, observations, documents, self-reports) and connecting central office work practices with outcomes. This qualitative data analysis led to five practices or dimensions:

- Dimension 1: Learning-focused partnerships with school principals to deepen principals' instructional practice.
- Dimension 2: Assistance to the central office-principal partnerships.
- Dimension 3: Reorganizing and reculturing of each central office unit, to support the central office-principal partnerships and teaching and learning improvement.
- Dimension 4: Stewardship of the overall central office transformation process.
- Dimension 5: Use of evidence throughout the central office to support continual improvement of work practices and relationships with schools. (p. v)

In all three school districts, the main focus of transformation was on building capacity of school principals to lead for instructional improvement within their schools. Specific central office leaders were responsible for ongoing support of principals and were to focus 100% of their time to helping principals improve their practice. These leaders are designated as Instructional Leadership Directors (ILDs) in the study. Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, and Newton (2010) note promising practices of ILDs that are associated with learning research (Honig, 2008) regarding improvement in professionals' work. This includes modeling for principals how to think and act like an instructional leader, developing and using tools that supported principals' engagement in instructional leadership, and brokering external resources to help principals become more powerful instructional leaders (p. vi).

The work of Honig et al. (2010) is important as it is a comprehensive effort to fill the gap in the research literature regarding central office work practices by studying districts undergoing change and utilizing robust methodology. The study is related to the proposed research study as central office transformation and the focus on building capacity of school principals to improve teaching and learning can "move school systems to a place where all teachers are working to teach at the highest levels, and all principals are capable of leading that work" (Honig et al., 2010, p. 127).

The purpose of Honig's (2012) research was to consider the extent that central office administrators were overcoming trends and supporting principals' development as instructional leaders and the conditions that help or hinder their progress. The research questions were addressed through a comparative, qualitative case study of three urban

school districts and included an analysis of the work practices of executive-level central office administrators engaged in relationships with school principals to support their instructional leadership. Data sources included 283 interviews, 265 observation hours, and a review of over 200 documents.

Honig (2012) identified specific practices that central office leadership does that help principals strengthen their instructional leadership. The practices support a conception of the central office as having a role as teachers of principals; The central office provides instructional leadership to principals. The findings suggest that central offices elevate the work of supporting principals to an executive-level responsibility, shifting the understanding of the role of central offices from management and hands-off approaches to operating as main agents of principal learning. This is a significant shift in current central office district level practice and will require additional research and new approaches to studying educational leadership in practice. The findings support the ideas of this research of central office leaders as principal supervisors and as agents of principal learning in the area of instructional leadership.

Research by Honig and Rainey (2014) examined the extent to which central office administrators that run Principal Professional Learning Communities (PPLCs) support the goal of strengthening principals' instructional leadership. In their embedded, comparative, qualitative case study of six PPLCs held in one urban district, they found that central office administrators varied in their participation in the PPLC meetings, and varied in the extent that they engaged in teaching practices that would be conducive to principals' learning. The authors did not attempt to connect the PPLCs to changes in

principals' instructional leadership practices or to changes in student achievement. Similar to the theoretical framework for this study, researchers used six concepts from sociocultural learning theory to anchor their analysis of the six PPLCs. The district selected provided a strategic site, where a group of eight instructional leadership directors (ILDs) were tasked with convening PPLCs. Six of the eight ILDs agreed to participate in the study. Data was collected through firsthand observation at 25 PPLC meetings, which consisted of 35 PPLC gatherings. Data was collected and analyzed from 150 documents the ILDs used at PPLC meetings. Additionally, 16 principals from across the participating PPLCs were interviewed, along with interviews with 31 other central office staff that worked with ILDs.

Findings indicated that ILDs varied in how they participated in the PPLC meetings in terms of the extent that they reflected the practices outlined in the sociocultural learning theory. ILDs that frequently engaged in the practices had positive results on the indicators. ILDs that inconsistently or infrequently engaged in the practices had negative results. Although the researchers did not establish a causal relationship between the practices of the ILDs and the positive reports and observations, the patterns in the data support an association between the practices and positive results. Theoretically, this would indicate that the practices are conducive to principal learning and suggest that central office administrators can make a change from their typical work practices to engage in these teaching practices. Future research may examine other dynamics related to principals' learning, such as trust and norms within learning communities, and the extent to which accountability can curb learning. Importantly, how

can districts dedicate executive-level central office staff to support principals' growth as instructional leaders, so that their time is not spent on other tasks? How do much smaller districts, with fewer than 10 central office members, productively assign these responsibilities?

Along similar lines to the 2010 Honig et al. study of central office transformation, Honig, Venkateswaran, and McNeil (2017) studied how central offices are using research to support improved teaching and learning for all students. Using qualitative methods, Honig et al. (2017) studied six districts that were implementing reforms to shift the daily work of central office staff to support improvement to teaching and learning. The investigation included 124 interviews, 499.25 hours of observations, and reviews of approximately 300 documents. Sociocultural learning theory (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991; Wenger, 1998) was again used to determine the degree to which practitioners used research to engage in fundamental, as opposed to routine change (Honig et al., 2017). The six districts included in the study varied in size (50,000 students, 19,000 students, and 2,000–5,000 students) and the study was conducted over 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012. Participants included twenty-three central office administrators that were tracked, and all districts included the superintendent, head of teaching and learning, and principal supervisors.

The 23 participants used between one and four of the five discrete research-based ideas (the principal supervisor as teacher of principals' instructional leadership, instructional rounds or learning walks, executive central office leadership as teaching and learning, cycles of inquiry, and instructional services redesign). A review of 53 cases of

research use reflected four patterns, low stasis (did not reflect the research and remained at the same level), high stasis (practice reflected research but did not change over time), low growth (practices did not reach a deep level but was on a growth trajectory) and high growth (movement of practice to levels reflecting fundamental change) (Honig et al., 2017).

The idea to shift principal supervision from evaluation and operations to teaching principals to grow as instructional leaders is related to this proposed study. In Honig et al.'s (2017) study, 14 of the principal supervisors fell into low stasis and high stasis patterns, 12 of the principal supervisors exhibited low growth, and four exhibited high growth. The second idea is the executive central office leadership as teaching and learning. For six superintendents, two fell into low stasis, continuing to focus mostly on operations, and one in high stasis, understanding the role of learning to lead but with no change over time. Two superintendents fell into the low growth pattern, growing in their talk about their role but without changes in practice, and only one superintendent demonstrated a shift from understanding to using the research, spending “considerable time working with his or her staff on the improvement of teaching and learning” (Honig et al., 2017, p. 20-21).

In a review of conditions that might be associated with how much appropriation occurred in districts, the participation of the superintendent in leading his or her staff corresponded with the patterns, reinforcing the importance of assistance relationships within the organization (Honig et al., 2017). This finding indicates that “superintendents and other executive-level leaders may have important roles to play in leading the learning

of their own staff, even when they themselves are still learning the research” (Honig et al., 2017, p. 29).

Principal supervision practices, models, and standards. Knapp et al. (2010) introduced learning-focused leadership, with five practices including a persistent public focus on learning, investment in instructional leadership, reinvention of leadership practice, new working relationships within and across levels, and evidence as a medium of leadership. In the study leadership support was integrally connected to the practice of learning-focused leadership (Knapp et al., 2010). It is clear from the earlier discussion that the impact of leadership on student achievement is typically indirect and occurs through leaders’ ability to improve teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2008). In the schools and districts in Knapp et al.’s (2010) study, leaders engaged in leadership support along with, and as part of, their learning-focused leadership practice. The authors noted that leaders “didn’t take for granted that teacher leaders, school principals, or central office staff would know how to lead effectively or would have the means and legitimacy to engage others in learning improvement” (p. 18). As a result of this, focused support for leadership work was essential to learning-focused leadership, and the steps taken were leadership acts that guided the improvement of teaching and learning. In the study, five forms of leadership support were noticed including, (a) *providing resources for leaders as well as teachers*, (b) *engaging leaders in professional learning*, (c) *fostering relationships with peers*, (d) *attending to administrative needs in a responsive, differentiated way*, and (e) *sponsoring and legitimizing leaders’ work*.

Beginning in May 2012, leaders from 11 school districts from the Leading for Effective Teaching (LET) initiative and charter management organizations (CMOs) met quarterly to learn more about research regarding principal supervision and central office leadership in teaching and learning improvement (Rainey & Honig, 2015). Using prior research on the value of principal supervision that emphasized principal growth and learning (Honig et al., 2010; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014), the principal supervisors changed how they supported principals in the 11 school districts. School system leaders were interviewed about “how they had taken action to create a system of support to help principal supervisors succeed” (Rainey & Honig, 2015, p. 7). The interview questions were identified from prior research and included nine school systems and design ideas:

1. Define the principal supervisor’s role as focused on principal growth and learning.
2. Define the principal’s role as focused on instructional leadership.
3. Principal supervisors report to, or near, the superintendent.
4. Principal supervisors work with a manageable caseload of principals.
5. Principal supervisors oversee a subset of strategically grouped principals.
6. Ensure principal supervisors view their job as teaching principals to grow as instructional leaders.
7. Principal supervisors receive professional development focused on improving their capacity to help principals grow as instructional leaders.
8. Proactively protect principal supervisors’ time.

9. Work to transform other central office units for better performance in ways aligned with the principal supervisor-principal relationship. (Rainey & Honig, 2015, p. 3)

Based on the information collected from the interview meetings in the 11 districts, the experiences of principal supervisors “can help others better anticipate and address implementation challenges as part of their own efforts to improve the supports they provide for principals’ success” (Rainey & Honig, 2015, p. 33). Several other relevant questions can also be considered including how districts can access and use the research to strengthen the performance of principal supervisors and central office leaders. Rainey and Honig (2015) also ask how external organizations may assist school districts improve the performance of the central office, and how can superintendents broaden their efforts in this area.

In 2012, the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) received a grant from The Wallace Foundation to study how principal supervisors are selected, supported, and evaluated, including their roles and responsibilities (Corcoran et al., 2013). The study had two parts, a survey administered to district staff serving as principal supervisors, and visits to six districts in The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Denver Public Schools, Gwinnett County Public Schools, Hillsborough County Public Schools, the New York City Department of Education, and Prince George’s County Public Schools). The multi-year Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative’s purpose was to improve training and support for principals and test the effect on student achievement (Corcoran et al., 2013). Through the course of the first

part of the investigation, the role of the principal supervisor was highlighted, with a recognition that little was known about the role at the time. The Wallace Foundation requested that the CGCS visit the six sites to better understand the role of principal supervisors in practice.

Surveys were received from 135 principal supervisors in 41 districts for a response rate of 60 %. Respondents were asked about the role of the principal supervisor, professional development, and their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their evaluation systems. Participants were also asked how the role and responsibilities of principal supervisors changed from 2010 to 2012, with results applying to the school year ending June 2012. Site visits were conducted between November 2012 and March 2013 and were typically one day visits. Interviewers used a rubric with questions for each group that included superintendents, deputy superintendents, principal supervisors, principal coaches, curriculum and instruction directors and staff, research and accountability directors, human resources directors, Wallace principal pipeline project directions, and focus groups of principals. The researchers reviewed documents including organizational charts, job descriptions, personnel evaluation forms, meeting agendas, classroom observation rubrics, school improvement plans, and other materials (Corcoran et al., 2013). These data were then analyzed.

Based on the survey and site visits, the research team observed strengths and weaknesses in the districts' approaches to supporting principals and principal supervisors. While acknowledging that there are no direct data linking these systems to student achievement gains, the analysis of across districts was used to develop nine

recommendations for effective principal support and supervision systems. These included:

1. Define and clearly communicate throughout the organization the role and required competencies of principal supervisors.
2. Narrow principal supervisor responsibilities and spans of control.
3. Strategically select and deploy principal supervisors, matching skills and expertise to the needs of schools.
4. Provide principal supervisors with the professional development and training they need to assume new instructional leadership roles.
5. Establish information-sharing policies or procedures to ensure clear lines of communication and collaboration between principal supervisors and central office staff.
6. Provide early and sustained support to new principals in the form of coaches.
7. Hold principals—and principal supervisors—accountable for the progress of schools and ensure alignment in the processes and measures used to assess teacher, principal, and principal supervisor performance.
8. Provide clear, timely, and actionable evaluation data to principals.
9. Commit district resources and engage external partners in the process of developing future school and district leaders. (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 49)

As there is no data to show a direct link between any principal supervisory model and student achievement gains, prior CGCS research shows that district structures that support and enhance instructional quality typically determine impact on student

achievement. This aligns with other research that indicates that a focus on instructional leadership has indirect effects on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Therefore, identifying instructionally focused professional development or academic measures of progress for principal supervisors as effective features of district supervisory systems would likely produce gains in student achievement as evidenced by a principal supervisors' capacity to drive instructional quality at the school level (Corcoran et al., 2013).

As recent research suggests (Waters & Marzano, 2006; Knapp et al., 2010; Honig et al., 2010; Honig 2012; Corcoran et al., 2013; Johnston et al., 2016), there is value in supporting principals' learning-focused leadership practices. To this end, the principal supervisor role arises as a need in education practice. As this role has surfaced in recent research, the CCSSO recognized a need to create a "clear and practical definition of what a principal supervisor should know and be able to do in order to improve the effectiveness of the school leaders with whom they work" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 2), and subsequently published voluntary standards to address this gap in knowledge. The Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (CCSSO, 2015) stem from the District Leadership Design Lab (DL2) Principal Supervisor Performance Standards Version 1.0 (University of Washington, 2014). The DL2 Principal Supervisor Performance Standards 2.0 were published in 2017 by the University of Washington and include six standards for practice along with five levels of expertise. The standards were identified through research conducted at the University of Washington (Honig et al, 2010; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014) along with practitioners from districts that have been working to

develop the role of principal supervisors. The version 1.0 and 2.0 standards were created in consultation with members of the Principal Supervisors Performance Standards Working Group of the ISLLC Refresh process. The process aimed to update portions of the ISLLC standards that specifically related to central office leaders who function as principal supervisors (University of Washington, 2017). The standards include:

Standard 1. Dedicate their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders.

Standard 2. Engage in teaching practices in their one-on-one work with principals to help principals grow as instructional leaders.

Standard 3. Engage in teaching practices while leading principal communities of practice (e.g., professional learning communities, networks) to help principals grow as instructional leaders.

Standard 4. Systematically use multiple forms of evidence of each principal's capacity for instructional leadership to differentiate or tailor their approach to helping their principals grow as instructional leaders.

Standard 5. Engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help principals grow as instructional leaders.

Standard 6. Selectively and strategically participate in other central office work processes to maximize the extent to which they and principals focus on principals' growth as instructional leaders. (University of Washington, 2017, p. 7)

In an effort to support the standards as a tool for practitioners, five levels of practice are included in the work, (a) *not adopting*, (b) *adopting the talk*, (c) *engaging at*

the surface level, (d) *engaging with understanding*, and (e) *mastery*. These are based on five degrees of appropriation outlined in the work of Grossman et al. (1999), and that are also be considered in this study. The CCSSO's Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (2015) do not make this distinction, but do suggest that "when the role of the principal supervisor has evolved to such a degree that the position is devoted to helping principals grow as instructional leaders, districts may find the University of Washington's DL2 Principal Supervisor Performance Standards useful" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 6).

The CCSSO (2015) notes that the Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (MPSPS) 2015 are grounded in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) 2015, indicating that it is the supervisors' responsibility "to help principals master all of the competencies put forth in Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 6). There are three categories for the MPSPS 2015 that include the (a) *work surrounding educational leadership*, (b) *ensuring the smooth and effective functioning of the district*, and (c) *improving the capacity and effectiveness of the principal supervisor as a district leader*. The MPSPS 2015 also includes the same dispositions required of school leaders in the PSEL 2015: growth-oriented, collaborative, innovative, analytical, ethical, perseverant, reflective, equity-minded, and systems-focused. The eight standards include:

Standard 1. Principal Supervisors dedicate their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders.

Standard 2. Principal Supervisors coach and support individual principals and engage in effective professional learning strategies to help principals grow as

instructional leaders.

Standard 3. Principal Supervisors use evidence of principals' effectiveness to determine necessary improvements in principals' practice to foster a positive educational environment that supports the diverse cultural and learning needs of students.

Standard 4. Principal Supervisors engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help them grow as instructional leaders.

Standard 5. Principal Supervisors advocate for and inform the coherence of organizational vision, policies and strategies to support schools and student learning.

Standard 6. Principal Supervisors assist the district in ensuring the community of schools with which they engage are culturally/socially responsive and have equitable access to resources necessary for the success of each student.

Standard 7. Principal Supervisors engage in their own development and continuous improvement to help principals grow as instructional leaders.

Standard 8. Principal Supervisors lead strategic change that continuously elevates the performance of schools and sustains high quality educational programs and opportunities across the district. (CCSSO, 2015, pp. 13-22)

Goldring et al. (2018b) describe the emergence of a new role for principal supervisors in six districts participating in a Principal Supervisor Initiative (PSI). The PSI was a four year, 24 million-dollar effort, launched by the Wallace Foundation, to redefine principal supervision in six urban school districts. The mixed methods study

documents the districts' experiences in implementing the initiative and examines the effects of the initiative on principals' performance. Participants in the study included principals and principal supervisors from Broward County Public Schools, Baltimore City Public Schools, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Des Moines Public Schools, Long Beach Unified School District, and Minneapolis Public Schools. Research methods included site visits and surveys conducted during the 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 school years. Site visits included semi-structured interviews with two central office staff, six principal supervisors, and ten principals from each district. The researchers recorded and transcribed 219 interviews and collected additional artifacts. Two rounds of surveys were given to 644 principals and 51 principal supervisors.

Results related to the training of supervisors and developing their capacity to support principals showed most emphasis was on two areas, observing classrooms to identify instructional quality and improving student growth and achievement. Descriptive survey data showed that principals reported that their supervisors spent more time on instructional leadership than on operations during the time of the PSI. Seventy percent of principals agreed that their supervisor was their main contact for instructional quality issues in 2017. A challenge the researchers recognized was that instructional leadership was not clearly defined in districts, even though principal evaluation systems were in place. Additionally, the difference between instruction and instructional leadership was not differentiated. This led to differences in how a supervisor approached the development of instructional leadership with their principals. Authors of the study

noted that districts will need to further define and specify standards for instructional leadership for both principals and principal supervisors.

Conceptual Framework and Visual Model

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the work of Knapp et al. (2010). Viewed through this lens, the assistance relationships between the principal supervisor and the principal in turn supports equitable outcomes for students through a focus on improved instructional activities. Learning improvement takes place at all levels including the principal supervisor, principal, teachers, and students. This model assumes that leadership is distributed at all levels.

Leadership support practices in this model include providing resources, engaging in professional learning, fostering relationships, attending to administrative needs, and sponsoring and legitimizing learning-focused leadership (Knapp et al., 2010). Learning-focused leadership includes a persistent focus on learning, investment in instructional leadership, reinvention of leadership practice, new working relationships within and across levels, and using evidence as a medium of leadership (Knapp et al., 2010).

I analyzed the current practice of principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York to identify themes in practice and assess the alignment of practice with the research literature on the impact of district and school leadership practices on student achievement outcomes. The visual model in Figure 1 illustrates the interconnectedness between learning-focused leadership practices and leadership support practices at both the district and school leadership levels.

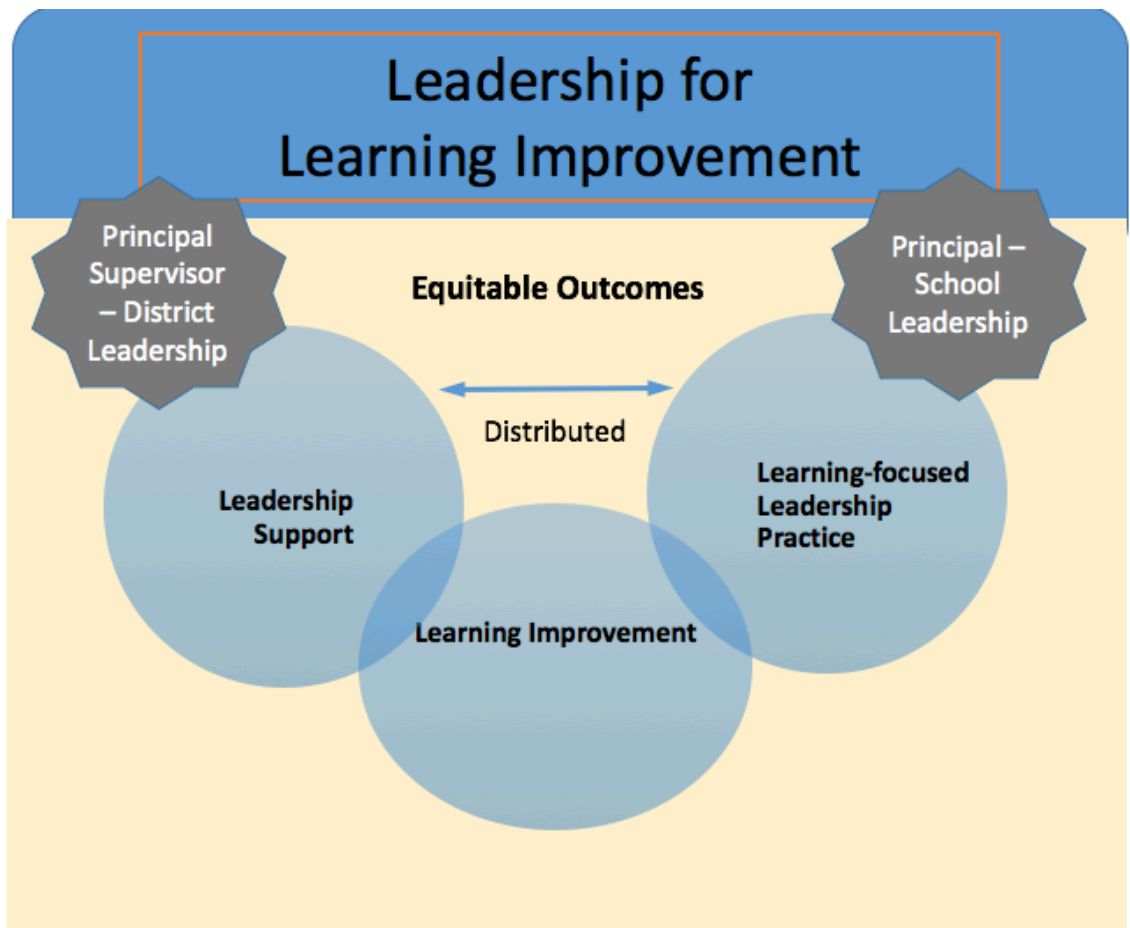


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework based on Leadership for Learning Improvement. From Knapp, M. S., Copland, M. A., Honig, M. I., Plecki, M. L., & Portin, B. S. (2010). Learning-focused leadership and leadership support: Meaning and practice in urban systems. Retrieved from University of Washington, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Focused-Leadership-and-Support-in-Urban-Systems.pdf>

Summary

This review presents the most current literature in the area of principal leadership and principal supervision. Research has shown that principal leadership has an impact on student achievement (Witziers et al., 2003; Waters et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008). This research has driven policy changes at the national level that

feature efforts to improve principal leadership effectiveness, along with subsequent revisions to standards and practices for principals (Waters et al., 2003; Knapp et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2011; CCSSO, 2015). The desire to create equitable outcomes for all students has spurred the need for principals to grow in their leadership capacity to improve student achievement and diminish persistent gaps between social and ethnic groups. The role of the principal supervisor in an assistance relationship with the principal is an emerging paradigm and a recent entry in the research literature (Knapp, 2008; Honig, 2008). Research shows that the principal supervisor can provide leadership support that may drive principal leadership improvement and impact student achievement outcomes (Honig et al., 2010; Knapp et al., 2010; Honig, 2012; Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Honig et al., 2017; Goldring et al., 2018b). As a result, the goal of this study has been to add to the existing literature regarding this new paradigm in learning-focused leadership and leadership support through principal supervision practices.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I present the qualitative procedures for the phenomenological approach used to study principal supervisors' perceptions about the significance of their role, the importance of school leadership and their impact on student achievement outcomes. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand their principal supervisor role and the practice of leadership support?
2. To what extent do principal supervisors understand how their role in learning-focused leadership and the leadership support process is connected to student achievement outcomes.
3. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand or recognize the learning-focused leadership practices of principals?

The sections in this chapter include a rationale for the research, the research setting, sample, data collection, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, limitations and delimitations, and a summary.

Rationale for Research Approach

The methodology for the study was a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach is useful for studying the lived experiences of several individuals around a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). With a phenomenological approach, the researcher attempts to understand the meaning of events and peoples' interactions in particular situations, emphasizing the subjective aspects of people's behavior (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The phenomenon studied is the lived experiences of central office administrators who are responsible for supervising elementary (K-5 or K-6) principals in their district. This phenomenological study included the practice of *bracketing*, where the researcher sets aside their own experiences regarding principal supervision, in order to find out what is taken for granted and achieve a fresh perspective (Creswell, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Additionally, transcendental phenomenological procedures, as illustrated by Moustakas (1994) (as cited in Creswell, 2007) were used. These include identifying the phenomenon of principal supervision, bracketing the researcher's own experiences regarding principal supervision, collecting data from several principal supervisors, and analyzing the data into significant statements or themes (Creswell, 2007). Following these procedures a description of what the participants experienced (*textural* description), along with how the participants experienced the phenomenon of principal supervision in terms of conditions, situations, or context (*structural* description) follows. These descriptions provide the overall essence of the experience of principal supervision (Creswell, 2007).

Moustakas's (1994) approach (as cited in Creswell, 2007) was suitable for this qualitative phenomenological research study because of its systematic design for data analysis and guidelines for creating textural and structural descriptions. The problem of examining the perceptions of principal supervisors can best be examined with this phenomenological approach. This approach enabled the development a deep understanding of the features of principal supervision that may inform the development of practices regarding principal supervision that impact student achievement. The use of

bracketing is significant, as my current role includes principal supervision, making it important that I separate my experiences and maintain a fresh perspective on the phenomenon of principal supervision. I was able to suspend my personal experiences (bracketing) regarding supervision during the data collection and analysis, but also used an interpretive approach (van Manen, 1990, as cited in Creswell, 2007) in order to introduce personal understandings as they added to the essence of the phenomenon and conclusions drawn from the research study. An interpretive approach means that a researcher may include their own history, culture, personal experiences, and politics (Creswell, 2007).

Research Setting

Data was collected for this qualitative phenomenological study in the natural setting in the field site where participants experienced the phenomenon. Principal supervisors generally perform their work with the principal they are supervising in the school where the principal works. Principal supervisors may also interact with principals in their administrative office, where they may interact with principals individually. By meeting with principal supervisors in their administrative office, I was able to observe how principal supervisors behave in a natural setting and this allowed for face-to-face interactions with participants. All interviews took place in the participants' office in the district where they supervise principals.

Research Sample

Participants included in this qualitative phenomenological study were practicing central office administrators in Nassau County public schools that serve students who are

enrolled in grades K-12. This included central office administrators who supervise two or more elementary principals and have been a principal supervisor for at least two school years. An elementary principal may work in a school with any combination of students in grades K-6. Participants were carefully chosen on the basis that each of them experiences the phenomenon of principal supervision in Nassau County, NY (Creswell, 2007).

Nassau County is located in New York State and, as of the 2016–2017 school year, included 56 public school districts with 200,738 students in grades K-12, (Nassau County, 2019). Of that enrollment, 49% of students were White, 13% Asian, 24% Hispanic, 12% Black, and 1% Multi-racial. Additionally, 8% of students were English language learners, 13% were students with disabilities, and 31% were economically disadvantaged. Nassau County is a suburb of New York City. The graduation rate for the 2018 school year was 88%, which is above the New York State graduation rate of 80%. The percentage of students graduating with a Regents diploma with Advanced Designation in Nassau County was 58%, while the New York State rate was 33%.

The population for the study was K-12 central office administrators from the 56 school districts in Nassau County who supervise elementary principals. Purposeful homogenous sampling was used to select central office administrators who belong to a subgroup that supervises K-6 principals as their defining characteristic. Another defining characteristic was that all participants were supervisors to at least two elementary principals for at least two school years. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends interviewing 5 to 25 individuals, hence, 10 candidates were selected who met the criteria from a

potential pool of central office administrators from the 56 Nassau County public school districts. Participants were first selected from districts that solely serve students in grades K-6, then from districts with elementary building configurations that include grades K-6, and finally from districts with elementary configurations of K-5.

The rights of participants in the study were protected by obtaining approval for the study from the St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. The purpose of the research and general information was presented in communications to the participants. Individual participants all signed consent forms and understood that they may voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality of participants was protected by using identifiers in place of names and excluding the name of the school district from the data reporting. Participants were provided with a statement of the known risks, if any, as well as the benefits associated with participating in the study.

Data Collection

Rigorous data collection procedures were used for this qualitative phenomenological study to examine the perceptions of principal supervisors with regard to the significance of their role in supervising principals and their impact on student achievement. This included spending adequate time in the field, collection of interview data, and providing robust summarizations of data (Creswell, 2007). The types of data collected included recorded conversations with participants, along with artifacts related to their supervision of principals when they were discussed during the data collection interview. According to Creswell (2007), "phenomenology can involve a streamlined

form of data collection by including only single or multiple interviews with participants” (p. 62). Rather than using the imprecise and abstract term of data triangulation (Bogden & Biklen, 2007), in this study I utilized robust single interviews with all participants to understand the essence of their experience.

Interviews with each participant were conducted with open-ended questions using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using the Rev application. All electronic files were stored on computers on accounts that were password protected to maintain confidentiality of the data collected. Participants were contacted by phone or email using publicly available information from school district websites for their workplace contact information.

Interview questions were developed from concepts found in the review of research literature including terms such as role of principal supervisor, practice of leadership support, and learning-focused leadership (Knapp, et al., 2010).

Data Analysis

The qualitative data record was prepared electronically during the data collection process and the content of the transcribed interview data along with notes of the researcher were uploaded to NVivo 12 for Mac software, hereafter referred to as NVivo. NVivo was used as a tool to code the data and identify themes as described in the methods below.

Data was analyzed following the general analytic approach of Moustakas’s (1994) method (as cited in Creswell, 2007). These steps include:

- Describe personal experiences related to the phenomenon of principal supervision. Bracketing enables the researcher to set aside any prior personal experiences and focus on the participants in the study.
- Develop a list of significant statements in the data sources regarding how participants experience the phenomenon of principal supervision, developing a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements.
- Identify themes from the significant statements.
- Describe what happened to participants and create a textural description including verbatim examples.
- Describe how the participants experienced the phenomenon and create a structural description to include the setting and context in which respondents experienced the phenomenon of principal supervision.
- Write a composite description of the experience of principal supervision using the textural and structural descriptions to provide the “essence” of the experience.

Responses to the open-ended interview questions provided insight into all three research questions. Table 3 shows how the responses to the open-ended interview questions align with the three research questions. Each research question is listed below with its corresponding identifier for reference in the table.

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand their principal supervisor role and the practice of leadership support?

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

To what extent do principal supervisors understand how their role in learning-focused leadership and the leadership support process is connected to student achievement outcomes?

Research Question 3 (RQ3)

To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand or recognize the learning-focused leadership practices of principals?

Table 3

Alignment of Open-ended Interview Questions to Research Questions

Question Number	Open-ended Interview Question	Research Question Alignment
1	What do you feel your role is as a supervisor of principals?	RQ1, RQ3
2	Do you have different practices for principals' supervision than you do for the evaluation of your principals?	RQ1, RQ3
3	To what extent do you feel principals' work impacts student achievement outcomes?	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
4	With regard to principals, what does learning-focused leadership practice mean to you?	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
5	Tell me about your approach to leadership support for the principals you supervise.	RQ1, RQ3
6	Do you have any specific practices you use in your role as a supervisor of principals that support principals as learning-focused leaders?	RQ1, RQ3
7	How does your work as principal supervisor impact student achievement outcomes?	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
8	Have you or your district made any significant changes in the area of principal supervision recently?	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
9	To what extent do you think you or your district values the work of principal supervision?	RQ1, RQ3
10	Is there anything you would change between your current practices in principal supervision and what you might consider ideal principal supervision practices?	RQ1, RQ3
11	Ending statements regarding principal supervision.	RQ1, RQ3

Coding was used as analysis to follow steps in the analytical approach described above. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), coding itself is data analysis,

providing opportunities for reflection, analysis, and interpretation of the meaning of the data collected. A coding system was developed by identifying coding categories using words or phrases that represent topics and patterns present in the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Several methods of coding were used to identify themes in the qualitative data record. Methods used for coding data in this qualitative phenomenological study include *attribute coding*, *evaluation coding*, *descriptive coding* and *in vivo coding*. Attribute coding provides demographic descriptions regarding participants and is appropriate for qualitative studies that involve multiple participants (Miles, et al., 2014). Evaluation coding provides insight into participants' judgement by applying nonquantitative codes onto qualitative data (Miles, et al., 2014). Descriptive coding summarizes the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data usually in a word or short phrase that is most often a noun (Saldana, 2016). This type of coding is appropriate for interview transcripts, field notes, and artifacts, and is useful for categorizing data at a basic level (Saldana, 2016). In vivo coding "refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (Saldana, 2016, p. 105). This type of coding is used primarily for interview data as it includes the voice of participants.

Categories for coding were identified based on the research questions and topics and patterns in the interview data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Categories were modified through the open-coding process to accurately reflect the participants lived experiences, to align with the study's research questions, and to address themes as they emerged from the analysis. Four analytic categories emerged from the coding process, leadership

support, the principal supervisor role, principal leadership practices and student achievement impacts. Table 4 identifies the coding categories and provides a description that defines content contained in each coding category as it relates to the study and research questions.

Table 4

Themes and Coding Categories Used to Interpret Data Collection

Coding Category	Description
Evaluation vs. Supervision	Participant statements: Do you have different practices for principals' supervision than you do for the evaluation of your principals?
Leadership Support	Analytic Category: Principal supervisors' understanding of leadership support practices.
Leadership Team Support	Related to leadership support provided by other central office administrators.
Operational Support	Related to leadership support with regard to management, operations, day to day.
Political Support	Related to leadership support at a political or organizational level.
Professional Learning	Theme: Related to leadership support for principals' professional learning.
Colleague Network	Professional learning through in-person professional networks.
Conferences Workshops	Professional learning through conferences, workshops, consultants, social media, PLCs, professional books, etc.
Mentoring	Professional learning through a mentoring program.
Regular Meetings	Professional learning through regular meetings with supervisor and/or central office administrators in-district.
PS Relationship Support	Related to leadership support through relationship with the principal supervisor.
Resourcing	Related to leadership support regarding resources (consultants, funding, materials, etc.).
Principal Leadership	Analytic Category: principal supervisors' understanding of principals' leadership practices.
Building Context	Schools are inherently different.
Leading Teaching and Learning	Related to teaching and learning; instruction, classroom culture, SEL, teachers, students.
Management	Building management, operations, day-to-

Principal Goals	day activities of principals. Related to school or principal's goals, mission and/or vision.
Relationships	Principal's relationships within their school community.
Using Data	Related to data informed instruction, evidence use.
Principal Supervisor Role	Analytic Category: principal supervisors' understanding of principal supervisor role and supervision. (Research Question 1)
District Context	Related to the role of supervisor, context of district or position characteristics.
District Mission, Vision, Goals	Related to the district's mission, vision, and goals (central office or board of education level).
Individualized PS LFL Practices	Principals are inherently different. Statements regarding principal supervisors' learning focused leadership practice.
PS LFL Statement	Principal supervisors' statements on learning focused leadership practices of principals.
PS ROLE Statement	Principal supervisors' statements regarding their role.
PS Value of Statement	Principal supervisors' statements regarding the value of principal supervision.
Student Achievement	Analytic Category: Principal supervisors' understanding of the impact of leadership on student achievement outcomes.
Principal Impact	Principal supervisors' statements regarding the impact of principal leadership on student achievement outcomes.
Value Response	Principal supervisors' value assessment regarding the impact of principal leadership on student achievement outcomes.
Principal Supervisor Impact	Principal supervisors' statements regarding the impact of principal supervision on student achievement outcomes.
PS Value Response	Principal supervisors' value assessment regarding the impact of principal supervision on student achievement outcomes.

The focus of the current research was to understand the phenomenon of the lived experiences of principal supervisors in order to better understand how their role impacts principal leadership and in turn student achievement outcomes. According to Bogden and Biklen (2007), interviews are used in qualitative research in two ways, as the dominant strategy for data collection, or in conjunction with other data. By using face-to-face interviews with superintendent principal supervisors, I collected information about principal supervisors' feelings, beliefs, and practices that are part of their work in supervising their elementary principals. The current research study provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their current practice. The data collected from the interview transcripts were the dominant strategy used to identify the lived experiences of participants in the study.

Open-ended interview questions assisted with understanding principal supervisors' lived experiences in their role as a supervisor of elementary principals, their practice in leadership support, how their work is connected to student achievement outcomes, and their understanding of principals' leadership practices. Table 5 shows the distribution of coded references among the open-ended interview questions. This indicates that with the interview questions I was able to solicit responses from participants that were specifically targeted to answering each research question and also broad enough to allow participants to fully describe all aspects of their lived experiences as principal supervisors.

Table 5

Coding Category Alignment with Interview Questions

Coding Category	Interview Questions	Research Question Alignment	Coding References
Evaluation vs. Supervision	2		9
Leadership Team Support	1,2,4,5,6,8,9,10,11	1	31
Operational Support	1,4,6,10,11	1	9
Political Support	1,4,5,6,7,8,9	1	19
Colleague Network	1,4,5,6,11	1	7
Conferences Workshops	1,3,4,5,6,9,11	1	22
Mentoring	1,11	1	5
Regular Meetings	1,2,5,6,7,8	1	17
PS Relationship Support	1,2,4,5,6,8,9,10,11	1	42
Resourcing	1,3,5,7	1	11
Building Context	3,5,6,11	3	4
Leading Teaching and Learning	1,3,4,9,10,11	3	28
Management	1,4,8,9	3	16
Principal Goals	3,4,5,6,8,9	3	10
Relationships	3,7,9	3	6
Using Data	1,2,3,4,6,7,8	3	12
District Context	2,5,6,9,10	1	6
District Mission, Vision, Goals	1,2,4,5,6,8,9,10,11	1	22
Individualized	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10	1	22
PS LFL Practices	1,2,4,5,6,7,8,10,11	1	34
PS LFL Statement	4	1	13
PS ROLE Statement	1	1	19
PS Value of Statement	9	1	11
Principal Impact	3,4,8	2	14
Feeling Response	3	2	9
Principal Supervisor Impact	3,7	2	18
PS Feeling Response	7	2	9

Issues of Trustworthiness

Throughout the study I considered Polkinghorne's (1989) notion that validation refers to whether or not an idea is well grounded and well supported (Creswell, 2007). Strategies employed to serve this purpose included making sure that I did not influence participants' responses to the interview questions, using Moustakas's (1994) (as cited in Creswell, 2007) approach to data analysis, being reflexive, and conveying the essence of the experience of participants (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) recommends using at least two strategies with regard to validity in a qualitative study. In this qualitative phenomenological study, I utilized the strategy of member checking, returning the findings to the participants, and asking them to confirm the accuracy of the report. Additionally, the account represented in this study includes a rich, thick descriptive narrative that allows readers to make decisions regarding whether the research findings have validity.

Reliability in this study was enhanced by using electronic means to record interviews to minimize potential human errors in the data collection process. I used a checklist (Creswell, 2015, p. 221, adapted from Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012) to ensure good interviewing procedures were used throughout the research study.

Limitations and Delimitations

Although I provided a detailed narrative of the phenomenon of principal supervision in order to support the transferability of the research findings, a limitation of the study may be that the participation criteria of being a principal supervisor in a specific geographic area (Nassau County) may limit the applicability of findings to other settings,

particularly to settings that are dissimilar to Nassau County. As discussed in the literature review, the context of the school setting matters to school leadership practices and student achievement outcomes (Marks & Printy, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2008; Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

Summary

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of principal supervisors with regard to the significance and importance of their role in supervising principals and their impact on student achievement using phenomenological methods. In applying Moustakas's (1994) (as cited in Creswell, 2007) approach, I used bracketing, coding, identifying themes, using textural and structural description, and finally writing the essence of the phenomenon of the lived experiences of principal supervisors in Nassau County. Collected data was transferred into electronic form and NVivo software was used to store and analyze the data for the coding process. Member checking and a rich, thick narrative description have added to the validity of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the self-reported work of principal supervisors in Nassau County, NY with regard to the significance of their role in supervising principals and their impact on student achievement. Studying principal supervisors' perceptions of their role indicates the extent to which local practice in principal supervision aligns with current educational research. The analysis identifies themes in the work practices of principal supervisors in Nassau County, NY and serves to inform local practice as it relates to the supervision of elementary school principals.

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 10 in-depth interviews of principal supervisors and is organized by sections that include participant characteristics, findings for each research question, and a chapter summary. In the first section I describe the characteristics of participants including their experience with principal supervision and their role in their district. Evidence supporting the findings for each research question is presented using themes supported by verbatim quotes relevant to the particular research question. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and I touch on the material that will be presented in Chapter Five.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand their principal supervisor role and the practice of leadership support?
2. To what extent do principal supervisors understand how their role in learning-focused leadership and the leadership support process is connected to student achievement outcomes.

3. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand or recognize the learning-focused leadership practices of principals?

Participant interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Rev application.

The interview transcripts were organized into separate files that included each participant's answers to each individual interview question. Each question was reviewed for repeated phrases or ideas and I created a tally chart to identify how many participants had a similar phrase or idea. This analysis resulted in the creation of analytic memos regarding the research data. Analytic memos include reflections and thinking processes about the data (Miles, et al., 2014) that are useful for determining the essence of the phenomenon of principal supervision.

Subsequently, I used NVivo software to analyze the transcript data. The first round of data coding generated a list of frequently used words or short phrases. A group of significant statements were created based on the first coding along with the initial manual coding, identifying 27 categories. I identified four main themes: leadership support, principal leadership, principal supervisor leadership, and student achievement. Each coding category was added to one of the four themes to reflect their relationship to the research questions. All of the transcript data was coded within NVivo resulting in 425 coding references. Each reference was then reviewed to ensure that it matched the category it was coded to using the codebook (Table 3). Lastly, the categories were clustered into direct alignment with each research question (Table 5) for analysis, resulting in the key research findings that are presented in this chapter.

Table 6 describes the number of references coded for each principal supervisor participant. Participant interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 54 minutes, with an average interview length of 36 minutes. Total interview time for all participants was 360 minutes.

Table 6

Number of References Coded for Each Participant

Participating Principal Supervisor	Number of References Coded
Supervisor 1	46
Supervisor 2	45
Supervisor 3	48
Supervisor 4	18
Supervisor 5	38
Supervisor 6	35
Supervisor 7	54
Supervisor 8	63
Supervisor 9	31
Supervisor 10	47

Participant Characteristics

The participants in this study included ten principal supervisors from ten public school districts in Nassau County, New York. All principal supervisor participants were required to be supervisors of their current elementary school principals for at least two years. Principal supervisors' supervision experience with their elementary school principals ranged from two years to eight years. Principal supervisors in the study supervised between two and five elementary school principals. Five of the participants had themselves been a principal in a public school in Nassau County, and one participant served as a principal in New York State. Eight of the principal supervisor participants

supervised elementary school principals with building configurations of grades kindergarten through sixth grade, with two principal supervisor participants supervising elementary school principals with building configurations of kindergarten through fifth grade. All principal supervisors in the study were superintendents of their school district and supervising principals was not their only role in the district. Table 7 summarizes the participant characteristics.

Table 7

Summary of Participant Characteristics

Participating Principal Supervisor	Years Supervising Principals	Number of Supervisees	Served as a principal	Sole role is principal supervisor	Elementary building configuration
Supervisor 1	8	3	Yes	No	K-6
Supervisor 2	3	4	No	No	K-6
Supervisor 3	2	3	No	No	K-6
Supervisor 4	8	3	No	No	K-6
Supervisor 5	8	4	Yes	No	K-6
Supervisor 6	4	3	No	No	K-6
Supervisor 7	2	3	Yes	No	K-5
Supervisor 8	7	2	Yes	No	K-6
Supervisor 9	7	5	Yes	No	K-6
Supervisor 10	5	4	Yes	No	K-5

Research Question 1

To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand their principal supervisor role and the practice of leadership support?

Finding 1. Principal supervisors identified six themes regarding the practice of leadership support: professional learning support, relationship support, leadership team

support, political support, resourcing support, and operational support. A majority (80%) of participants identified four or more of the six themes each.

Table 8 presents a summary of the number of references for each of the six themes for all participants. Professional learning support had 51 references, relationship support had 42 references, leadership team support had 31 references, political support had 19 references, resourcing support had 11 references, and operational support had 9 references. The total number of references of leadership support by the principal supervisors was 163 references. One participant referenced all six themes, five participants referenced five of the six themes, two participants referenced four of the six themes, with two participants referencing three of the six themes.

Table 8

Summary of Leadership Support Theme Data

Theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	All
Professional Learning	12	9	2	3	6	4	1	5	2	7	51
Relationship	2	6	7	1	2	4	5	7	4	4	42
Leadership Team	1	2	1	0	5	0	6	6	4	6	31
Political	3	3	0	0	2	3	4	2	0	2	19
Resourcing	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	7	0	2	11
Operational	0	1	2	0	1	1	2	2	0	0	9

Professional learning support. All principal supervisors (100%) identified professional learning as a practice of leadership support (31% of 163 references). Additionally, they collectively identified four individual professional learning types: external learning, regular meetings, colleague networks, and mentoring programs.

External learning opportunities had 22 references, regular meetings had 17 references, colleague networks had 7 references, and mentoring programs had 5 references. The total number of professional learning support references was 51. Table 9 provides a summary of the data for each participant.

Table 9

Summary of Individual Categories of Professional Learning Support Data

Support Theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	All
External Learning	4	4	0	2	2	3	1	2	1	3	22
Regular Meetings	4	3	2	1	2	0	0	2	1	2	17
Colleague Network	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	7
Mentoring	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	5

External learning opportunities accounted for 43% of 51 professional learning support references. Types of professional learning mentioned at least once in this category included, workshops, conferences, continuing education, professional development with teachers, professional learning communities, principal academies, online learning communities (twitter), and book shares. Participant 8 identified the need for professional learning, stating, “Pretty much everything we do connects in some way to their improving their skills and ability and to also develop ourselves as a really well-functioning, cohesive leadership team.” Participant 10 notes that the principal supervision role includes:

Part of my role looks at staff development and professional development opportunities for our administrators and not only in terms of district practices but also best practices nationally and locally in terms of giving them the tools that they need in order to be successful.

Also mentioned was a clear expectation for principals to learn with teachers, with participant 5 indicating, “in terms of specific practices, there are times where I mandate their attendance to be engaged in the learning shoulder to shoulder with the teachers who are delivering the information to our students.” Similarly, participant 6 noted, “I bring in a lot of professional developers during the school day, and my principals must sit in on it.”

Participant 10 stated:

One of the things we're very committed in our district in terms of professional development opportunities. We have teachers obviously that go out for opportunities for professional development and conferences, but there's an expectation that principals will as well. We want our folks to go out and to be engaged, to have a sense as to what best practices are and to identify innovative ways in which to promote student growth, student achievement with various types of programs and by offering certain programs, we make sure that our principals lead by example and attend those types of conferences, even alongside teachers if need be.

Another type of professional learning included regular meetings, accounting for 33% of 51 professional learning support references. Meetings included both one-on-one

and administrative team meetings. When describing their approach to leadership support participants talked specifically about how meetings support professional learning.

Participant 1 shared:

Monthly meetings with a focus on learning, specifically we call ACT, administrative council talks. So at these meetings we are very much looking at professional development based on our own knowledge and practices that are shared amongst our colleagues and we do that monthly because I just feel meetings really should be another place for learning.

Participant 3 ties the learning to conversations regarding the vision:

We have a scheduled monthly meeting that we get together. I have an agenda for that focuses on tying it back to the vision for the year. If you turn around and look on the board, those are all of our initiatives for the year. And our conversations... revolve around all of those items. Much of that is instructional and how is it going in the buildings and where are their challenges and how can I help them with those challenges.

Two superintendents indicated that their role as a principal supervisor included individual monthly meetings. Participant 2 notes, "I meet with them on a monthly basis. Each of them. I have a one-hour meeting with on a monthly basis." Participant 1 states:

I think at the same time it's my role to continually meet with the principals to make sure that they're on track in regards to meeting their goals, which is the ultimate benchmarking of their success and or challenges that they're facing throughout the year.

This is also a regular practice for participant 5:

Now I also have monthly opportunities. Twice a month, I meet with the principals and every administrator in the district to ensure alignment between my goals and their goals and support, right, for that alignment, so everyone's getting the same message all the time.

Superintendents also focus on professional learning with data, with participant 8 noting, “We meet three times a year for building data team meetings. That would be one time where I would give them feedback on how they presented their data when there's a problem.” Similarly, participant 1 states:

And we have very formal meetings three times a year that looks at the role of the principal and support staff, the data, the practices that we're putting in place and how are we improving or achieving what we've set out to do all along the way?

Five principal supervisors discussed the importance of principals learning from participation in collegial networks with other principals, accounting for 14% of 51 professional learning support references. With regard to their approach to leadership support, participant 8 said, “That's probably one of the main goals is to ensure that the principals have a good relationship with one another and they can have a partner to really do their job.” Participant 1 said the principal supervision role was to “support the learning that should be going on amongst the principal team.” Further noting:

I think it's very important that principals develop relationships with their colleagues who are also principals within district and outside of district. It's very easy to get caught up in just managing your building and your own learning really

is heightened when you have exposure to other principals who are doing similar work.

With regard to supervision practices, participant 10 shared:

I see that the relationship amongst the principals is a positive one. I can tell they actually like each other, which is important. They're not in a position where one is trying to outperform another or try to gain something more than the other.

They really do work together when problems are presented, you know, we do that in a larger group.

Three superintendents discussed the need for formal mentoring programs for principals. This accounted for 10% of 51 professional learning support references. Participant 2 was the only superintendent that mentioned a formal mentor program as part of the role of principal supervision, "I have mentor meetings four times a year, where I have a whole mentor plan actually."

With two participants, mentoring arose at the end of the interviews when they were asked if they had anything else to add regarding principal supervision. Upon reflection, participant 1 shared:

And I think because I've also had the opportunity to work with different principals, mentorship is something that I'm very aware of and how important that may be. So especially for new principals that they're being supported because what I've come to find in a lot of districts, there's not necessarily a formal mentor program for administrators. For some reason, our culture just kind of thinks, well, once you become an administrator, you've got it and you don't need mentorship

and there's not anything formal. It's usually informal. I don't know how much more formally it has to really get, but it's interesting that the amount of time that we spend in terms of supporting teachers is nowhere close to what's established for administrators.

Similarly, participant 5 stated:

I still think that there's more that we should do to support new principals. I don't think that should end at the end of the first year. I think it should carry them all the way through tenure, at least two years onto the job. Because it's a big job. It's bigger than it's ever been. It's burgeoned out of control. I would like to do a better job in [district name] and I'd like to see the state of New York do a better job around that piece.

Relationship support. All principal supervisors (100%) identified having a responsive relationship with principals as a practice of leadership support (26% of 163 references). The responsive relationship was directly between the superintendent and the principal. When asked about their role as a principal supervisor, participant 3 shared, “Developing a trusting relationship where they feel they can come to me for guidance and come to me for support. Come to me with questions and not feel uncomfortable about asking questions. It's about that relationship.” Participant 1 stated, “being someone they can come to,” with participant 2 indicating, “we show that we care about one another,” and adding, “I want them to never be afraid to come to me when they have to talk to me about something.”

When asked about their approach to leadership support many mentioned being responsive to principals by being readily available. Participant 10 said, “One of the things I find is very important is accessibility. I want the building principals to know that I am accessible to them directly.” Participant 6 stated, “They know they can contact me 24/7. They contact me on my phone on the weekends, at nights, the mornings. They could call here. They could meet me for coffee.” Participant 5 shared, “I would say my principals know that they can call me at any time for support, which they do all the time. I’ve spoken to three of them this morning already.” Participant 4 stated, “One is I have almost a daily conversation with the principles and try to do a back and forth on whatever issues are of the day that they’re dealing with.” With participant 3 noting, “...I speak to my principals probably, at least communicating every day in some way, whether it’s through phone, email or me being in the buildings.”

Relationships were brought up again when asked about specific practices of leadership support. Participant 3 shared:

I think the practice has to do with relationship and communication. I’m very fortunate in that I have three elementary buildings. I’m a small elementary district. It’s kind of a perfect role for a superintendent to be able to roll out initiatives because it’s a much more contained situation and I can have those kinds of intimate relationships with my principals.

Participant 8 brought up how the length of a relationship can influence principal supervision practices, noting, “But I think for the most part that’s why trust is so

important because I have one brand new principal, so I don't think we're there yet in the relationship.”

When asked if there was anything else to share about principal supervision participant 7 stated:

I sure do believe in providing a lot of support. I believe that the relationship between them and myself is very important to be comfortable so that again, they're sharing as much quality information as possible and do so in a productive way.

While participant 1 responded:

as a supervisor of principals, you really have to spend time in developing the relationships with them as an individual. I've been successful with some where I can say we are definitely close and I've also been in a situation where that hasn't been the case. And you definitely see the difference in terms of the way one works with each other, the overall attitude towards central office and the principal being a part of the school community, it all trickles. That's why I really understand that the type of relationship that you establish with the principal is also critical to the overall success of him or her.

At the end of the interview participant 2 added a statement regarding the value of relationships, “it just took me a little time to figure out about relationships and the value of relationships, and not that everybody's your friend, but that people need to feel valued. And I think a lot of people miss that piece.” Further adding, “You need to be able to

finesse things sometimes, so that you can grow relationships with people, because you're not going to get anything accomplished, if you don't have that.”

Leadership team support. A majority (8 out of 10) of principal supervisors discussed having a leadership team approach (19% of 163 references) to leadership support in their work as principal supervisors. This included assigning the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction as a direct supervisor of the principal, including other central office administrators, assistant superintendents or directors, in assisting with principal supervision, and a general team approach to working with principals. Two superintendents use the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction as the main supervisory contact with their elementary principals, with other superintendents mentioning the importance of having their assistant superintendents or directors involved in the work of principal supervision.

When asked about the role of principal supervision, participant 7 stated, “I guess as you can probably tell, I believe a lot in the team structure.” Adding:

We have, of course, I have four assistant superintendents here who each have a part in that team to help support principals in their ultimate goals. And my role has to help provide each of those four support team members in addition to other directors, which we then as we keep that team structure in place and build that team around the principals the same way we do each staff member and each of our kids.

This idea was shared by participant 8, who stated, “I really look at it as us being a cohesive leadership team rather than supervising them. That we're partners in what we do in the district.”

Participant 9 presented the idea of relying on other team members for assistance: But you have got to know, you've got to know what's going on and you have to rely on your essential administration team to see that. You have to rely on them because they have different rapports with the others.

With participant 10 also seeing the benefit of a team approach to the task of principal supervision, noting:

Again, I'm so grateful that I have these, the two assistant sups [sic] in this district simply because of the nature of the size of it. No one person could do it. And in a way, although the assistant sups [sic] are directly responsible for the supervision, the fact that so many of us have those interactions with the individuals, that also behooves us in terms of really getting a full picture, in terms of someone's strengths as well as areas that we may identify as needing a continued growth. It is not every principal comes in a master of all.

When asked about practices of principal supervision, participant 5 directly mentioned the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, saying “the weeks that principals are not meeting in an administrative council meeting, they're meeting with their direct supervisor, the assistant superintendent for C and I [sic].” In another instance participant 2 indicated that:

The director . . . meets with the principals once a month. . . . That's a place where he then has the Because he was a principal for 15 years, 16 years, that's where he can also mentor them. That's where he gets to be the person who is guiding them. And he's the link to me.

In speaking directly of supporting principals, participant 5 stated:

And perhaps more importantly, have a system of support for principals, whether it be the direct supervisor, if that's assigned to an assistant superintendent or the superintendent him or herself that communicates the principals that they, they have immediate access to an opportunity to ask questions about the day-to-day. Because sometimes things arise that even veteran principals don't have enough experience to manage on their own. It's important that there's this spirit of cooperation and collaboration, that they know that they have a brain trust to go to, so to speak, to run these things by.

Political support. A majority of superintendents (7 out of 10), mentioned providing some form of political support or protection from external sources as part of their principal supervision role and practice of leadership support (12% of 163 references). Several superintendents noted working to inform the board of education of their principals' work as a means of support. Participant 7 stated,

I work hard to make sure that the board of education and the community are incredibly well informed about the work that the specific principals are a part of, so that they understand the value of the team that we have.

Participant 1 shared, “We come back to the board at particular points in the year and share with the board what has been done to really show how we have actually made that particular growth.”

Participant 6 discussed using the public meetings as an opportunity to support principals by informing the public of potentially unpopular decisions stating:

So by the time it happened, not as many yelled at the principals because the principals said, as we are all aware, the superintendent spoke about this at the board meeting and at the PTA. It's all about taking it on the road.

Along similar lines, participant 10 offered the following, “it's an opportunity for us to engage in a conversation with our community and with our board about issues that are timely, and many times we'll have recommendations that'll come from that exchange of information.”

Participant 2 spoke directly of protecting the principals:

Have you spoken to the principal? They shouldn't be coming to me and going around the principal. Some of them go right around me and will go right to the board of education. So we had to take a step back and put I guess, a chain of commands. “You talk to this person first, then you go to this person, then you go to this person.” I have to explain to parents sometimes, “That's a building level issue and it really shouldn't be here. I don't know your child well enough.” So that's one way of protecting them.

Another example of political support given by participant 6 was:

I've taught them to do is not to respond to parents at 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock at night. Wait until the morning. I am in receipt of your email, I will investigate the situation and get back to you within 24 to 48 hours unless it's an emergency.

With participant 8 stating, "if they have a really difficult parent and they need my support for that, or they have a union issue."

Resourcing support. Some (4 out of 10) principal supervisors discussed supporting principals by ensuring access to necessary resources such as program, personnel, consultants, legal resources, and financial resources (7% of 163 references).

In responding to what their principal supervisor role is, participant 1 stated:

It's my role as the supervisor to make sure that the resource personnel that is available in the district is made available, that they're working in a way that's benefiting students and staff. And that goes to the whole concept of resources that I have to make sure that the resources that the principals ultimately are seeking are actually available, and if not, a rationale for why not and/or plan to support them in terms of their efforts to well, quote, make it happen based on the limited resources that we currently have.

Participant 4 stated:

And actually you know, the resource piece is something I didn't talk about before, because part of supervising the principals is making sure that they're on track with understanding what resources they need in the building. What's reasonable and what's unreasonable? What's going to make a difference? And I think that's a piece of their supervision.

Participant 10 discussed the importance of supporting resources for programs “that we think are important.” With participant 8 noting:

And sometimes you want to say no, but they know their people best, and they have to also be the ones that give in sometimes because what I'm doing for them, they have to do for their teachers. I think somebody explained it to me once is an environment of yes. Because it's very easy to always say no because what they ask for costs money, they cost time, time out of the classroom. When they ask for something, they're coming because their teachers are asking for it, so I try really hard to say yes and support them. As long as it aligns, like I said, and it's within our budget and it's reasonable and they usually are.

Operational support. More than half of superintendents (6 out of 10), spoke of the principals' running the daily operations or management of their building and how they practiced leadership support in that area (6% of 163 references). Regarding their role as a principal supervisor, participant 5 stated, “The management piece is something that a central office or a superintendent should support in ways where it's appropriate for the long arm of central office to provide guidance around policy and practices at the building level.” Participant 7 stated:

To start with in terms of the principalships [sic], we know how many different areas the principal's responsible for within their program and just as an overarching idea, my main role is to provide as much potential support for the principal to succeed in his or her job on a day-to-day basis.

Superintendents were aware of the impact of the day-to-day operations on a principal’s work. When asked to reflect on their thoughts about principal supervision, participant 3 noted, “I think it's also important to be aware of all the responsibility that they have in a day in a building. That being in a district level office is very different from running a building and the kinds of things that come their way every day.” Adding, “I think it’s important that a principal supervisor bring themselves back to being mindful that there's a lot of minutiae that a principal deals with each day and putting that into the equation as well.”

Finding 2. In statements regarding their role, principal supervisors use examples from the leadership support themes (described in finding 1) to describe their role, along with three additional themes: the importance of the district’s vision, mission, and goals, individualizing supervision for principals, and the context of their own district-level work. Table 10 summarizes the themes that describe the role of principal supervisor.

Table 10

Summary of Principal Supervisor Role Theme Coding References

Theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	All
District Mission, Vision, Goals	2	4	3	1	1	0	5	3	1	2	22
Individualized	1	1	4	0	0	1	9	4	1	1	22
District Context	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	6

Role of principal supervisor. Open-ended interview question 1 specifically asked principal supervisors, *What do you feel your role is as a supervisor of principals?*

Participant responses included broad statements that often incorporated ideas from the themes of leadership support. The idea of support as a general term was mentioned from several participants, along with the idea that the role had many aspects. Participant 8 stated, “I think my biggest role as their supervisor is one of support.” Participant 7 noted, “my main role is to provide as much potential support for the principal to succeed in his or her job on a day-to-day basis.” While participant 2 said, “so I feel that my role is to always guide them in their work,” also noting “There’s so many levels to this.” With participant 6 sharing:

I see my role more as the huge umbrella. I don't just focus, as I was saying, I just don't talk to them about instruction. I just don't talk to them about budget. I almost talk to them about everything. I feel as if I need them to realize that their role is not a single role.

Open-ended question two asked if participants had different practices for principal supervision than for the evaluation of principals. Two participants felt that they were not different. Participant 3 stated, “I would find it hard to separate the two. I see them all connecting very closely.” Six participants indicated that they are different practices, often noting that the evaluation is specifically tied to an evaluation rubric. Participant 4 noted, “The evaluation is limited to the Marshall Rubric.” Participant 6 said, “The evaluation is the formal piece and you can’t get everything in there.” Participant 7 shared, “For the evaluation pieces, there are formal labs or evaluation tools, that we use because of the nature of APPR.” Also, adding to the nature of evaluation, participant 6 states:

The evaluation is more formal. They set up goals. We do the mid-year to see if they met their goals. I visit their buildings. We do end of the year and then I do a write up of their goals and if they met them, yada, yada, yada. It's more of an instrument, but it really doesn't get down to the nitty gritty. I feel like it's almost being done because it has to be done.

Participant 5 discussed a connection to both supervision and evaluation:

I think that the supervision of the principals should create both objective and subjective information that helps you write the evaluation for your principles. But not everything that you do in terms of the supervision of your principles is going to find its way into the evaluation document. And so in that way, I would say yes, there are different practices.

District mission, vision, and goals. The majority of principal supervisors (9 out of 10) identified the importance of the district's vision, mission, and goals as part of their principal supervisor role (44% of 50 references). Three participants clearly stated this expectation with regard to their principal supervision role:

I think as the supervisor of the principals, being the superintendent, it's a role where I have to make sure that the mission, vision, goals of the district are explicit and understandable to the principals so that they're able to carry out all of the work that they plan to do in their buildings. (PS1)

I think first and foremost it's to be sure they're all on the same page with regards to the vision that we have for the district. It's really important to me that there be consistency across the three buildings. (PS3)

If people were not there when our strategic plan was developed to make sure they're oriented toward what the goals are of the district and that our strategic plan guides everything that we do here in the district. . . . is to work together to have that shared vision and that shared understanding and shared goals, and then to support them as they craft or as they implement that vision in their buildings.

(PS8)

When asked about specific practices used in their role of principal supervisor, participant 7 shared:

Next time I pop in to have a conversation about what do they think about what we worked on, how does that relate to their building? How does that relate to their goals for the building? . . . So I give them a huge amount of autonomy once we determine that their goals are surely within the confines of what our district wide goals are, that they're not trying to do something that is either in conflict too or too far off the beaten path to what the district wide goals are.

When discussing any recent changes to principal supervisor practices, participant 2 discussed the work in relation to board of education goals, stating:

So we took the board of education goals. . . . My goal is to directly connect it to the board goals. So everything that I'm doing this year is directly connected to a board of education goal. So everything has to get hooked back into what our mission is. So that's a little bit different, because I'm monitoring what they're doing through our vision.

Engaging in consistent practice across buildings through the use of goals was mentioned by participant 1:

So what you'll find in this district is that we have three buildings, but they're unique and they have different methodologies on achieving the goals. On many levels, but at the same time they're very similar methodologies of achieving goals. And that's the beauty of the work when you understand that how you get there is on you, what you're working towards is common across all three.

This was similarly noted by participant 4:

Just consistency . . . on board goals. That's exactly what it says in our third goal. Consistency across curriculum, across the grade levels, through empathy and through the other five pieces that we were looking at. But consistency is so important. And the only way that you go to get that consistency is, is if the principals have good relationships, and if the superintendent is able to foster those relationships and guide everyone . . . you really want principals working at their operability and you don't want principals to go rogue. You don't want to find out that people are doing stuff in the building that is contrary to what the big goals are.

Individualized supervision. The majority (8 out of 10) of principal supervisors identified the importance of individualizing supervision as part of their role (44% of 50 references). While the previous participant comments indicated a commitment to consistent practice across district schools, participants also indicated that it was important to consider each principal individually along with unique needs of the building. When

asked about the role of principal supervision, participant 7 incorporated both points, stating:

Each building has its own unique feature that would separate itself from one another, even though we all are in the same community. And so in supervising principals, I also need to recognize what those differences are and allow the principals to have the ability, sometimes said as permission to do what they need to provide the best care for their staff and their students and their community separately. . . . We often note that there are lots of things that are standardized and need to be, but the one thing we can't standardize, our kids. And so in that case, I can't necessarily always standardize the approach for each individual principal. I have to be mindful of in the supervision of setting those goals and objectives for them, that are individualized where needed as well.

Individualizing supervision based on the principal's experience was considered, with participant 8 indicating, "I had two very new principals. The way I supervise, I guess, would be different more based on how long they were in their roles." Participant 2 noted working with non-tenured principals, stating, "I mean, it's a little different with probationary people because you have to keep giving them feedback."

When discussing their leadership support practices, participant 6 said:

So it's like every principal you're constantly doing different things with because their strengths and weaknesses also vary, but that's not something that's written down. You tend to start to see patterns what your principals, so this one might

need more of this, this one might need more of that. This one might need more of this.

With participant 7 noting:

You know that autonomy is very powerful because I have a principal for six years, I have a principal for 18 years and I have a principal who's 42 years in education and I hope to make them feel that there's no difference between them in what they're getting in terms of the support. They may need some different individualized support and I want that to be a big part of it.

Superintendent as principal supervisor. Half of the participants (5 out of 10) brought forward the challenges of supervising principals as it relates to the context of the district and as a superintendent of schools (12% of 50 references). When discussing any changes participants would make to principal supervision, participant 9 stated:

And this position, trying to balance this position, and I say this in a K-6, it's much different and especially if you're doing your job well. . . . Like I don't have a personnel person here, so we have over 600 employees, so there has been a tremendous demand on my time in the last few years, and especially with all the changes that we're making of being present district office and taking on that personnel.

When discussing supervision practice, participant 2 mentioned:

I do visit the schools, I attend their faculty meetings. I will attend a PTA meeting or a PTO meeting. If there are schoolwide events, I will attend those events as

well, whether it's formal or even as a drop in, which is not easy to do given the sheer number of schools that we have.

While participant 8 noted:

When I write something, I want to be able to provide my own evidence of what I've seen them do to support my perception and my reading of them. And I don't know how I could supervise if I were the superintendent in a district of 12 buildings, how I could even ever write a meaningful evaluation for somebody.

When discussing leadership support, participant 3 reflected:

Communicating as frequently as I do and being as present in the buildings as I am because it's a small situation. Maybe more difficult coming from a larger K through 12 district with 10 buildings. It would be very, very different. I would think the responses from a superintendent in that situation it could look very different.

Research Question 2

To what extent do principal supervisors understand how their role in learning-focused leadership and the leadership support process is connected to student achievement outcomes.

Finding. Principals supervisors highly value the impact of principals' learning-focused leadership practice on student achievement outcomes but are less assured when connecting their principal supervisor work to its impact on student achievement outcomes. At the same time, principal supervisors consider their work highly valuable.

Open-ended question 3 asked, *To what extent do you feel principals' work impacts student achievement outcomes?* When placing a value on the principals' influence, all principal supervisors (10 out of 10) indicated with conviction that the principal greatly influences student achievement outcomes. Participants used words and phrases such as: "overwhelming" (P1), "off the charts" (P2), "essential" (P3), "greatly impacts" (P4), "most impactful" (P5), "huge correlation" (P6), "heavily impacted" (P7), "most important role [is to improve outcomes]" (P8), "power beyond their understanding" (P9), and "incredibly important" (P10). Participant 5 stated emphatically, "That's funny to me. The building level leader outside of the classroom teacher is the most impactful factor on student achievement, and shame on any superintendent that doesn't know that. I'm done with that question."

Principal supervisors' understanding of the impact on student achievement outcomes was explained through the connection to principals' instructional leadership including how principals influence teachers. Participant 2 said:

The principal sets the tone for a building. The principal's leadership impacts how teachers perform in the classroom. It impacts relationships in the building, and that ultimately impacts student achievement outcomes. The principals permeate everything. You have to have the right person at the helm.

Participant 10 stated, "When I was a principal, and I hope it maintains its strength in the future, the principal is the instructional leader." Participant 3 fully explained, stating:

This goes back to my reference to the principal as an instructional leader. I think teachers need a tremendous amount of support, supervision, guidance when it comes to instruction and interpreting data and using that data in a meaningful way to adapt their instruction. The principals are the boots on the ground. They're the ones who are there every day. They're the ones being able to do classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis and have ongoing conversations with their teachers. That is not possible for somebody say in a central office position to do with the frequency or with as much data of their own to pull from and interfacing with those teachers. I've viewed the principals as essential to how we're moving forward and looking at that, improving our student outcomes.

While participant 4 noted:

If a principal is working poorly and not supervising instruction and developing their staff, student achievement goes down. And for principals really working at an optimal level and encouraging teachers to strive as high as possible. They're good visible for us in the building of encouraging students as well to achieve. I think then you get great impact.

Also, mentioning the principals' influence was participant 7:

And so we've been working here as many places have, on the understanding that the culture of the building of which is set in essence by the principal who has the greatest impact on that is the greatest potential factor in the achievement outcomes. Because that affects the individual cultures of each classroom and the

more all of our staff members are pulling in the same direction, the greater our achievement outcomes will be.

Participant 9 understands how this may also have a negative impact:

I think that the most successful principals are those who are involved in the early intervention team meetings, who attend the CSE [sic] meetings, and who are actually in the classroom, and have also advanced their own understanding of instructional leadership and the programs we're delivering, because they make the best. They provide the most specific feedback to move instruction forward to help the student . . . where I saw where it impacted achievement negatively because of the lack of presence or the requirement of a principal to require her teachers to do a certain thing.

When placing a value on their role as principal supervisors to influence student achievement outcomes, superintendent principal supervisors used qualifiers in their responses. Open-ended interview question 7 asks, *How does your work as principal supervisor impact student achievement outcomes?*

The most assured participants included participant 5, who responded, “so after the classroom teacher and the building principal, the superintendent's supervision of principals, I would say is at least the third most impactful on student achievement outcomes.” With participant 9 emphatically stating, “I think everything rises and falls on my decisions and the decisions my team makes. . . . So there is absolutely no doubt that the decisions I make financially and academically and hiring directly impact these students.”

Other responses were more qualified, “I'm really hoping that it's having a positive impact on student achievement outcomes” (P2), and “I think my work has always been with the potential to impact the students' achievement” (P7). While participant 4 said, “Well, I think if I'm doing a good job supervising everybody and making sure we have the right resources in the building, that we should see better student outcomes.”

When describing the impact of their principal supervisor role on student achievement, various themes of leadership support and learning-focused leadership practices were incorporated:

Collaborative meetings that we have and we have set meetings throughout the year very specific to data and goals and outcomes that are established every year. And we have very formal meetings three times a year that looks at the role of the principal and support staff, the data, the practices that we're putting in place and how are we improving or achieving what we've set out to do all along the way? We don't wait until the end to say, well, how did we do? It's actually done along the way. So when you do that, it helps in terms of changing practice because just because you set up a practice that you think is going to be impactful amongst students, it may not be. (P1, data, goals)

I'm hoping that the conversations we have, the discussions we have through research that I bring to them, the resources that I expose them to, impact student achievement outcomes, because it's supposed to be child-centered, and our clients are our children. (P2, responsive relationships, professional learning)

I think that as the principal supervisor in this particular situation by establishing a clear vision, establishing accountability for implementation of that, what we're going to do to pursue that vision, that's my responsibility. To the extent that I do that successfully, I think has a direct impact on the effectiveness for our children. (P3, vision)

The superintendent is evaluating at all times student achievement and then setting goals around making sure that student achievement progresses in a way that is learner focused, but that also continues to push the expectations for all students across the board. Because if the superintendent's not doing that, then those achievement gaps that have historically persisted in local school districts, no matter where, what part of the state you're in, they're all the same. And so if the superintendent does not have a system to evaluate that data in his or her district and then is not putting in programs and resources to impact those gaps, then the overall student achievement will never meet the expectations that everyone should have for student achievement. (P5, data, goals)

But by continually focusing even on the fact that there's teaching and learning being thought of in central office and not just as principals in silos, helps them stay focused. So how do we, in this particular role as a superintendent or assistant superintendents, give the right kind of feedback or opportunity even to the principals to help continue to move the needle. So I think that that's how our work really can have an impact. (P7, teaching and learning)

I will tell you it's important from my point of view to be able to support programs that we think are important. So that's something I think that's very important in terms of supporting that work and being present. As busy as my days are and I can't always go if I can be free. I think my presence is important to let them know that if this work is so important for me to take time out of my day, I want to be with you because you are doing the same thing and taking the same sacrifice.

(P10, resourcing, responsive relationships)

While principal supervisors were less assured of the impact of principal supervisor practice as compared to the impact of principals' work with regard to student achievement outcomes, their responses indicated that they did consider their principal supervisor work as highly valued. Open-ended interview question 9 asks, *To what extent do you think you or your district values the work of principal supervision?* Participants were sure of the value of principal supervision. Participant 1 shared, "Highly, because having been a principal myself, I value the fact that my supervisors at that time gave me the freedom and the autonomy to really run my building." Participant 3 sees "it as essential," participant 4 said, "I personally highly value it," and participant 10 stated, "It's so very important." Most notably, participant 7 shared:

I value the work tremendously and I know that the district does, and I work hard to make sure that the board of education and the community are incredibly well informed about the work that the specific principals are a part of, so that they understand the value of the team that we have, that it isn't simply individuals working in silos that do great things. It's that each level from our students all

through every single adult is supported by a team and that the community knows that and can appreciate that, so that when asked for different types of support, especially at the board of education level, it is more easily understood as where the need is.

Research Question 3

To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand or recognize the learning-focused leadership practices of principals?

Finding. Principal supervisor's belief statements regarding learning-focused leadership practices of principals included two themes, principal practice related to teaching and learning and principal as learner. Principal supervisors also identified six themes relating to learning-focused leadership. These included a focus on teaching and learning, that principals have to manage the day-to-day work of their building, they use data, they set goals, they have relationships, and the idea that schools have different needs. A majority (70%) of participants each identified four or more of the six themes. Table 11 summarizes the coding references related to the six themes of learning-focused leadership.

Table 11

Summary of Principal Learning-focused Leadership Theme Coding References

Theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	All
Leading Teaching and Learning	3	2	3	1	2	5	2	3	4	3	28
Management	1	1	3	0	1	3	0	3	2	2	16
Using Data	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	6	0	1	12
Principal Goals	1	1	0	0	3	0	4	0	0	1	10
Relationships	0	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	6
Building Context	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	4

Learning-focused leadership practice. Open-ended interview question 4 asked, *With regard to principals, what does learning-focused leadership practice mean to you?*

Data collected for this question resulted in two themes, *principal practice related to teaching and learning* (7 out of 10 participants) and *principal as learner* (3 out of 10 participants).

Statements noting principal practice related to teaching and learning or instructional leadership included:

Learning-focused leadership I would say is one that is very much focused on when I say the whole child, all of the aspects that affect student learning, which is obviously academic, but also the social emotional aspect of programs, making sure that the principal is focused specifically on those particular areas in lieu of the other areas that a principal is also responsible, which is technically the management of the building. (P1)

I think it connects to everything I've been saying actually viewing themselves as an instructional leader, not just a manager. Thinking about what they bring to the equation in their supervision of their teachers. Being able to offer instructional guidance to teachers around issues of differentiation and data informed instruction. I see that being an essential part of what they do. That to me would be learning focused leadership. (P3)

I'm going to take it to mean that our focus on . . . and we talk a little bit about where is the evidence of learning in children, and we try to get past the task checklist. "Hey, we did these things. So we must be doing well." And get back to the concept of do we have evidence of learning in the children? (P4)

That means to me that the principal is aware that they're on a pathway of learning the entire time they're serving as a principal, that they're putting their staff, including teachers and everyone else has interacting with children on a pathway of learning, and that they're paying attention to the learning, not necessarily the teaching that's going on in the classrooms. That's what learning-focused leadership practice means to me, that the, you're looking at learning as a building level leader across the board. (P5)

I'm not really sure, but I would imagine that we've used Marzano and Waters framework for principal practice . . . the Marzano and Waters model, it's called school level leadership that works, district leadership that works. It speaks to 21 different leadership behaviors, and it correlates them to how those behaviors. . . . What the effect size is relative to student achievement. And like I said before,

they spend 80% of their time maybe managing their buildings. We try to not look at those behaviors, but look at the behaviors that they can shift or change that will increase student achievement. How to leverage student achievement. (P8)

Learning-focused leadership practice. I think that to me that means that the principal is connected to her learners or his learners and evaluating in the classroom who's doing the work. Are the children doing the work or is the teacher standing and delivering? (P9)

I would like to think it means that if you're going to be an instructional leader or just a leader of your building, even if it's day-to-day management, that you have a focus in terms of what it is that you expect, that it's clear, clearly defined to the various constituency groups within your building and that you lead by example. And that the practices that take place throughout the year are in support of those learning goals. (P10)

Statements noting learning-focused leadership practice related to principal as learner included:

I always want my principals to be learning. So as far as with regard to principals, what does learning-focused leadership practice mean to me, it would mean that they are constantly learning, evolving, and moving themselves forward, if that makes sense. (P2)

Well, I think really what it means to the principals is, and I hear all of them say it, that we're lifelong learners. We're all here learning every day. Nobody should be stagnant. (P6)

What it means to me is that I have to help provide opportunities and setting my own culture of learning within our administrative team where rather than simply the superintendent as the potential boss always pushing down ideas to everybody, asking the right kinds of questions about where the principals really believe that the building should be moving towards in the future, asking them to be a very willing and open participant in that process of building the action plans for short term and long term gains that we're looking for, or long term planning that we're looking for. And this way they're more likely to be motivated to have their own learning at the forefront of it so that they can say, "What are the things that I need to learn about to help me help my building get better?" (P7)

With regard to open-ended question 4, additional data that informs participants' thinking is of note. Participant 9 asked, "Can you just repeat the question again one more time?" Participant 10 stated, "It's interesting. When I saw that I was like, I don't know that term. Learning-Focused Leadership Practice," following with "I would like to think it means . . ." Participant 4 began, "I never thought about that. I'm going to take it to mean . . ." Participant 6 responded, "Say it again . . . Learning-focused leadership practice. Learning-focused leadership practice. . . Well, I think really what it means . . ." Participant 8 started, "I'm not really sure, but . . ."

Leading teaching and learning. All principal supervisors (100%) identified leading teaching and learning as a learning-focused leadership practice of principals (37% of 76 references). When discussing their role as principal supervisors, four superintendents mentioned instructional leadership. Participant 3 stated, "A big part of

the conversation is differentiating between a principal as a building manager and a principal as an instructional leader,” with participant 6 noting, “so they are the instructional leader of their building.” Participant 9 shared:

There is a difference between managing a school and leading a school, and sometimes you can have excellent managers who do a very good job, but my real focus is on how do we develop great leaders, how do we develop leaders who can move forward children, all constituents? People who take out the education piece would be leaders no matter where they are, and then help them become instructional experts.

Similarly, participant 3 stated:

At the heart of instructional leadership is their ability to collect, evaluate, and manage data, and then turn that around in a way that helps inform their staff of how the action steps that would be associated with the evaluation of that data is aligned with the vision and mission of the school and ultimately aligned with the district goals.

When specifically discussing learning-focused leadership practice, ideas concerning leading teaching and learning were expressed again. Principal supervisor 6 specifically noted a specific leadership framework for principals, “Balanced Leadership for Powerful Learning. It’s the model.” Participants responded:

Learning focused leadership, I would say, is one that is very much focused on when I say the whole child, all of the aspects that affect student learning, which is obviously academic, but also the social emotional aspect of programs, making

sure that the principal is focused specifically on those particular areas in lieu of the other areas that a principal is also responsible, which is technically the management of the building, the management of staff as it relates to the politics as altogether. So you have to balance all of that where when we talk about who is the instructional leader, that's the person who is learner focused and focused on learning overall. (P1)

Right out of the gate when I came on board I focused on that because I've seen that being a problem elsewhere. Where principals just see themselves as building managers and teachers are to some degree left to their own devices on a day-to-day basis from an instructional point of view. So right out of the gate I opened my conversations with my principals here differentiating that and asking them to reflect on how they see themselves using that paradigm. Do you see yourself more as a manager? You see yourself more as an instructional leader? What does it mean? What does it look like? I use that a lot in my conversations asking questions and getting them to reflect as opposed to me delivering on a pedestal about what my philosophy is. I find that generates a much better conversation, a much better understanding on their part of what I'm looking for and where we're going. (P3)

And I say to my principals all the time, you are the instructional leaders of your building. You are the instructional leaders of your building amongst a thousand other things, but that and safety are pretty much your two primary responsibilities.

It doesn't mean the others go by the wayside, but you are the instructional leader.

(P6)

For two superintendents, setting the stage for learning included consideration for a culture of learning as an aspect of learning-focused leadership. Participant 7 noted:

And so we've been working here as many places have, on the understanding that the culture of the building of which is set in essence by the principal who has the greatest impact on that is the greatest potential factor in the achievement outcomes. Because that affects the individual cultures of each classroom and the more all of our staff members are pulling in the same direction, the greater our achievement outcomes will be.

Participant 10 expressed:

You know, you realize that the academics are not just the only thing that matters. You know, in some instances, the social and emotional components and having a sense of respect. You know . . . we've started talking here about the cultural competencies and how important that is if you really want to be successful.

When asked about changes in the area of principal supervision, the teaching and learning theme was discussed by three principal supervisors:

Because again, you can read books, you can have a little theory, it's not until you're actually in the classroom with the teacher and really seeing what's going on that really can be impactful in terms of their own growth because they also have to buy into what improvement they're ultimately seeking to have. (P1)

[referring to classroom walkthroughs] That would help me know for sure that they know what they're looking at and that they know how to help support teachers, not necessarily evaluate teachers, but help support teachers in their rollout of the many things that we've done over the last five years. (P5)

But ultimately I'm looking for principals who can lead and support the school community moving forward and making sure that every single student is given an opportunity to strive and do their best. (P10)

Building management. A majority of principal supervisors (8 out of 10) identified management as a learning-focused leadership practice of principals (21% of 76 references). Although most references regarding day-to-day management of a school building are short, there is a clear recognition that this is a necessary component of principal leadership. For example, participant 2 stated, "I expect that they take care of the everyday pieces." Participant 8 noted, "they have to have an orderly school . . . there's those management things you have to do," and participant 10 said, "I would extend that even to the day-to-day management of the building in terms of goals and expectations and leading by example." Participant 6 said:

They are the manager of their building. They really have 25 different roles on a daily basis as I do. You never want anyone to say they don't know who their principal is. You never want someone to say, our principal never greets us. So if I'm asking you to be out there for arrival and dismissal . . .

Safety was an aspect of this theme, with Participant 6 noting, “you ought to ensure that your children are safe and your staff at all times.” Participant 4 indicated, “assure that the schools are running appropriately . . . schools are safe places.”

Using data. Half of principal supervisors (5 out of 10) identified using data as a learning-focused leadership practice of principals (16% of 76 references). Data use was mentioned when referring to principal or principal supervisor impact on student achievement. Participant 3 briefly stated, “interpreting data and using that data in a meaningful way to adapt their instruction . . . data informed instruction.” Participant 1 noted:

I think in terms of data, in terms of managing that data and working with our principals to not only dig through but to make sense of that data. . . . So if the data is not showing you improvement, well, then we need to change something.

With participant 10 stating:

The data. It’s interesting when you talk about student achievement outcomes. You know what? I work with our building principals. I’m not the data analytic that I once was [as superintendent versus assistant superintendent] . . . but I look at the data. I will speak to people about the data. If there are things that just don’t look right to me in terms of what’s going on . . . we do look at the other data and data points.

Participant 8 discussed data use multiple times during the interview, noting “They have a whole data system in their buildings . . . data is really important.” Also stating,

“and that’s probably the most important thing that I work and expect the principals to do, is to use data to drive the decisions that they make.”

Principals’ goals. Half of principal supervisors (5 out of 10) identified using goals as a learning-focused leadership practice of principals (13% of 76 references).

Participant 1 states:

The principal of the school basically is the person that identifies not only the vision and the mission, but also the goals and the processes that are required to be undertaken to reach all of the outcomes that are identified for a building.

When describing supporting learning-focused leadership, participant 7 responded:

So the first specific practice is to do some sort of formalized goal setting and ask them to provide goals that they will have for each individual, each of their buildings and then spend some time discussing with them, evaluating where those goals are for the building sake, but also how does that fit within the bigger picture potentially.

When asked about significant changes to principal supervision, principal supervisors have added principal goal work to their practice of supervision:

And I’ll tell you something else that has changed is the way we put together their goals. The principal’s goals. Principals provide their own smart goals, and they weren’t connected directly to board goals. (P2)

When I got here, they weren’t even writing any annual goals. They said they had them, but then when I asked to see the on paper, they said they didn’t write them down, so then I told them they didn’t have them, which was fairly unpopular.

Then I created what we agreed to call a student achievement plan. But principals really still weren't internalizing, individualizing the goals that they developed for their buildings . . . the assistant superintendent for C and I [sic] who I put in charge of the principals developing their student achievement plans and she has helped them grow their understanding of how they can use their student achievement plans to really impact and target the work in their buildings that needs to be paid attention to that has not been paid attention to in the past. . . . Because of the goals they set, the teachers and the principals have had to learn things that are based in not just their own ideas, but in qualitative and quantitative research. (P5)

Principals' relationships. Some (4 out of 10) principal supervisors mentioned the importance of principals' relationships with others as a learning-focused leadership practice (8% of 76 references). With regard to a principal's impact on student outcomes, participant 2 said, "The principal's leadership . . . it impacts relationships in the building, and that ultimately impacts student achievement outcomes," while participant 7 shared:

The sense of belonging and comfort in a school building will translate, and the connections, frankly, between staff members and the students inclusive of the principal will always translate into students believing in themselves for more . . . so I give the principal the opportunity to work with his or her team to determine what direction they take in building that positive culture and building the types of positive relationships that have really strong impacts on student outcomes.

Building context. A few (2 out of 10) principal supervisors mentioned the context of the building as part of learning-focused leadership practice of principals (5% of 76 references). Participant 7 noted, “each building has its own identity . . . his building is significantly different than my other two.” Participant 8 noticed, “but sometimes something will emerge in one building that is not in another.”

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this qualitative phenomenological research study regarding the lived experiences of principal supervision. Findings were organized according to the three research questions. Data from 10 individual interviews of supervisors of elementary school principals revealed the essence of the lived experiences of principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York. The themes identified in the findings were supported with quotations from the participants to provide a thick, rich description of the phenomenon being studied.

The main finding of research question 1 is that principal supervisors identified six themes regarding their practice of leadership support. The themes included professional learning support, relationship support, leadership team support, political support, resourcing support, and operational support. Professional learning support comprised four themes, including external learning, regular meetings, colleague networks, and mentoring programs.

The second main finding of research question 1 is that, in addition to the six themes of practice of leadership support, principal supervisors identified three themes that were important to their role as a principal supervisor. The themes included the

importance of the district's vision, mission, and goals, individualizing supervision for principals, and the context of their own district-level work.

The main finding of research question 2 is that principal supervisors felt assured regarding the high value of principals' impact on student achievement, yet are less assured when connecting their own role as a principal supervisor to student achievement outcomes, while also identifying their principal supervision work as highly valuable.

The main finding of research question 3 is that principal supervisors' understanding of learning-focused leadership practices included the idea of principal practice related to teaching and learning, and the idea of the principal as learner. Additionally, principal supervisors identified six leadership practices of principals that included a focus on leading teaching and learning, management of the day-to-day work of their building, use of data, goal setting, relationship building, and understanding that individual schools have different needs.

In the next chapter I will present an analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the main findings and also present conclusions and recommendations for each finding and research question.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter is presented in two sections. The first section of this chapter includes an analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of each of the four major findings of the study by research question. The analysis of each finding highlights patterns and themes among and within the four analytic categories: leadership support, the principal supervisor role, student achievement impacts, and principal leadership practices. Discussion of the analysis includes how the categories and themes relate to ideas from the relevant literature presented in chapter two, in addition to sociocultural learning theory's assistance relationships (Honig, 2008) and appropriation (Grossman et al., 1999). The analysis also shows how the themes align to the conceptual framework, which includes leadership support, learning-focused leadership practice, and learning improvement (Knapp, et al., 2010). This interpretive insight forms the essence of the phenomenon of principal supervision within this study. In this section I will also look back to the researcher assumptions presented in chapter one and summarize the interpretation of findings.

In the second section of this chapter I present conclusions and recommendations for this qualitative phenomenological study as they apply to the research questions, corresponding findings, and the analysis and discussion of the four analytic categories. Recommendations based on the conclusions are presented with regard to policy, practice, and further research. Lastly, I will share a final reflection on the study.

Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to analyze the self-reported work of principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York with regard to the significance of their role in supervising principals and their impact on student achievement. Studying principal supervisors' perceptions of their role indicates the extent to which local practice in principal supervision aligns with current educational research. From the analysis, I identified themes in the work practices of principal supervisors in Nassau County, NY, which serve to inform local practice as it relates to the supervision of elementary school principals.

Qualitative data for this research was collected using face-to-face interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and were subsequently coded and analyzed using NVivo software. Participants in the study included 10 superintendents from public school districts in Nassau County, New York who are supervisors of elementary school principals. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand their principal supervisor role and the practice of leadership support?
2. To what extent do principal supervisors understand how their role in learning-focused leadership and the leadership support process is connected to student achievement outcomes.
3. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand or recognize the learning-focused leadership practices of principals?

Reviewing the interview data of the 10 principal supervisor participants for concentrations of references within participants and across participant cases, allowed for the identification of themes that help define the essence of principal supervision. Analytic categories were developed to align with this study's research questions. The analytic categories were used to code the data and identify the findings of the study that were presented in chapter four. The categories of leadership support and the principal supervisor role are aligned with research question one. The category of student achievement outcomes is aligned to research question two and the category of principal leadership practice aligned to research question three.

Research question 1. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand their principal supervisor role and the practice of leadership support?

Analytic category 1: Leadership support. Principal supervisors identified six themes regarding the practice of leadership support: leadership team support, operational support, political support, relationship support, resourcing support, and professional learning support. Based on the coded data, principal supervisors perceived that professional learning and a supportive personal relationship with their principals were of critical importance with regard to providing leadership support to their elementary principals. Figure 2 shows the relative importance of each of the six themes as evidenced by the number of coded references each and the number of open-ended questions the theme reference appeared in.



Figure 2. Leadership Support Hierarchy. The size of the boxes represents the quantity of coded references; the larger the box, the greater the coding references across all cases. Shading represents the quantity of questions the codes arose in; the darker the shade the greater the number of open-ended interview questions containing references for that theme.

The greatest representation of the lived experience of principal supervisors with regard to providing their principals with leadership support was through professional learning opportunities. Principal supervisors discussed four distinct categories of how they support principals through professional learning, including, opportunities for external learning, such as attending conferences and workshops, learning support through attendance at regularly held meetings, support from having a network of principal colleagues, and support through a formal mentoring program. The focus on professional learning by principal supervisors aligns with current research on leadership support.

Knapp et al. (2010) identified engaging leaders in professional learning as one of the five activities of leadership support. Figure 3 shows the relative importance of each category as evidenced by the number of coded references.



Figure 3. Professional Learning Hierarchy. The size of the boxes represents the quantity of coded references; the larger the box, the greater the coding references across all participants. Shading represents the quantity of questions the codes arose in; the darker the shade the greater the number of open-ended interview questions containing references for that theme.

Analytic category 2: Principal supervisor role. Regarding their role as principal supervisor, all six themes or ideas of leadership support were represented in their principal supervisor role statements, indicating that leadership support is contained within

and part of the lived experience of the principal supervision role. Three additional distinctions with regard to their principal supervisor role were identified. Most importantly, and for all participants, there was a strong belief that there should be a focus on the district's mission, vision, and goals in order to create consistency across school buildings in the district for equity purposes. In addition, there was also a recognition that supervision should be individualized for both the purpose of meeting the individual needs of principals and should be individualized due to inherent differences in school buildings. Although this had the same number of coded references as the mission, vision, and goal theme, it was heavily pronounced in one case. Lastly, five participants' perception of their role included the understanding that a superintendent's performance in the role of principal supervisor was impacted by the size of the district or the district context and that the value of their work might be diminished depending on how many principals or schools they were responsible for. Figure 4 shows the relative importance of each theme as represented by the number of coded references each and the number of open-ended questions the theme reference appeared.

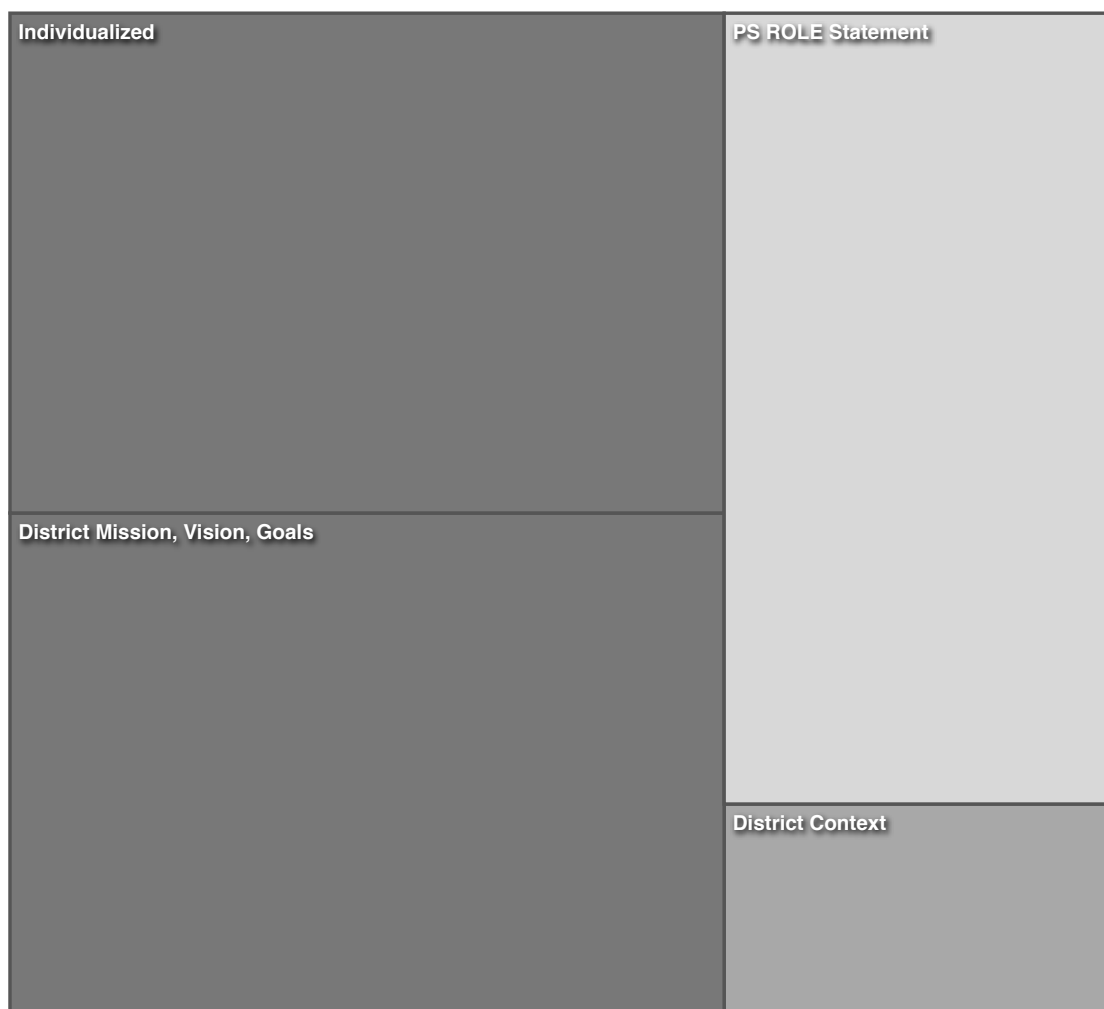


Figure 4. Principal Supervisor Role Hierarchy. The size of the boxes represents the quantity of coded references; the larger the box, the greater the coding references across all participants. Shading represents the quantity of questions the codes arose in; the darker the shade the greater the number of open-ended interview questions containing references for that theme.

Interpretation and synthesis: The role of principal supervisor and leadership

support. The conceptual framework for this study included five leadership support activities as outlined by Knapp et al. (2010). All six themes identified by participants can be aligned with one of the five leadership support activities, as shown in Table 12. This indicates that the phenomenon of principal supervision, as it relates to leadership support

defined in Knapp et al. (2010), includes a range of basic understanding that matches current research. The depth of participants' understanding will be explored further as it relates to the application of sociocultural learning theory's assistance relationships (Honig, 2008) and appropriation (Grossman et al., 1999).

Table 12

Alignment of Leadership Support Themes to Leadership Support Activities

Leadership Support Activities (Knapp et al., 2010)	Leadership Support Themes
Providing resources to enable leaders to sustain their instructional improvement work	Resourcing
Creating and facilitating regular opportunities for leaders' professional learning	Professional Learning (Conferences Workshops, Regular Meetings, Mentoring)
Brokering relations with leaders' peers and colleagues engaged in similar work	Professional Learning (Colleague Network), Relationship Support, Leadership Team Support
Responding in a coordinated and timely way to administrative, legal, political, or logistical issues facing the school administrators	Operational Support
Sponsoring and legitimizing learning-focused leadership	Political Support

The study participants, in line with the findings of Knapp et al. (2010) identify informal professional learning through interactions with principal networks and interactions with central office staff doing similar work. The research of Knapp et al. (2010) also aligns with participants' firm belief in the importance of fostering a robust personal relationship with principals, the second most important theme identified by participants. Hvidston et al. (2018) also found that perceptions of trust and

communication were an important factor in principal supervision. Based on findings from this study, principal supervisors identified a strong leadership team component as being important.

Knowing that social engagement is essential to learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991), it follows that the phenomenon of principal supervision described by participants would also reflect an emphasis on learning that occurs with others. For example, professional learning was the most recognized form of leadership support, with a wide range of types of professional learning identified, such as conferences, workshops, professional learning communities (PLCs), and through networks of colleagues.

With regard to the role of principal supervisor, participants referenced responsive relationships between the supervisor and principal as the second greatest theme and a leadership team approach to supervision third. Although these were coded as two separate themes, in the context of sociocultural learning theory, both can be considered learning through relationships in a social setting. When taken together, these two themes would surpass the number of references for professional learning, and would have the largest number of references in the leadership support category (73 out of 163 references.) This indicates participants understand that support, and learning or growth, happens within social constructs.

Sociocultural learning theory also provides for assistance relationships (Honig, 2008) that are used to support the learning process and movement from novice to expert practice. These assistance relationships include (a) *modeling*, (b) *valuing and legitimizing peripheral participation*, (c) *creating and sustaining social engagement*, (d)

developing and using tools, (e) brokering, and (f) joint work. Examples of each type of assistance relationship can be found within and across cases in the data. Table 13 shows two examples of each assistance relationship.

Table 13

Examples of Assistance Relationship Use by Principal Supervisors

Assistance Relationship	Example 1	Example 2
Modeling	<p>And so if the superintendent does not have a system to evaluate that data in his or her district and then is not putting in programs and resources to impact those gaps, then the overall student achievement will never meet the expectations that everyone should have for student achievement. Yeah, so I write goals around that. Then I share the goals with my assistants and principals, they align their goals with mine, and we make sure that we're all pushing the same boulder up the hill. We're not pushing different boulders up the hill. (P5)</p>	<p>On the board, those are all of our initiatives for the year. And our conversations revolve around all of those items. Much of that is instructional and how is it going in the buildings and where are their challenges and how can I help them with those challenges. (P3)</p>
Valuing and legitimizing peripheral participation	<p>I wanted her to be the person who became the expert in that. And I'm trying to find their expertise I guess, and I don't know, have something that they become the expert in. (P2)</p>	<p>I think also in terms of being a learner, a few things that are happening is trying to tap into resources. I'm a novice, but still learning that Twitter is a very unique way of really putting in front of people information. (P1)</p>
Creating and sustaining social engagement	<p>Bring the principals here more often and have them discuss things and bringing them really</p>	<p>Your own learning really is heightened when you have exposure to other principals who are doing similar work. (P1)</p>

	into all the big picture discussions. (P4)	
Developing and using tools	Balanced Leadership for Powerful Learning. (P8)	You have to have really good board goals (P2) district wide goals, district goals and expectations (P10)
Brokering	Parents would go right around the principal and come right to me. That's not to happen. (P2)	So by the time it happened, not as many yelled at the principals because the principals said, as we are all aware, the superintendent spoke about this at the board meeting and at the PTA. (P6)
Joint Work	When you talk about student achievement outcomes. You know what, I work with our building principals. I'm not the data analytic that I once was, but I look at the data. I will speak to people about the data. If there are things that just don't look right to me in terms of what's going on. (P10)	I have to help provide opportunities and setting my own culture of learning within our administrative team where rather than simply the superintendent as the potential boss always pushing down ideas to everybody, asking the right kinds of questions about where the principals really believe that the building should be moving towards in the future, asking them to be a very willing and open participant in that process of building the action plans for short term and long term gains that we're looking for. (P7)

Along with assistance relationships, activity theory provides for levels of appropriation (Grossman et al., 1999) to gauge movement from novice practice to mastery. The five levels of appropriation described by Grossman et al. (1999) are (a) *lack of appropriation*, (b) *appropriating a label*, (c) *appropriating surface features*, (d) *appropriating conceptual underpinnings*, and having (d) *achieved mastery*.

Understanding the degree of appropriation to which a principal supervisor practices leadership support is clear to the extent that participants discussed the six leadership support themes. All participants identified three or more themes of leadership support. This shows that no participant exhibits a *lack of appropriation* and by their naming types of leadership support are, minimally, *appropriating a label* as principal supervisors practicing leadership support.

Recognizing the work of leadership support along degrees of appropriation is useful as it focuses on growth, from novice to expert, as opposed to other evaluation frameworks that simply identify low performance, which have been shown to work against improvement through learning (Honig, 2008). Individual participant's descriptions show a range of appropriation beginning with *appropriating surface features*, that is, using processes of leadership support, but not necessarily changing practice consistently. Within participants we can see a progression to *appropriating conceptual underpinnings* as they apply ideas to new situations, and some are showing *mastery* through their understanding of why their practices are important for equitable student outcomes. Table 14 demonstrates several participants' range of appropriation within their work as principal supervisors supporting principal leadership.

Table 14

Recognition of Degrees of Appropriation in Supervision and Leadership Support

Participant	Appropriating surface features	Appropriating conceptual underpinnings	Achieved mastery
1	In a lot of districts, there's not necessarily a formal mentor program for administrators	We are a district that are [sic] trying to embrace PLCs as a framework to support the work that we're doing with our kids	You can read books, you can have a little theory, it's not until you're actually in the classroom with the teacher and really seeing what's going on that really can be impactful in terms of their own growth
5	If there was a way to make more time my partnering with the assistant superintendent to do more walkthrough	I created what we agreed to call a student achievement plan. But principals really still weren't internalizing, individualizing the goals that they developed for their buildings. They were sort of working in lockstep because they felt safe that way.	In terms of specific practices, there are times where I mandate their attendance to be engaged in the learning shoulder to shoulder with the teachers who are delivering the information to our students. Because we have to ensure that principals can know what the expectation is around how the curriculum is going to be delivered, why we chose it, how it's aligned with what kids are going to have to know and be able to do in terms of the New York State standards.
8	I wish I could be in their buildings more	A lot of working to build trust because that's hard. We work under really stressful environments and sometimes the trust can be threatened.	Balanced Leadership for Powerful Learning. It's the model. It's based on the Marzano model and it talks about the 21 balanced leadership responsibilities and the average effect size that it impacts student achievement. Really the focus is to increase their awareness that that's their role.

The phenomenon of principal supervision in Nassau County includes the superintendent as having primary responsibility for principal supervision. Two superintendents rely on the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction as a main point of contact for their principals. In one district, the director of curriculum and instruction has separate monthly meetings with principals. Additionally, participants' focus included a team approach that has other central office administrators participating in supervision. However, principal supervision is only one part of the complex position of superintendent of schools. Participant 9 said, "And this position, trying to balance this position, it's much different, especially if you're doing your job well."

These ideas are supported in the literature. Johnson et al.'s (2016) research showed that the focus on instruction varied when principals were supervised by their superintendent or by someone other than the superintendent, with 17% of those supervised by someone other than the superintendent reporting "somewhat" or a "great extent" higher focus on instruction. In small districts 81% of principals were supervised by their superintendent as opposed to 19% in large districts, with 72% of principals in large districts reported having monthly professional development opportunities, versus 31% in small districts. Findings included the need for greater consistency in support for principals, along with maintaining an instructional focus for principal supervision.

The literature also supports the idea that the superintendent's experience matters, with Waters and Marzano (2006) showing a significant correlation between superintendent's tenure and average student achievement, beginning as early as two years

into the superintendent's study. All participants in the current study have been supervising principals for at least two years.

Honig et al. (2010) note promising practices of principal supervision when districts have Instructional Leadership Directors (ILDs) focusing 100% of their time on principal supervision. Further, Honig's (2012) research finds that central offices should elevate the work of supporting principals to an executive-level responsibility to shift central offices from hands-off approaches to operating as the main agents of principal learning. These ideas are seemingly in conflict. On the one hand, there is evidence of experienced superintendents impacting student achievement outcomes, while on the other hand, superintendents who serve as principal supervisors must balance competing demands while fulfilling other responsibilities of their role. In all cases, the importance of principal supervision at the central office level, either directly by the superintendent or another central office administrator, is clear.

Participants also introduce the idea that supervision must be individualized based on the principal's needs and the school's needs. This is seen in Hvidson et al.'s (2016) study that concluded there was a need for individualized supervision for principals based on experience.

Although district context represented a smaller portion of references by participants with regard to their role, district size is also an important consideration of the role of principal supervision. Further compounding issues of principal supervision is the need for individualized supervision. Clearly principal supervision is a complex undertaking when attempting to provide robust leadership support for principals.

Participants' strong focus on relationships and a team approach to principal supervision and leadership support may be evidence of the fact that participants in the current study have felt the need to rely on other central office leaders for assistance with supervising principals.

Research question 2. To what extent do principal supervisors understand how their role in learning-focused leadership and the leadership support process is connected to student achievement outcomes?

Analytic category 3: Student achievement. Principals supervisors highly value the impact of principals' learning-focused leadership practice on student achievement outcomes but are less assured about making a connection between their principal supervisor work and its impact on student achievement outcomes. At the same time, principal supervisors consider their work highly valuable. Participants' values became evident as a result of their responses to open-ended question 3, *To what extent do you feel principals' work impacts student achievement outcomes?*, open-ended question 7, *How does your work as principal supervisor impact student achievement outcomes?*, and open-ended question 9, *To what extent do you think you or your district values the work of principal supervision?*. Table 15 includes statements showing how principal supervisors strongly value the principal's impact on student achievement and highly value their own work, but are not as assured when it comes to connecting their principal supervision work to student achievement.

Table 15

Comparison of Participants' Value Responses

Participant	Value of Principal's Impact on Student Achievement	Value of Principal Supervisor's Impact on Student Achievement	Value of Principal Supervision
1	overwhelming	you set up a practice you think is...impactful...it may not be	Highly
2	off the charts	really hoping...it's...positive	definitely value the work...
3	essential	to the extent that I do that successfully...I think I have a direct impact	I see it as essential
4	greatly impacts	I think if I'm doing a good job...we should see better outcomes	I personally highly value it
5	second most impactful	third most impactful	I think it is highly valued...
6	huge correlation		
7	heavily impacted	I think my work [has the] potential to impact	I value the work tremendously
8	most important role	every decision we make should improve student achievement	
9	power beyond...understanding	directly impact	Oh, exponentially...
10	incredibly important		Its' so very important

Interpretation and synthesis: Student achievement. While participants understand the impact of principal leadership, they do not always connect how their own

principal supervision work impacts on principals and can, in turn, raise student achievement. Principal supervisors know that principals' work impacts student achievement outcomes, yet they are not directly tying themselves into that picture. The connection from principal supervisor to principal to teacher to student did not appear as a theme despite their strong conviction that a principal impacts student achievement outcomes. This is an indication that participants know that instructional leadership should be at the forefront of a principal's work, but may be unaware of how their principal supervisor work can drive this focus or unaware of how to frame their principal supervisor work to ensure there is a focus on instructional leadership.

Part of this may be explained by the review of literature in which direct vs. indirect effects of school leadership is discussed. While research on indirect effects of leadership show positive effect sizes, Witziers et al. (2003) wanted to understand more about direct effects, concluding that the direct contribution to student outcomes is small. Leithwood et al. (2004) found that for effects of leadership on student learning, the combination of indirect and direct effects of school leadership on student outcomes is small but significant. The Leithwood et al. (2004) study makes clear that leaders contribute indirectly to student learning by their influence on other people. As the role of principal supervisor is an emerging topic in the research literature, in current studies researchers have yet to focus on connections regarding the impact of central office leadership on principal leadership. Principal supervisors may see themselves as removed from the more specific link of teacher to student or the path from principal to teacher to

student, and thus the phenomenon does not exhibit a clear connection between the value of their principal supervisor work and how it impacts student achievement outcomes.

The Central Office Transformation investigation (Honig et al., 2010) showed how principal supervision practices associated with learning research can help districts focus on building the capacity of school principals to improve teaching and learning. This includes modeling for principals how to think and act like an instructional leader, how to use tools to support engagement in instructional leadership, and brokering external resources (Honig, 2008), in other words, the practices of assistance relationships. Further, the Honig et al. (2010) study introduces dimensions of practice that are similar to the conceptual framework's learning-focused leadership, including the practice of learning-focused partnerships with school principals, central office-principal partnerships, supporting teaching and learning improvement, and use of evidence.

As noted in the review of literature, research suggests (Waters & Marzano, 2006; Knapp et al., 2010; Honig et al., 2010; Honig 2012; Corcoran et al., 2013; Johnston et al., 2016), there is value in supporting principals' learning-focused leadership practices; simply put, that principal supervision matters. Understanding this, the CCSSO recognized a need to create a "clear and practical definition of what a principal supervisor should know and be able to do in order to improve the effectiveness of the school leaders with whom they work" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 2). The research-based Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (CCSSO, 2015) were created based on the District Leadership Design Lab (DL2) Principal Supervisor Performance Standards Version 1.0 (University of Washington, 2014). Despite the availability of newer research and

frameworks for principal supervision, the phenomenon of principal supervision in Nassau County does not include formalized practices or frameworks for principal supervision in any cases in the study.

While I was able to identify examples of use of assistance relationships within the data (Table 13), there is a question as to whether or not participants are aware of how their use of these assistance relationships can support their own learning in the area of effective principal supervision practices that impact student achievement outcomes. The research of Honig et al. (2017) finds that “superintendents and other executive-level leaders may have important roles to play in leading the learning of their own staff, even when they themselves are still learning the research” (p. 29). This type of intentional learning would support superintendents in moving supervision practices from evaluation and operations management to teaching principals to grow as instructional leaders.

Research question 3. To what extent do central office leaders who supervise principals understand or recognize the learning-focused leadership practices of principals?

Analytic category 4: Principal leadership. Principal supervisors’ belief statements regarding learning-focused leadership practices of principals included two main themes, principal practices related to teaching and learning and the principal as learner. Principal supervisors also identified six themes specifically related to their understanding of learning-focused leadership practices. These understandings included the idea that schools have different needs, that there is a focus on teaching and learning, that principals have to manage the day-to-day work of their building, that principals

should set goals, that they must have quality relationships, and that they use data as part of their leadership work. Figure 5 shows the relative importance of each of these six themes as evidenced by the number of coded references each and the number of open-ended questions the theme reference appeared.



Figure 5. Principal Leadership Practices Hierarchy. The size of the boxes represents the quantity of coded references; the larger the box, the greater the coding references across all participants. Shading represents the quantity of questions the codes arose in; the darker the shade the greater the number of open-ended interview questions containing references.

Interpretation and synthesis: Principal leadership. We know that principal leadership matters. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2010). School leadership practices have been identified and reported in the literature as being impactful on student achievement outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd, & Row, 2008; Robinson et al., 2009; Day et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2003). Researchers have identified impacts on student outcomes that occur indirectly through leaders' ability to improve teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2008). School leadership types also matter (Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008) and that the school leaders' influence is greater when it is shared or distributed (Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008).

This study's data shows that principal supervisors' perception of principal leadership is grounded in two historical school leadership models, instructional leader and building manager. Considering the data from their statements regarding what learning-focused leadership meant, notably, principal practices related to teaching and learning, taken with the bulk of coding references in the area of leading teaching and learning, there is a clear picture that principal supervisors believe principals should be practicing leadership in the area of teaching and learning. Referencing several practices, such as guiding teachers, and using data, participant 3 said:

This goes back to my reference to the principal as an instructional leader. I think teachers need a tremendous amount of support, supervision, guidance when it comes to instruction and interpreting data and using that data in a meaningful way to adapt their instruction. The principals are the boots on the ground. They're the

ones who are there every day. They're the ones being able to do classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis and have ongoing conversations with their teachers.

Noting how culture impacts student learning, participant 7 stated:

And so we've been working here as many places have, on the understanding that the culture of the building of which is set in essence by the principal who has the greatest impact on that is the greatest potential factor in the achievement outcomes. Because that affects the individual cultures of each classroom and the more all of our staff members are pulling in the same direction, the greater our achievement outcomes will be.

It is useful how participants' perceptions fit into four categories of leadership that prior research (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008) has shown links leadership to student learning, *setting directions*, *developing people*, *redesigning the organization*, and *managing instructional leadership*. Table 16 shows the alignment of these practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008) with the current study's conceptual framework regarding learning-focused leadership and the six themes of learning-focused leadership identified by study participants.

Table 16

Alignment of School Leadership Practices

Practices linking school leadership to student achievement outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008)	Principal learning-focused leadership (Knapp et al., 2010)	Participants' principal learning-focused leadership practice themes
Setting directions; vision, goals, performance expectations, shared understandings	Persistent focus on learning improvement; Improvement goals; Shared responsibility for student learning	Principal goal setting
Developing people; intellectual stimulation, individualized support, models of best practice	Investment in instructional leadership with resources, professional development; Differentiated, responsive relationships - leader to teacher	Relationships; Building context
Redesigning the organization; strengthening school culture, modifying organizational structures, build collaborative processes	Reinvention of leadership practice; Teacher leaders, instructional leadership team	Relationships
Managing the instructional program	Persistent focus on learning improvement; Evidence use - data-driven, evidence for instruction and learning	Leading teaching and learning; Management; Using data

Participant themes align with current research on school leadership practices, yet only one participant identified a specific principal leadership model, Balanced Leadership for Powerful Learning (Goodwin, Cameron, & Hein, 2015), as part of their principal supervision and evaluation practice. This framework stems from the identification of 21

leadership responsibilities that can be associated with student achievement, first introduced in the research of Waters, et al. (2003). Additionally, there was confusion among participants with regard to the term *learning-focused leadership*. While participant principal supervisors recognize a clear connection between principal leadership and student achievement (finding 3), their confusion regarding this term and their absence of identifying the use of a specific framework for principal leadership practices indicates that principal supervision practices do not incorporate a robust definition or framework for principal leadership practices that impact student achievement.

This is an ongoing problem seen throughout research on instructional leadership. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) warned of the concept of instructional leadership being a slogan or “leadership by adjective” where adding a qualifier creates a new form of leadership. Shatzer (2014) recommended future research examining new models of leadership to replace dated theories of instructional leadership but cautioned that simple integration of practice should be avoided. Freeley and Scricca (2015) state clearly the need to adopt effective research-based leadership actions that allow leaders to meet the needs of those they serve. Newer versions of leadership standards such as the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015) aim to do this.

Researcher assumptions. The assumption presented in Chapter 1 stated that principal supervisors in Nassau County would not have a formal understanding of current research-based practices in principal supervision that have emerged over the past fifteen years. Based on the experiences that participants shared in interviews, there is a partial

understanding of effective practices of principal supervision and leadership support, which is clear from the alignment of themes to the research-based practices of leadership support. However, participants' experiences indicated that they did not use specific research-based frameworks, tools, or standards for principal supervision that have emerged recently in the literature, such as the Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (CCSSO, 2015).

Summary of interpretation of findings. The discussion presented in the first section of this chapter includes the perceptions of practicing principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York. In summary, it provides the essence of the lived experiences of principal supervisors. Principal supervisors in Nassau County identified many of the current research-based practices of leadership support as being part of their supervision practices. It is evident that there is a range of appropriation, or growth from novice to expert, in the practical application of their ideas regarding leadership support. The discussion reveals that they are certain of the impact of principal leadership on student achievement outcomes but are less certain when making the same connection to their own role. Learning-focused leadership was an unfamiliar term for some participants, however, there is a clear sense that leadership focused on teaching and learning should be at the core of principals' practice.

Data collection included a single interview for each participant in the study. The choice to use this streamlined form of data collection for this study was supported by phenomenological procedures described in Creswell (2007) and Bogden & Biklen (2007). Additionally, my own work as an Assistant Superintendent in Nassau County,

New York has allowed me to develop significant relationships with other administrators in the county, including superintendents. My own previously established relationships with several participants, along with other participants' awareness of my professional work, also supported the use of single interviews. Participants were quickly forthcoming with sharing their perceptions at the start of the interview. Participants also spent extended time during the interview, speaking with me at length during each single session. For these reasons, additional methods of data collection, such as focus groups were considered, but not employed.

The analysis of findings presented deserves some caution. First, the research sample for this study was small, with data collected from 10 participants. Second, this study was limited to principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York, and therefore the results may not be applicable to other settings that may be dissimilar to schools or districts outside of this particular area. Third, participants in this study were supervisors of elementary school principals and therefore the findings may not be applicable to supervisors of secondary school principals. Therefore, it is important to note that the findings in this study are specific to the lived experiences of the study population.

A qualitative study is subject to potential bias due to the researcher-as-instrument. It is important to note additional bias in analyzing the findings in this study as a result of my own experience as a principal supervisor in Nassau County, New York. To minimize this bias, I have engaged in reflective processes, including specifically noting observer comments while reviewing data, journaling, and having discussions with critical

colleagues. The discussion presented is an expression of my own making meaning of the data collected in this study as a result of my interpretation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions. The first major finding of this study is that participants' lived experience as principal supervisors involves supporting principal leadership in six clearly defined areas: professional learning support, relationship support, leadership team support, operational support, political support, and resourcing support. The second major finding of this study is that principal supervisors believe their role includes these six themes of leadership support along with three other distinctions: district goals, individualization, and district context. These findings match research on sociocultural learning theory, demonstrating superintendent participants' understanding that principal supervision includes many practices involving learning within social constructs. Within their own work practice, superintendents' principal supervision expertise ranges from a novice level to more expert execution.

Currently in New York State, only a few districts within the New York City Department of Education, have participated in research and professional learning with regard to the newly defined role of principal supervisor as outlined in recent research. Although leadership support by participants in this study align well with current research on leadership support for principals, it is clear that the new paradigm of having a defined role of principal supervisor is not part of the lived experiences of Nassau County superintendents. Participants in this study act as principal supervisors within the role of superintendent, however, they are unaware of the latest research-based and well defined,

role, standards, and evaluation instrument for principal supervision. The practices identified by superintendents may simply be part of the existing routine of running the district and may not have the specific intention of supporting principal leadership.

The third major finding of this study is that principal supervisors highly value the impact of principals' learning-focused leadership practice on student achievement outcomes, but are less assured when connecting their principal supervisor work to its impact on student achievement outcomes. While the value of the role is considered important, the uncertainty in connecting the role to its impact on student achievement outcomes by supporting principals' learning focused leadership, along with the lack of a clearly defined principal supervisor role, leads to the related conclusion that prioritizing the role of principal supervisor as its own position is questionable in these districts.

While these superintendents act as principal supervisors, they also perform all of their other district-wide roles and responsibilities, bringing into question how well they are able to perform practices of leadership support that can ultimately impact student achievement outcomes. Superintendents must understand that just as a principal makes an indirect impact on student achievement through their influence on teachers, a principal supervisor makes an indirect impact on student achievement through their influence on principals. This is important even when the principal supervisor is still themselves learning how to help principals grow as instructional leaders.

The fourth major finding of this study is that principal supervisors' beliefs about learning-focused leadership practices of principals centered around principals' practice focusing on teaching and learning and the principal as learner. Principal supervisors'

lived experience included understanding that schools have different needs, that there should be a focus on teaching and learning, that principals have to manage the day-to-day work of their building, they should set goals, they must have effective relationships, and they should use data.

Participants had an understanding of components of principal leadership practice and recognized that principal leadership practice and student achievement are connected. Yet, participants were divided on their understanding of the term learning-focused leadership. Some participants interpreted this term as meaning having a focus on instructional leadership, reinforcing their connection of principal leadership practice that supports teaching and learning that may impact student achievement. While others defined learning-focused leadership as a principal's life-long learning or professional growth. While both are worthy definitions, this lack of commonality means that participants do not have a practical and operational definition of research-based learning-focused leadership practice that is understood by themselves and that is clear to the entire leadership team. As such, this may contribute to hesitation on the part of principal supervisors, to make a clear connection between their role to support learning-focused leadership and to improve student achievement outcomes and reduce persistent gaps in learning for students in disadvantaged groups. Having a robust definition or framework for principal leadership practices is critical to effectively supporting principal leadership within the practice of principal supervision.

Recommendations. Based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study, as researcher, I offer the following recommendations for policy, practice, and

future research. Supporting the research-based practice of principal supervision supports effective principal leadership practices, and in turn, supports the ultimate goal of reducing persistent gaps in student achievement outcomes. The recommendations below are for (a) bodies with authority to influence education policy in New York State and Nassau County, (b) currently practicing Nassau County administrators responsible for principal supervision, and (c) further research.

Recommendations for New York educational policy makers. Political bodies with educational decision-making authority in New York State and Nassau County should:

1. New York State lawmakers should review and amend or eliminate the current legislation that drives the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) law for principal evaluation. Lawmakers should consider how to better align the requirements in the law to current research-based practices in the area of principal supervision and evaluation.
2. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) should support all districts in New York State, including Nassau County, with regard to furthering research-based practices in principal supervision. Opportunities for professional development in the area of principal supervision that utilizes a framework of leadership support should be widely available and supported at the policy level. The federal government has already supported the importance of professional learning of principals by allowing Title IIA funds to be utilized for these purposes.

3. The Nassau County Council of School Superintendents (NCCSS) should create their own position statement with regard to the importance of, and support for, the principal supervisor position.
4. NCCSS should work with the Nassau Association of District Curriculum Officials (NADCO) and other school leadership groups to promote the importance of leadership support for principals.

Recommendations for Nassau County administrators. With the current research on principal supervision, leadership support, and learning-focused leadership in mind, central office administrators responsible for principal supervision in Nassau County, New York should:

1. Review the current research on the role of principal supervisor and create their own local definition of the role of principal supervisor based on the aspirational 2015 Model Principal Supervisor Standards or other research-based leadership support framework.
2. Prioritize the role of principal supervisor at the local level by identifying the work of principal supervisor as either a significant part of a central office level administrator's job responsibilities or as a separate position in itself, as has been done in other school districts with success.
3. Create a local scholarship of practice for the newly created principal supervisor role that aligns with the research on learning-focused leadership and leadership support practices.

4. Identify a research-based school leadership framework in order to work towards identifying and documenting their district's definition of learning-focused leadership for principals. To be impactful, learning-focused leadership practice must be clearly defined.
5. Identify and put into practice a research-based leadership support framework in order to provide principals with the leadership support they need to be effective in their learning-focused leadership practices within the context of their individual schools.

Future research. The results of this study represent the perceptions of 10 superintendents who supervise two to five elementary principals in Nassau County, New York. These results may not generalize to other superintendents or principal supervisors in other populations or localities, to secondary principal supervision, or to principal supervisors who are responsible for the supervision of more than five principals. Future research would be necessary to determine if similar findings would result in studies involving principal supervisors at the secondary level, or in other districts, counties, or states, or in larger districts with greater numbers of principals. In order to consider these other aspects, future researchers could:

- Conduct a similar study using a quantitative approach. Survey tools can be used with larger groups of participants and may strengthen the data collected.
- Conduct a similar study with principal supervisors who supervise secondary principals.

- Conduct a similar study with principal supervisors who are responsible for a larger number of principals.
- Conduct a similar study with principal supervisors from other areas, such as all of Long Island, various regions of New York State, or New York State as a whole.

Directly related to the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study, additional research should include:

1. Investigations of principals' perceptions of their own supervision in Nassau County. Comparing principals' perceptions or lived experiences to the results of this study would assist with the alignment of practices in principal supervision with perceptions of the impact of the supervision. Exploring principal supervision from both the supervisee and supervisor perspectives may reveal greater insight into leadership practice.
2. Conducting a similar study with other central office administrators, specifically assistant superintendents for curriculum and instruction and assistant superintendents for human resources would further add to the body of research in the area of principal supervision practices. Findings in this study indicated that other members of the superintendent's administrative team are embedded in principal supervision practice within their districts.
3. Research that considers the experience level of the principal supervisor or whether the principal supervisor had served as a principal. Although this was not considered within the scope of this study's research questions, a cursory

examination of the data shows that references from superintendent participants in the study with the most experience, and who were former principals, represent a greater depth and breadth of coded references across all cases.

4. Research that adds to the research literature on direct and/or indirect effects of principal supervision on student achievement outcomes.
5. Research that considers additional data collection procedures such as focus groups and multiple interview sessions over specific time periods.

Researcher Reflections. I began my own journey with principal supervision in 2016 when I became the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Valley Stream Thirteen Union Free School District. Having previously been a director of curriculum, instruction, and technology, working alongside four elementary principals for nine years, I did not anticipate how unprepared I would be to formally support four elementary principals in their critical roles. This was the beginning of what has now become four years of learning and professional growth. My own lived experience includes on the job training and practice, and now, several years of my own research within this significant and emerging area of K-12 education. Principal supervision will be an area of study that will continue to emerge and grow, namely, in my own practice, for other scholar-practitioners, and for research.

APPENDIX A

St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Jan 14, 2020 4:16 PM EST

PI: Judith LaRocca

CO-PI: Anthony Annunziato

Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2020-316** *Perceptions of the Role of Principal Supervisors in Nassau County, New York*

Dear Judith LaRocca:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Perceptions of the Role of Principal Supervisors in Nassau County, New York*. The approval is effective from January 14, 2020 through January 12, 2021

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data needs to be discarded.

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B

Informational letter to Nassau County Principal Supervisors



Department of Administrative
and Educational Leadership
8000 Utopia Parkway
Jamaica, NY 11439

Dear Administrator:

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the self-reported work of principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York. This study will be conducted by Judith LaRocca, doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation. The faculty sponsor is Dr. Anthony Annunziato, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University.

If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview concerning your work as a supervisor of elementary (K-6) principals in your district. You must be a currently practicing supervisor of elementary principals that work in a Nassau County public school with any combination of students in grades K-6. You must supervise two or more elementary principals and have been a principal supervisor for at least one school year. Participation in this study will involve an interview that may take up to two hours of your time. We will schedule a mutually convenient time for the interview, which will take place at your district's location.

If you are interested in participating in this doctoral research, please complete the attached **Consent Form** and return it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope or scan and return to Judith LaRocca by email at judith.larocca17@stjohns.edu.

Once eligible participants are established for the research study they will be contacted to schedule an appointment for an interview. Outcomes of this research may serve to inform local practice with regard to learning-focused leadership and leadership support practices. If you have any questions, please reach out to me by email or phone at 516-984-3595. Thank you in advance your consideration.

Sincerely,

Judith A. LaRocca
Doctoral Candidate
St. John's University

APPENDIX C

Letter of Informed Consent



Department of Administrative and
Educational Leadership
8000 Utopia Parkway
Jamaica, NY 11439

Dear Administrator:

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the self-reported work of principal supervisors in Nassau County, New York. This study will be conducted by Judith LaRocca, doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation. The faculty sponsor is Dr. Anthony Annunziato, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview concerning your work as a supervisor of elementary (K-6) principals in your district. Your interviews will be audio taped. You may review these tapes and request that any or all portion of the tapes be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve up to two hours of your time.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help understand the extent to which local practice aligns with current educational research on principal supervision and may inform future practice. Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by using codes and keeping consent forms separate from data so that your identity will not become known or linked with any information you provide. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews or questionnaires, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have any questions or wish to report a research-related problem you may contact Judith LaRocca at 516-984-3595, judith.larocca17@stjohns.edu, or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Anthony Annunziato, Director, Long Island Graduate Center, 718-990-7781. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB

Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440. You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

Agreement to Participate

Signature

Date

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