

Changing Student Demographics and Suburban School Leadership

by

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## ABSTRACT

### CHANGING STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND SUBURBAN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

By

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Principals and superintendents serving in four suburban school districts in Wisconsin experiencing significant increases in the numbers of students who identify as Hispanic or African American were studied to identify how these leaders were working to meet the needs of all learners in increasingly diverse public school contexts. This study aimed to answer three primary research questions: What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles? What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully deliver on the promise of creating school environments within which all students succeed? How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies and supporting principals in proactively leading through racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized such groups of students? Leadership dispositions, knowledge, skills, and resources identified by building administrators necessary to successfully meet the challenge of actualizing success for all students are discussed and include growth mindset, a deep understanding of change management, a willingness to confront and disrupt, and a reliance upon peer collaboration. The superintendent/principal relationship is analyzed for relevance and

impact on principal effectiveness and issues currently faced by district administrators serving in increasingly diverse suburban school districts are outlined. Results of this study illuminate opportunities for future research and implications on current practice in the field of educational administration.

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*“If I have seen farther it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”*

*Sir Isaac Newton*

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Dr. Henry is the superintendent of a large, suburban school district in the Midwest, the Fairchild School District. At the start of his tenure, he supervised a cadre of 25 building principals and was excited to lead this group of administrators in a collective effort to affect positive change in their district. Dr. Henry was excited, enthusiastic, and optimistic about the future of the Fairchild School District as he saw great potential, energy, and hope across this group of principals. Dr. Henry's enthusiasm was dampened a bit heading into the second year of his tenure as five of his school-level leaders had left the district, creating the need to attract and hire several new principals. Two of the exiting principals told Dr. Henry that the role of the school principal had become too complex and pressure-filled. They communicated that they no longer felt capable or effective and therefore, decided to retire. They explained upon their departure that they felt ill-equipped to handle not only the components of their lengthy job-descriptions, but the issues involving staff, students, and families. Fairchild, a suburban district with a history of high levels of academic achievement, had undergone a swift shift in student demographics, seeing a significant annual increase in the numbers of students who identified as African American and Hispanic. The teaching and administrative staffs in Fairchild are largely White and these shifts have created unexpected pressures and tensions within the district. Twenty-five percent of Dr. Henry's administrative team was new at the start of year two. Over the next five years, Dr. Henry experienced continued turnover within the principal ranks and by the start of year seven of his superintendency, only three of the original twenty-five principals remained. Through exit-interviews with

each principal leaving Fairchild, Dr. Henry tried to gain an understanding of why so many were choosing to leave. A recurring theme emerged through these interactions—the exiting school leaders communicated that they felt ill equipped to deal with issues related to the changing student demographics in Fairchild. One “seasoned” principal explained, “Every year we had more and more students coming to school whose parent did not speak English. We had to keep trying to figure out ways to best communicate families who did not speak English. I felt helpless in these efforts. I just didn’t know what to do.” Another principal described a series of stressful conversations she had had with parents of some of her students who were African American. She described feelings of fear, self-doubt, and anxiety in preparing and carrying out these conversations as she did not want to communicate in a disrespectful way, but always left the interactions second-guessing her own tactics. These exit interviews confirmed what Dr. Henry had believed throughout his tenure in Fairchild. Inadequacies with respect to cultural understanding that are faced by urban school district principals, those widely understood and described in research and practice, were now facing him and the leaders he was charged to support.

Although Dr. Henry’s story in this case is fictionalized, in many ways it represents a typical story for many superintendents in the United States—especially those working in suburban settings. The demographic landscape is rapidly changing in the United States and these changes are mirrored in the public schools. Since the 1990s, schools in suburban settings have experienced significant population growth, almost all of which has been attributed to increased enrollment of students of color (Frey, Berube, Singer, & Wilson, 2009). Still perceived by many as prosperous White communities, suburban cities are now the epi-center of racial, ethnic, and political change in America

(Orfield & Luce, 2012). Racially diverse suburbs are growing at a faster rate than their predominantly white counterparts. Diverse suburban neighborhoods now outnumber those in central, urban cities by more than two to one (Tavernise, 2012). Over half of all members of racial minority groups in large metropolitan areas, including those who identify as African American, now live in the suburbs (Frey, 2011). Forty four percent of suburban residents in the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States live in racially integrated communities, which are defined as places whose inhabitants are between 20 and 60 percent non-white (Tavernise, 2012). By the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the United States will have no racial majority. In 2011, a majority of the children born in the United States and nearly half of students attending public school in the U.S. were non-white (Tavernise, 2012). As the populations of students of color continue to grow, suburban school systems will need to strengthen their competency in serving these students and their families. The task of leading in schools working to forward integrative practices in suburban districts that are experiencing changes in student demographic composition presents a variety of challenges, including issues of faculty efficacy and agency, school identity, and power and politics (Evans, 2007).

Attracting and retaining skilled, dedicated, and resilient school leaders remains a challenge for school districts across the country. The National Center for Educational Statistics (Battelle, 2010) reports that during the 2007-08 school year, 20% of principals across the country did not return to the same school for the 2008-2009 school year. Research from across the United States (Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009; Stoelinga, Hart, & Schalliol, 2008; Partlow & Ridenour, 2008; Brown-Ferrigno & Johnson-Fusarelli, 2005; Fuller & Young, 2009) suggests challenges that superintendents and

school districts with principal turnover face. Existing research indicates a variety of reasons for such high principal turnover rates. These include:

- mobility of students and teachers;
- low performance on accountability examinations;
- increases in the numbers of economically disadvantaged students;
- job stress;
- inadequate feedback;
- lack of guidance from supervisors;
- the number of accountability mandates;
- lack of resources;
- irrelevant preparation;
- lack of development and training;
- “ghosts of principals past”;
- isolation; and
- inability to fit into the current school culture (Daresh & Male, 2000; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2007; Draper & McMichael, 2000; Fuller & Young, 2010; Partlow, 2007; Rooney, 2000; Shipps & White, 2009; Walker & Qian, 2006).

Existing research also substantiates the need to support principals while they are on the job (Crippen, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2007; Davis et al., 2005; Piggot-Irvine, 2004; Silver, Lochmiller, Copland, & Tripps, 2009; Wildy & Clarke, 2008). The structures and systems districts employ to support principals varies widely and depends on the district’s resources and collective expertise (LaPointe et al., 2007). To

further exacerbate the issue, questions continue to be raised about the adequacy of principal preparation programs, leaving the responsibility of training and development of school leaders to school districts. As the roles and responsibilities of principals continue to grow and become more complex, some believe it is a “job too big for one” (Grubb & Flessa, 2006, p. 518).

During the past three decades, the roles and responsibilities of the school principal have evolved dramatically. Historically, principals were primarily responsible for the safety and security of staff and students and the assurance of a properly equipped and maintained school building; principals now are expected to be the lead architect of a change agenda that is significantly influenced by complex internal and external forces (Fullan, 2001; Marzano & Waters, 2005). Guided and dictated by a growing accountability movement in education, school leaders now face not only the day-to-day dealings with students, parents, teachers and the larger community, but must guarantee student achievement for each and every student in their care (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). The “wake up call” that resulted from the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s *A Nation at Risk* (1983) report, continues to inform and influence education policy and practice today. The report began:

Our nation is at risk. Competitors, throughout the world, are overtaking our once challenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation. The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people...If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the

mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have viewed it as an act of war.

A number of accountability measures and reforms followed this publication, all of which have impacted those involved in the leadership of schools. From local task forces to the Goals 2000 Summit held in Charlottesville, Virginia, to The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Response to Intervention (RtI) movements of today, education leaders are continually faced with pressure to impact student achievement, meet standards and face a highly complex daily existence in change leadership.

Decades of school reform, aimed at improving achievement outcomes for all students regardless of socioeconomic status, disability, race/ethnicity or English Language Learning (ELL) status, have been largely ineffective, as significant discrepancies in academic achievement continue between white, affluent students and their non-white, non-affluent peers. In Wisconsin, the context for this study, the achievement gap between students who are White and those who are African American is the largest in the nation in both reading and mathematics at both the fourth and eighth grade levels, as measured by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) (Education Commission of the States, 2013).

Principals are critical to school success (Fullan, 2001, 2008a, 2008b; Leithwood, Lewis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Reeves, 2009, Whitaker, 2003). Researchers report, however, that the applicant pool of qualified principals is shrinking (U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Harris, 2008;

McCreight, 2001). Fewer and fewer educators aspire to the principalship and a leadership gap is projected in the near future (Archer, 2004; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007; Copland, 2001; Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Noor, 2008; Norton, 2003). The shrinking applicant pool of qualified education professionals desiring to move into principal positions, the number of principals leaving the profession, and the increasingly diverse demographic context within which these educators are being asked to lead, are causes for concern, reflection, and the development of more robust and comprehensive systems of support.

The impact of the school principal on student achievement is well-documented in the research. The changing demographic landscape in U.S. public schools is also well documented. Little is currently known, however, about the ways suburban school leaders are addressing increasing diversity in their schools. Specifically, there is a lack of research on the specific supports, structures, and policies suburban school leaders rely upon to navigate the ever-increasingly complex role they are being asked to fulfill. Additionally, existing research on responses to rapid student demographic change focuses primarily on school-level responses (Cooper, 2009; Evans, 2007) while little research considers district-level responses and the connections between principals and their district-level counterparts as they work together to create learning environments within which all students are successful.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this research was to understand how principals and superintendents, working in suburban school districts experiencing significant shifts in student demographics related to increases in the numbers of students who identify as

African American or Hispanic, are doing as they address these shifts and develop competency in creating learning environments within which all students are successful. This study aimed to illuminate the demographic shifts across the United States and their impact on public education administration, placing a particular research emphasis on educational leadership in suburban school districts within which these changes have been swift and significant. This research aimed to capture the lived-experiences of suburban-school principals and their district office counterparts as they reflect on the greatest challenges they face in their roles and the resources and supports that proved most helpful in their work.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research questions were:

1. What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles?
2. What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully deliver on the promise of creating school environments within which all students succeed?
3. How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies and supporting principals in proactively leading through racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized such groups of students?

### **Significance of the Study**

While the existing research offers significant insights into the roles and responsibilities of school leaders working in urban school districts contexts, little is known about how changes in student demographics are impacting the roles and responsibilities of suburban school district principals. As shifts in race and ethnicity continue to evolve in the country, the need to gain a full understanding of how districts work to build the competencies of understanding race, ethnicity, socio-economic status and second-language acquisition so that all students are honored, valued, and successful in suburban districts has never been more important. This increased understanding can inform suburban school leadership practice now and into the future.

Documenting the reflections of suburban principals and their district office administrators, and describing the resources and supports that proved most helpful when developing competency in leading in diverse school contexts, will inform current and future thinking about the necessary components of principal preparation programs. The examination of district-level policies and their impact on building the competency and shaping the practices of school leaders as they work to create learning environments within which all students are successful, will inform the work of principals and superintendents as they attempt to work in concert to deliver on the promise of access and equity for all.

### **Research Assumptions**

When conducting a qualitative research study, the researcher enters the project with a defined worldview or lens through which the researcher sees the world. This set of beliefs and assumptions guides the research. As Creswell (1998) identified, the following

assumptions are inherent in qualitative research: ontological, axiological, methodological, rhetorical, and epistemological. For the purposes of this research study, each assumption will be further defined and contextualized.

### **Ontological Assumption**

Creswell (1998) suggests the ontological assumption addresses the nature of reality. He states that reality is constructed by individuals and therefore, multiple realities exist. Specifically, the realities of the researcher, those of the subjects being studied, and that of the reader impact data analysis. In this study, this researcher illuminated the multiple voices and realities of principals and their superintendents working in suburban school districts experiencing significant student demographic changes. In bringing those various realities to life, the nature of reality in the realm of educational leadership will be described. This researcher brought a reality to this research, a perspective and experience as a white, female district-level administrator. As an educational leader currently serving in a suburban school setting, this researcher entered this study with the belief that the gaps in achievement between students who are White and students who are African American or Hispanic are caused by problems with or inadequacies in the educational system and the policies and practices that are perpetuate these differences in student outcomes. This researcher did not believe the issues of access and achievement for students of color, students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, students whose first language is not English, and students who are disabled currently present in the vast majority of the public schools in the United States, are the fault of the students. This world view informed and influenced the judgments made by this researcher throughout the research process. As an aspiring superintendent who supervised principals in a

suburban school district experiencing shifts in demographics, this researcher believed this reality enhanced my ability to relate to the principals and superintendents participating in the research and the research data itself.

### **Axiological Assumption**

Creswell (1998) describes the axiological assumption as one that reveals that qualitative research is value laden. He posits that the researcher must admit the value-laden aspect of the study and report his or her biases. As a white, female district-level administrator, this researcher came to this study with particular biases. This study included participants who were White, African American, or Hispanic. It is understood that my interactions with each participant were impacted by the race of the participant as well as that of this researcher.

### **Epistemological Assumption**

The relationship of the researcher to that being researched is the definition of an epistemological assumption (Creswell, 1998). Because qualitative researchers interact with those they study, researchers must minimize the distance or “objective separateness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between themselves and their research subjects. Since this researcher was a practicing district-level administrator working in the same geographic region as the participants in the study, the distance between researcher and participants involved in the study was reduced. This researcher had yet to become a superintendent and, therefore, had yet to attain insider status.

### **Rhetorical Assumption**

Creswell (1998) suggests the qualitative researcher tends to employ a writing approach that is narrative, literary, or personal in nature. The qualitative research favors

terms such as “confirmability”, “transferability”, “credibility”, and “dependability” over “objectivity”, “validity”, and “generalizability”. The aim of this research was to describe in the fullest extent possible, the lived experiences, dispositions and beliefs of both principals and their superintendents working in suburban districts experiencing swift shifts in student demographic composition. Embracing a narrative, personal, and literary approach was selected to achieve this aim.

### **Methodological Assumption**

Since the qualitative researcher believes the findings and major learnings from the study emerged through an inductive, context-bound process, they bring a methodological assumption to their research (Creswell, 1998). The context of school leadership in suburban districts where shifts in student demographics have been significant, sets the stage for this study. Patterns and theories of understanding were developed through the course of the research.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Superintendent:* A superintendent of schools is the chief executive officer of a school district. The superintendent of schools, as the instructional leader of the school district, is given responsibilities to supervise all staff and has the full authority over the entire instructional program.

*Principal:* The instructional leader of an individual school within a school district. The school principal is supervised by the superintendent of schools (or designee).

*Suburban District:* Definitions of “suburban” include physical, functional, social and process dimensions (Forsyth, 2012). There is no consensus among scholars as to what exactly constitutes a suburb. According to the National Center for Educational

Statistics (2013) a suburban school district is classified as either small, mid-sized or large according to the following criteria:

*Suburb, Large:* Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more.

*Suburb, Midsize:* Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.

*Suburb, Small:* Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000.

Simply defining the term using population density and location is too restrictive and narrowly focused. The fields of urban planning, urban history, urban sociology, and urban geography provide differing definitions of a suburb. These disciplinary differences attempt to define the term for different purposes. Historians strive to define suburbs in a way that makes sense over time while urban sociologists are more concerned about how the definition can inform social relations (Forsyth, 2012). The research involving varying definitions of “suburb” are influenced by the following: location, built environment characteristics, transportation, activities, political places, styles of building, design, and planning, critical assessments, indices, and sociocultural influences (Gober & Behr, 1992; Harris & Larkham, 1996b; Harris, 2010; Johnson 2006; Flint, 2006). The school districts selected for inclusion in this study are considered to be suburban according to this more expanded conceptualization of the term. Two of the four districts are located directly adjacent to a large metropolitan area. All four districts are situated in cities that have the built environment characteristics or features, readily identifiable with the naked eye, associated with the term “suburban”. These include detached housing, single-story

factories and warehouses, campus-style low-rise office complexes, strip shopping centers, and large-scale shopping malls (Dunahm-Jones & Williamson, 2009). Two of the four districts are located in cities within commuting distance to the “core city”, while all four cities offer a wide array of activities to residents that are associated with suburban life. These include schooling, a faith community, shopping, industry, recreation and entertainment (Garreau, 1991). All four school districts are located in cities that meld town and countryside in a unique manner (Archer, 2011).

Most germane to this purpose of this study was the sociocultural dimension of the definition of “suburban”. As Healy (1994, p. xiii) writes, “The terms suburb and suburbia have functioned as imagined spaces on to which a vast array of fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions and yearnings have been projected and displaced.” Fava (1956) suggests that “suburbanism is a way of life” (p. 34) and points out that suburban residents tend to share three common traits: “more than their disproportionate share of young married couples and their children, made up largely of families of middle-class status, and with certain qualities such as private houses, low densities, and open space” (p. 36). Nicholaides and Weise (2006) expand on this dimension of the definition of suburb explaining that suburbanism is an elaborated way of life shaped by “elevated values for home ownership, secluded nuclear families, privacy, a distinctive, gendered division of labor, social exclusivity, semirural landscapes, dislike of cities, political home-rule, etc.” (p. 7).

More recent attempts to define the American suburb have included a more heterogeneous description. Teaford (2008) suggests:

American suburbs include some of the nation's most densely populated communities as well as areas zoned to accommodate more horses than human beings. Suburbia reflects the ethnic diversity of American more accurately than the central cities, providing homes for Hispanics, Asians, and blacks as well as non-Hispanic whites. It comprises slums as well as mansions, main streets as well as malls, skyscrapers as well as schools. Some suburbs are particularly gay-friendly; others are planned for senior citizens. Some are known for their fine schools; others are examples of educational failure. (pp. xiii-xiv).

Earlier definitions of suburb have been challenged by newer attempts to capture what it means to live in a suburban area. Increasing diversity, as explained by Nicolaides and Weise (2006), is a primary contributor to newly devised conceptualizations:

The most intensive argument has pivoted around questions of class and race; was a suburb only a suburb when it was white and middle or upper class? Pioneering scholars in the field...implied the answer was yes... By the 1990s, however, suburban "revisionists" had begun to challenge this "orthodox" version of suburbia for what it omitted: In particular, industry, multi-family housing, blue-collar workers, ethnic and racial minorities, and the poor (p. 7-8).

*Demographics:* Statistical data relating to the population and particular groups within it. For the purposes of this study, the population is the total number of students enrolled in an educational institution (e.g., all schools in the state of Wisconsin, a particular school district in Wisconsin, or a particular school in a school district in the state of Wisconsin). The state of Wisconsin tracks enrollment data for the following student groups at the state, district and school levels according to the following status

markers: disability status, economic status, gender, race/ethnicity, grade level, migrant status, English Language Learner (ELL) status. For the purposes of this study, enrollment trend data for students who identify as African American or Hispanic were examined.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The findings of this study were limited to an examination of principals and district office administrators in four suburban school districts. While each participant met the requirements of this study, the conclusions drawn are not meant to be generalized beyond this small sample with any degree of certainty. However, the findings of this study can serve as a foundation for additional inquiry.

The study focused on the experiences and perspectives of principals and district office administrators working in suburban districts that have experienced a significant shift in student demographics, specifically, a marked increase in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic. While the researcher made every effort to articulate the thoughts and experiences of the participants clearly and accurately, in the end, the interpretation of the data is that of the researcher.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In an attempt to gain an understanding of how to best prepare and support principals working in suburban districts facing significant demographic shifts, it is important to examine and contemplate how leadership theories interact and which rise in importance and relevance. Though sometimes considered the cure to all organizational ills, leadership can be misunderstood if the relationship to power and position is not distinguished (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Because leadership theory can inform practice and

strengthen the metacognitive behaviors of those leading, studying research that compares behavior, power, styles and models is important (Yukl, 2010; Bolman & Deal 2008; Razik & Swanson, 2010). Different leadership theories help explain how leaders interact with workers. The scope and breadth of the different leadership theories, though not exhaustively explained, will be presented as an integral consideration in this research as it commences. A particular emphasis is placed on transformational leadership theory as it is most applicable to the complex roles and responsibilities of leaders in education in today's context. School leaders facing new and emerging leadership questions and issues as they work to navigate swift and significant changes in student demographic composition are continuing on their personal journey of maturation and self-discovery. These experiences continue to shape and inform one's individual leadership style as they continue to work in the field of education. These leaders employ behaviors and attitudes indicative of some or all of the theories described here (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Summary of Leadership Theories and Associated Hallmark Characteristics*

Leadership Theory	Hallmark Characteristics
1. Transactional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation tied to self-interest.</li> <li>• Rewards and punishments needed for motivation.</li> <li>• Bargains must be struck.</li> <li>• Leader wields power over followers.</li> </ul>
2. Charismatic Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on vision beyond status quo.</li> <li>• Self-confidence, emotional appeals used to affect change.</li> <li>• Leader-dependency impedes lasting change.</li> </ul>
3. Participative Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delegation and empowerment.</li> <li>• Collaborative goal-setting and decision-making.</li> </ul>
4. Servant Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care for individual welfare and development as well as that of the organization.</li> <li>• Opposition to social justice inequalities.</li> </ul>
5. Culturally-Relevant Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple perspectives valued and considered in decision-making.</li> <li>• High-expectations and high-support for all stakeholders.</li> <li>• Desire to continuously learn from and with others' with different world-views and experiences.</li> </ul>
6. Transformational Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders and followers unite in pursuit of goals.</li> <li>• Trust, empowerment, charisma and vision are defining leader characteristics.</li> </ul>

**Transactional Leadership Theory**

Transactional leadership theory is grounded in the belief that people are motivated by self-interest and therefore need rewards and punishments for motivation (Kowalski,

2006; Yukl, 2010; Sergionvanni, 2009). These leaders value relationships with their employees, though they may be temporary, for the purpose of exchanging valued things. The assumption made by the transactional leader is that his or her followers do not share a common stake in the organization and therefore, bargains must be struck. One inherent problem with transactional leadership theory is that it supposes the leader must wield power over employees in order to achieve change. The goals of the organization, in the end, are at risk for not being achieved, as the followers may not truly believe in and become invested in those goals. It is tempting for principals to rely on the means of transactional leadership. As they work to build relationships with and the trust of their followers, principals can easily rely on rewards or punishments for their employees while not tending to the larger work of the establishment of a shared mission, vision, values and organizational goals (Fullan, 2001).

### **Charismatic Leadership Theory**

Charismatic leaders aspire for what lies beyond the current, or the status quo (Yukl, 2010). These leaders employ a variety of tactics to achieve this vision. These include self-sacrifice, personal risk, self-confidence, emotional appeals and use of trust. These means are risk for the charismatic leader, as the actualization of the vision is grounded in traits and characteristics of the leader and not the buy-in or belief of followers (Fullan, 2005). Episodic improvement may occur, however, it is often followed by frustration over leader-dependency (Fullan, 2001). Charismatic leadership can do more harm than good as it relies on charisma as the primary motivation factor. History, unfortunately, is rife with stories of charismatic leaders who motivated the masses into acts of terror. School district leaders, as they look to hire principals, must be aware of the

pitfalls of charismatic leadership and develop comprehensive and exhaustive hiring practices and protocols so as to look beyond woo and personality to substance and a collaborative spirit of potential principal applicants.

### **Participative Leadership Theory**

Delegation and empowerment are hallmarks of participative leadership and can be considered the antithesis of charismatic leadership. The participative leader allows followers to have influence over decisions. This style of leadership has many benefits, including higher decision quality and acceptance by followers, more satisfaction with the decision-making process, and the development of decision-making skills throughout the organization (Yukl, 2010). Participative leadership often results in an increase in trust, in collaborative goal setting, and it can be a powerful tool for increasing morale, effort and productivity (Yukl, 2010; Bolman & Deal, 2008). Participative leaders must be cautious of participation in leadership perceived as a mandate or misunderstood by followers as change will then not be successful (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Principals are wise to employ participative leadership strategies in their work in schools. As these leaders navigate a constantly changing profession that is informed and influenced by many external forces, using a representative group of followers in the change management and leadership work can be highly effective. Making sure to employ a variety of robust and consistent communication strategies to create clear messages about participation in leadership decisions is crucial for the school leader.

### **Servant Leadership Theory**

Servant leadership can be defined as the ability to help others accomplish shared objectives through the facilitation of individual deployment, empowerment, and

collective work that is consistent with the health and long-term welfare of followers (Yukl, 2010). These actions are characterized by professional competence and community values rather than personal interests and commitments (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Such leaders actively oppose social justice inequalities, empower and listen to their followers and share in their pain, and rely heavily on trust (Yukl, 2010). Excellence, justice, and caring strengthens faith in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Follower satisfaction is emphasized over the success of the organization and because of this tenant of servant leadership theory, it is applicable to all organizations (Yukl, 2010). Competing values between the performance of the organization and that of employee welfare can cause dissonance and impede progress. Knowing that trust matters in leadership (Tschannen-Moran, 2004), the school leader must constantly consider strategies that will develop trust with followers. Balancing the needs and goals of the school with those of individual staff members is one aspect of the art of education leadership.

### **Cultural Competency Leadership Theory**

Culturally-competent leaders possess a quality called *cultural proficiency* and have a clear understanding of their own assumptions, values, and beliefs about cultures and people that are different from their own. With this understanding culturally proficient leaders are effective in working with people in cross-cultural settings (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). These leaders also possess an understanding of the cultural dissonance students might experience in a school setting. Culturally proficient leaders demonstrate a continued desire to know more about the populations they serve and interact with so as to create and maintain shared goals that will increase learning for all students. As a result,

these leaders communicate and lead with a conscious awareness of the cultures within their communities and schools (Robins, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2002).

Certain qualities help define leaders as culturally relevant. These leaders strive to create an equitable community within which issues of privilege and injustice are resolved through the shared lens of multicultural stakeholders (Spillane, 2005). Such leaders have high expectations for all students, teachers, staff and themselves and understand that the support and monitoring of professional development will result in a focus on positive outcomes for all students (Harris, 2009). Trust, openness, the ability to masterfully communicate to a diverse stakeholder group, and showing steadfast respect and value for those they lead, are other defining characteristics of the culturally competent leader (Moodian, 2009). These leaders recognize students' educational barriers and address them to help students be academically successful. Leaders build trust and create an open atmosphere with their teachers, grounded in the values of empowerment, shared-decision making and high-expectations with high levels of support (Harris, 2009; Jennings, 2007). As principals and superintendents working in suburban settings that are experiencing significant shifts in student demographics, the need to develop culturally competent leadership philosophies and practices come to the forefront. The following section will detail several theories of leadership and their connection to leadership in schools (see Table 1).

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Over the past three decades, the empirical research has focused on leadership that provides inspiration to followers so that important, lasting, and meaningful change can follow. Shields (2010), whose work moves past the concept of "transformational" to that

of “transformative”, as it involves a dual focus on social change and leadership, suggests that transformational/transformational leaders are needed in the field of education today because leaders working in schools today are working in a “land of unfilled promises”. In other words, the reality of equal opportunity and access for all students is a promise yet to be actualized. Beginning with the leader’s awareness of self—of both personal strengths and weakness and those of an educational system and society as a whole—transformational leadership requires critical reflection of the system and for whom it is working and for whom it is failing. It calls for action—for leaders to disrupt injustices so that every student has equal access and opportunity and is treated with respect. Of all of the leadership theories discussed herein, transformational leadership theory stands alone in its importance to this research study.

Transformational leadership, similar to participative leadership, unites followers and leaders in the pursuit of goals that are common and agreeable to both parties (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2009). The level and type of participation differentiates participative and transformational leadership. Leaders and followers experience a symbiotic relationship within which purposes are fused, power bases linked, and leadership becomes moral when followers and leaders unite to achieve goals (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Transformational leadership will be defined in this section and the historical relevance described.

### **General characteristics.**

Transformational leadership theory, sometimes referred to as “new” or “contemporary” (Geijsel et al., 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999), emphasizes the leaders and followers simultaneously. This style of leadership is empowering, sensitive to local

community aspirations, builds collaborative culture, is supportive of followers, and emphasizes the importance of a shared vision (Silins et al., 2002). Transformational leaders move the followers toward an aspirational vision that focuses on universal needs and purposes.

Empirical research defines this form of leadership in a variety of ways, but descriptions share four similar and important hallmark characteristics: trust, empowerment, charisma, and vision (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Carlson, 1996; Kowalski, 2006; Razik & Swanson, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2009; Yukl, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Silins et al., 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003).

### **Trust.**

Transformational leaders inspire trust and build relationships (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Within the field of educational leadership, facets of trust have been identified that help in understanding its contextual definition. Tschannen-Moran (2004) suggests the facets of trust necessary for successful school leadership include benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competence. Trust as a tenant of transformational leadership is slightly different because of its connection with empowerment (Carlson, 1996). Trust, for these leaders, is focused on helping followers believe in themselves and their leader. Trust, in this context, is more deeply defined by the leader's ability to communicate that both the leader and followers have the ability to implement the desired change to achieve the mutually agreed upon vision. By focusing on values such as integrity and fairness (Razik & Swanson, 2010), authentic and genuine trust is built. This level of trust supports an agenda of transformation that encourages others to act similarly (Fullan, 2005).

**Empowerment.**

Positional authority does not rule the day in transformational leadership work. Instead, relationships are based on common purposes (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Transformational leaders empower others by cultivating significance, community, competence, and enjoyment to the collective work of the organization. Embracing others with different worldviews, temperaments, and personal agendas is important in conveying empowerment as an organizational value (Sergiovanni, 2009). Empowerment is a work quality offered to all employees, which is unlike transactional leaders who rely on exchange-based relationships. Transformational leaders encourage sharing and open communication without fear. It is empowerment in the organization that stimulates change and innovation (Giejsel et al., 2002; Yukl, 2010). Because of the widespread empowerment experiences by followers, a more robust problem-solving process, greater personal ownership, and increased awareness of the relationships between the employee's work and the organization's work results (Sergiovanni, 2009), because "empowerment is about efficacy" (Carlson, 1996, p. 141).

**Charisma.**

Carlson (1996) defines charisma as the ability of a leader of an organization to create excitement in workers toward a goal that is beneficial to the organization and themselves. Not to be confused with manipulation of power to motivate others, charismatic practices are grounded in morals and ethical standards (Kowalski, 2006). Transformational leaders, as they work to establish a vision through empowerment, increase awareness of what is good, right and important. These leaders inspire human potential and satisfy higher-order needs which raise the expectations of both the leader

and his or her followers and the level of shared commitment and purpose (Sergiovanni, 2009; Geijsel et al., 2002). As a result, followers often do more than they originally intended and often more than they thought was possible at the outset of the change process (Avolio, 1994). These leaders move followers towards higher levels of self-actualization and beyond their self-interests (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Other charismatic practices employed for transformational leaders include self-management, personal reflection, courage and commitment (Razik & Swanson, 2010).

### **Vision.**

Transformational leaders understand that a clear vision of the organization's goals helps followers understand the purpose, objective and priorities associated with achieving that vision (Yukl, 2010). The articulation of a vision is a dynamic process that involves distinct steps: stating a vision of things to come; revising it in light of emerging events, ideas, new learning and beliefs; and restating the vision that connects the members of the organization in mutual resolve and purpose (Sergiovanni, 2009). Key values that are mutually held by the leader and followers help set the vision for the organization. "No amount of charisma or rhetorical skill can sell a vision that reflects only the leader's values and needs" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 370). The vision shapes the culture and creates avenues for follower engagement (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Consensus is vital in the vision's development as it creates the idea of a new and better state of the future (Sergiovanni, 2009).

### **Transformational leadership research.**

Several main ideas and themes have emerged from research on the impacts of transformational leaders' actions on educational organizations. Beginning in the 1990s,

transformational leadership practices were connected to effects on students, perceptions of leaders, behavior of followers, the psychological states of followers, and effects at the organizational-level (Geijsel et al, 1999; Stewart, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood et al., 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Yu, Leithwood, & Jantzim, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Teacher-perceived student outcomes were found to be indirectly impacted by transformational leadership practices (Leithwood et al., 1999). As these leaders pursued three goals: (1) helping staff develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture, (2) fostering teacher development, and (3) helping teachers solve problems, the perception of followers about the competency of the leader was positively impacted (Leithwood et al., 1999). Changed teacher practices have been directly linked to transformational leadership behaviors (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000), as was followers' motivation to change (Yu, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2002). Lastly, organizational learning has been linked to charisma, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

The principal, faced with daily leadership issues and challenges, must consider the leadership theories discussed and use these for reflection and the development of his/her own leadership style. Needing to rely on some or all of the leadership actions and dispositions connected to each theory during his or her tenure, the principal develops a toolbox of strategies to employ when and where appropriate.

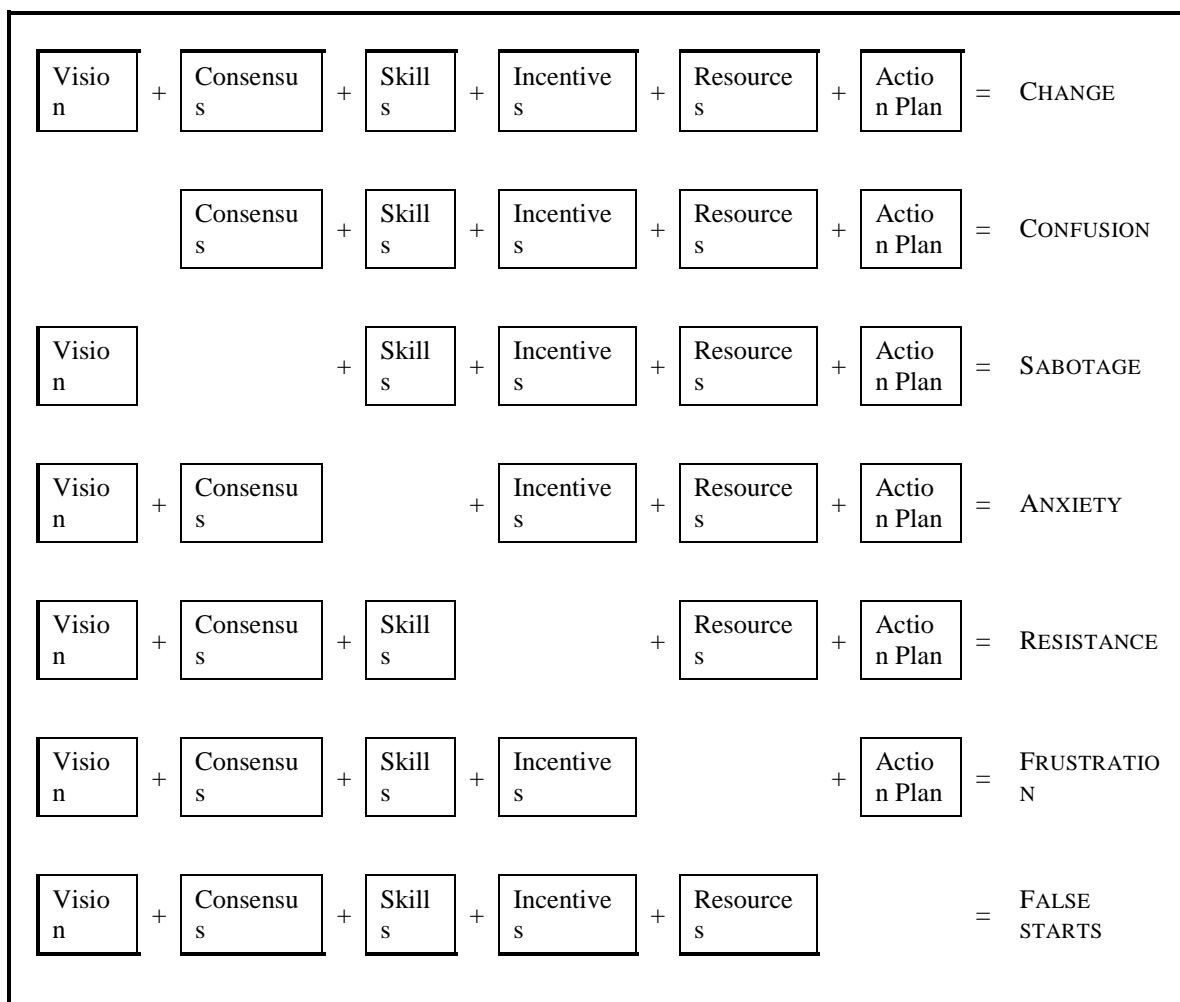
### **Leading and Managing Complex Change**

Rath and Conchie (2008) discuss the relationship between followers and leaders and identify followers' four basic needs: trust, compassion, stability, and hope. In order to successfully manage and lead change, leaders must be able to set vision and priorities,

strategize, influence others, and build relationships and coalitions of support, and make things happen. Educational leaders must do these things on behalf of the needs of the students they serve. Transformational leadership is a complex endeavor that places equal importance on both leaders and followers (Silins et al., 2002). Understanding its complexities and components is vital in the leadership of change efforts. Ambrose (1987) offers a framework for leading and managing complex change that is useful in understanding and leading transformative change efforts and identifying why these efforts fail or fall short of original expectations (Figure 1).

Ambrose identifies the necessary ingredients for successful change leadership and management: vision, consensus, skills, incentives, resources, and action plans. She suggests that in the absence of one necessary component, change efforts can fail and result in confusion, sabotage, anxiety, resistance, frustration, or feeling as though one is running on a treadmill. In considering the work of superintendents and principals in leading through significant changes in student demographics, Ambrose's framework provides insight and guidance in this work. The framework assists in the assessment of the condition and climate of the organization within which transformative change is being lead and offers a potential remedy by identifying the symptom and restoring of the missing component. For example, if the change leader senses anxiety on the part of followers, a lack of skill on the part of those implementing the change may be the cause. If sabotage is present in the climate and culture of the organization, the need to focus on building consensus for change may be the appropriate remedy.

Figure 1

*Managing Complex Change Matrix*

*Note.* Ambrose, D. (1987). *Managing complex change*. Pittsburg, PA: The Enterprise Group.

### Overview of Study

The focus of this study is on the resources and supports that assist suburban school principals in their work in leading through issues and opportunities related to significant and swift shifts in student demographics. The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, as well as the significance, assumptions, limitations, definition of terms and theoretical

framework used to guide the research. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant research literature in the areas of accountability in schools, the evolving roles of both the superintendent and principal, urban issues facing school leaders working suburban school districts, current methods of support to this group of educational leaders, and the disconnect that exists between the day-to-day roles of suburban school leaders and their preparation. Chapter 3 outlines the design and methodology for conducting interviews and the review of archival data, and the processes used to collect and analyze data. Chapter 4 presents the findings, and Chapter 5 discusses the results and implications of this research.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

Superintendents and principals, the educational leaders in today's school systems, are expected to embody and advance the leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions that ultimately lead to a positive impact on student achievement (Razik & Swanson, 2010; Fullan, 2001; Fullan, 2005; Kowalski, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood, Lewis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Reeves, 2009; Whitaker, 2003). The roles and responsibilities of both the superintendent and principal have become more complex in the age of accountability. The harsh reality of fifty years of educational reform with very little impact on student achievement continues to plague the day-to-day efforts of educational leaders (Harvey, Cambron McCabe, Cunningham, & Koff, 2013). The mounting pressures of the job of principal have led to high rates of turnover in these positions, creating a principal shortage that is a national and an international challenge (Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009; Stoelinga, Hart, & Schalliol, 2008; Partlow & Ridenour, 2008; Browne-Ferrigno & Johnson-Fusarelli, 2005; Thomson & Blackmore, 2006; Weiss, 2005; Walker & Qian, 2006). Demographic shifts related to race and socio-economic statuses have been in the forefront of public education policy and practice since the late 1800s. The need to expect principals to competently and confidently create a learning community that welcomes, supports, and values all students has intensified in suburban areas as these regions have become increasingly more racially and socio-economically diverse in the past two decades (Center for Public Education, 2012). This has created the need to examine the resources, supports, and strategies necessary to equip school leaders with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to face their roles with

competence and confidence (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2002; Wheatley, 2002). This literature review will cover the completed analysis of these areas and connect them with the need to more deeply study school leaders working in suburban settings, especially those experiencing changes in student demographics. The evolution of the role of both the superintendent and principal will be explained, followed by a description of the landscape of changing student demographics in the country and the need to equip school leaders with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively lead for the success of all students.

### **A Historical Perspective of Accountability in Public Education**

The role of the federal government in public education has involved and intensified over the past century. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education policy in the United States generally followed the provisions of the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution, which stated that all powers not assigned to the federal government be reserved for the states. The states developed their own systems for educating children, complete with unique and individual measures of accountability. The value of “local control” extended to school districts allowing boards of education the autonomy and authority to develop policy and practice. The commitment to local control in public education spanned the first 150 years of public education in our nation.

A gradual shift from a reliance on local control to a stronger federal regulation of and presence in education began in the 1930s. The Great Depression and the economic strife associated with this period in our nation’s history led to a number of federal programs, including aid for public schools. With the Russian launch of the satellite Sputnik, the country’s education system gained increased attention and scrutiny as a

newfound spirit of competition with other nations pervaded the national dialogue (Beck & Murphy, 1993).

During Lyndon B. Johnson's presidential term, he declared a war on poverty as a response to growing concerns with inequality between White and Black Americans. The largest federal education policy in the nation's history was introduced in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Schugurensky, 2002). The aim of this piece of legislation was to provide education services for children of low-income families. Billions of dollars were allocated annually through ESEA programs, including Title Grant provisions. Programs including Head Start, programs focused on bilingual education, counseling programs and special education services began during this era. ESEA was the genesis for future legislation, including the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), the Bilingual Education Act, and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. The passage of ESEA in 1965 laid the foundation for the future role of government in civil rights matters and their intersection with public education.

The standards movement in the United States began with the 1983 publication by the National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled, *A Nation at Risk*. The report detailed the state of education in America at the time and claimed that students were not involved in the appropriate curriculum and therefore concluded that a mediocre workforce was the result. The report further cited a failure to set high academic expectations for students; a lack of college preparatory courses; content that was not rigorous, reflected mediocre outcomes, and had inconsistent standards; and described an education system with a poorly trained workforce. The National Commission on Excellence in Education's report contained several important and impactful

recommendations. These included a standardization of content and the requirement that all high school students take four years of English, three years of math, three years of science, three years of social studies, and one-half year of computer science. It also required that foreign language study begin in elementary school. Additional recommendations included lengthening of the school day and the use of standardized, content-driven examinations (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). The report stated:

The purposes of these tests would be to: (a) certify the student's credentials; (b) identify the need for remedial intervention; and (c) identify the opportunity for advanced accelerated work. The tests should be administered as part of a nationwide (but not federal) system of state and local standardized tests. (U.S. Department of Education, 1983, Recommendation B: Standards and Expectations: Implementing Recommendations, Item 3).

The response to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* was swift and significant. *A Nation Responds: Recent Efforts to Improve Education* (U.S. Department of Education, 1984) outlined the tenants of the reform movement which included longer school days and years, fewer elective choices for secondary students and opportunities for math and science increased graduation and college admission standards. Additionally, higher expectations for teacher and administrator preparation were put into place and the importance of staff development was stressed.

During the decade of the 1990s, standards evolved in subject and content. The effort to align the various components within the educational system included the development of standards, teacher licensing regulations, classroom materials and

professional development aligned to standards, and negative sanctions for a lack of student achievement.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 established a lasting and unprecedented influence over public education in the American system (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, 2005). NCLB mandated that all schools receiving Title 1 funds must make the results of standardized state assessments public and that these results would be disaggregated by demographically identified subgroups. Schools who failed to meet particular student achievement expectations would face sanctions, including the dismissal of staff and administration. NCLB was praised by civil rights groups and supporters of standards-based education reform for its concerted effort to establish high expectations for all students. These heightened expectations were thought to be a catalyst for positive changes in student achievement for students, regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, language or socioeconomic status. There were, however, many critics of this legislation who claimed the act would disrupt the natural curiosity of children and stifle creativity in students and teachers (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

The goals of NCLB were summarized in four “pillars”: stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choice for parents. The first pillar aimed to close all achievement gaps by raising the achievement of disadvantaged students. The second pillar allowed schools the freedom to use federal education funds to improve student achievement. The third pillar required schools to adopt practices and programs that have been scientifically proven to be effective in improving student achievement outcomes. Lastly, the fourth pillar allowed

parents whose children attend failing schools according to NCLB criteria to choose to send them to better performing public or charter schools

Though each of the pillars had an impact on school leaders, NCLB's first pillar, stronger accountability for results, presented the greatest challenge to district superintendents and school principals. Under the guidelines of NCLB, schools must meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals toward the expectation that 100% of students reach proficiency as measured by state assessments, in the areas of language arts, mathematics, and science, by 2014. For students in third grade through eleventh grade, this resulted in annual participation in state assessments. The results of these tests were made public, resulting in school, district and state report cards. For schools not meeting AYP, public embarrassment and sanctions ensued (Brewster & Klump, 2005). Principals and superintendents were held directly accountable for these results. The fear of not meeting AYP requirements led to school leaders and principals focusing on preparing students for the administration of annual state assessments.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governor Association for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) were developed in response to a continuous rhetoric across the nation about the student achievement outcomes of American students compared to those in countries across the globe. With the annual publication of international performance on the Programme for International Assessment (PISA), policy makers were frustrated with declining American student performance. Consequently, a standardized set of educational outcomes was put forward, to be adopted voluntarily in every state in the nation. The aim of the development of the CCSS was to establish a clear set of learning outcomes in English/language Arts and mathematics for

students in grades K-12. Most states adopted the standards, though not without considerable debate at the national, state and local levels. Proponents of the CCSS applauded the effort to create a consistent set of learning outcomes aimed at leveling the global student achievement playing field. Critics complained it was part of a socialist government agenda and feared a lack of local control in matters of curriculum development (Senechal, 2010). The standards presented new challenges for district and school leaders. Though not unfamiliar with a focus on standards-based leadership, education leaders were now faced with the need to recalibrate curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices to these new expectations for student performance.

In 2009, President Barack Obama, with funding provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, brought forth the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative as a way to spur innovation in state and local school districts. States competed through grant submission centering on a variety of criteria including focus on teacher and principal effectiveness, efforts to raise achievement and close gaps, adopting common core state standards, adopting high quality state assessments, encouraging the development and monitoring of charter schools, developing plans to turn around the lowest performing schools, and the developing longitudinal, statewide data systems (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The impact of this initiative was felt across the country as the focus on choice, competition and accountability intensified. The infrastructure needed to implement the demands of RTT was staggering (Harvey et al., 2013). Critics of RTT voiced strong opposition to the initiative, reigniting the national debate on equity and effectiveness of the American education system and the interplay between federal, state, and local bodies (Peterson & Rothstein, 2010; Harvey et al., 2013).

The pressures related to accountability, performance, and competition remained constant pieces of the education leadership landscape. The reform efforts of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> have had a most profound impact educational leadership (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Education Reform Summary*

<b>Year(s)</b>	<b>Study/regulations</b>	<b>Issues</b>
1975	Education for all Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142)	Protecting the rights of, and improving outcomes for students with disabilities
1983	A Nation at Risk (NCEE, 1983)	Reform of public education system
1983-1990	A Nation Responds (USDOE, 1984)	Longer school days/years; higher expectations
1990-2000	Subject frameworks/content Standards	Align components within system
1997	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Increased accountability for outcomes of students with disabilities
2004	No Child Left Behind (2004)	Mandates, outcomes/accountability
2009	Race to the Top (USDOE, 2009)	Competition, choice, accountability Innovation
2010	Common Core State Standards (NGABP, CCSSO, 2010)	Consistent, national education outcomes, federal involvement, Response to Intervention mandate

*Note.* NCEE = National Commission on Excellence in Education; USDOE = U.S. Department of Education; NGABP = National Governors Association of Best Practices; CCSSO = Council of Chief School State Officers.

### **The Evolving Role of the Superintendent**

The expectations placed on superintendents have evolved over the past 150 years and have become increasingly complex and demanding. The role was first created in the 1830s, and by 1850 thirteen large school systems had employed a person in the role of superintendent; by 1900 most large school districts followed suit (Kowalski, 2005).

At the inception of the role, the superintendent was expected to serve as lead teacher, responsible for the assurance of a quality, standardized instructional program. Over time, as a result of societal, industrial, political, and technological shifts, the role increased in breadth and complexity. Kowalski (2006) offered five role conceptualizations that assisted in understanding how the role has evolved over time.

### **Role Conceptualizations**

#### **Superintendent as teacher/scholar.**

From the 1830s through the first decade of the 20th century, the Common School Movement aimed to help schools deliver a uniform set of subjects and courses and had standardization as the driving value. The superintendent was expected to oversee this process (Kowalski, 1999). In the wake of the Civil War, rapidly growing urban districts developed standards and expectations for the instructional program and the superintendents were expected to be master teachers, charged with the administration of the instructional program (Callahan, 1962). In an 1890 report on the role of the superintendent, the essence of the position was summarized:

It must be made his recognized duty to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals; to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible; to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils. (Cuban, 1976, p. 16)

During this time in history, superintendents were often the most influential members of the National Education Association (NEA). Management tasks were often the responsibility of school board members or delegated to others and superintendents

viewed their role as a teacher, not as a politician or manager (Callahan, 1966).

A quote from the President of Stanford University, Dean Cubberly, who served in the role from 1917-1933, expressed the education wisdom at the time with respect to the marginalization of certain groups of students:

We should give up the exceedingly democratic idea that all are equal and that our society is devoid of classes...The wage earner remains the wage earner... One bright child may be worth more to the national life than thousands of those of low mentality.

At this time, intelligence quotient (IQ) testing offered a seemingly scientific basis for assigning students to varying curricular tracks. It was this tracking that led to marginalizing students of color within the school system. Superintendents, through the development of teaching and learning structures and expectations, perpetuated these practices—practices that persisted in the school systems of the modern day.

Though never becoming irrelevant, the conceptualization of superintendent as teacher/scholar waned over the past century. Citing a variety of influences on the superintendent's ability to narrowly focus on matters of instruction, research was mixed on the superintendent's influence over student achievement outcomes (Zigarelli, 1996; Peterson & Barnett, 2003; Bredesen, 1996; Coleman & LaRocque, 1990; Herman, 1990; Morgan & Petersen, 2002; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Petersen, 2002; Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987).

The research indicated an indirect relationship between the superintendent and achievement. Through staff selection, policy development, principal supervision and

budgeting, the superintendent could impact student outcomes (Bjork, 1993; Kowalski, 2001).

### **Superintendent as manager.**

Management became the dominant role of superintendents in the early 1990s. As the country evolved from an agrarian to an industrial nation, the areas of focus for superintendents moved beyond supervision of the educational program to budgeting, standardization, personnel management, and facility management (Callahan, 1962). Intense debates regarding the construct of superintendent as business manager waged throughout the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as critics expressed concerns about the intrusion of these issues in the education domain (Van Til, 1972). Glass (2003) discussed the impact of district size on the evolution of the managerial role in local contexts. However, by the 1990s, scholars agreed that superintendents must be both accomplished scholars and managers, citing the demands of decentralization and democratization (Kowalski, 2005). As time went on, superintendents continued to face the dilemma of striking a balance between leadership and management.

### **Superintendent as democratic leader.**

Scarcity of resources forced the school superintendent into the political realm in the 1930s. The constant fight for government and community financial support for education solidified this role for superintendents. A debate continued over the merits of the superintendent inserting himself or herself into the political fray; the current realities of governmental control and influence in the field made this a necessary part of the job description (Kowalski, 2006). In particular, changing values and economic realities

placed a renewed intensity of focus on the need for superintendents to facilitate, mediate, and engage in conflict management (Keedy & Bjork, 2002).

### **Superintendent as applied social scientist.**

Several forces shaped this role conceptualization over time. They included: (a) growing dissatisfaction with democratic leadership after World War II; (b) rapid development of the social sciences, (c) support from the Kellogg Foundation to forward research in the area of educational administration, (d) a resurgence of criticisms of public education since the 1950s, and (e) the need for social justice (Callahan, 1966; Crowson & McPherson, 1987; Cooper & Boyd, 1987; Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2003). A superintendent needed to have a solid understanding of the relationship between social and societal ills, including poverty, crime, gender inequality, discrimination and violence and their impact on schools. All of these issues complicated the role of the superintendent and infringed on his or her time, energy and resources.

### **Superintendent as communicator.**

The presence of technology and the pace of its development moved the nation from the manufacturing age to the information age. The increasingly collaborative nature of the position and the mounting pressures to interact with a variety of constituencies and stakeholder groups created significant expectations of the school administrator to competently and confidently communicate, both in oral and written methods. Superintendents were expected to navigate and lead school improvement efforts, mediate conflict management scenarios, advance and inform change agendas, and challenge beliefs and traditions (Trimble, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Hernandez, 1994).

**Superintendent as innovator and politician.**

As resources continued to shrink and competition for funding in both the private and public sectors intensified, superintendents working in modern contexts had to devote time and energy to rethinking the allocation and procurement of resources to support the work of the district. In the absence of additional revenue streams, these district leaders found themselves in a constant cycle of revision, reduction, and redeployment of resources, both human and otherwise, in an effort to save money. These pressures on district resources could push the district administrator into the political sphere that was enveloping the public education sector as he/she was forced to advocate for legislative change that would result in more monies landing in district coffers (Kowalski, 2006).

The growing depth and breadth involved in the role of the superintendent over time presented real challenges in time management and prioritization of tasks and activities. At its inception, the role's primary focus was that of instruction—ensuring quality teaching in classrooms. The role of the superintendent has moved far away from the classroom to a focus on politics, competition, resource allocation and facility maintenance (Harvey, et al., 2013). These pressures and increased expectations took the superintendent away from intimate involvement in daily matters of school administration and the support of principals. School leaders working in complex environments within which more and more students of color were entering the school doors each and every year needed the ongoing direction and support of district leaders who were all too often unavailable and otherwise occupied with matters of politics (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Evolution of the Role of the Superintendent Summary*

Year(s)	Major Responsibilities	Descriptors
1830-1850	Lead instructional program	Schoolmaster
1850s-1910	Maintain order, supervision of staff	Supervisor
1910-1960s	Resource management, business operations, democratic leadership	Statesman
1960s-1980s	Standardization of practices	Manager
1980s-2000s	School choice and charter proliferation, technology infusion, social justice advocacy, education-reform, school safety	Communicator Reformer Advocate
2010 -	Competition, choice and innovation, Common Core State Standards implementation	Innovator Politician

Of the entire superintendent's critical staff in a school district, the principal was the most important in matters of student achievement (Leithwood et al, 2004). The role of the principal also evolved significantly over time, expanding in breadth and complexity. The next section will focus on this evolution and examine the current realities of school principals and explain why the additional pressures and issues related to shifting student demographics demand further examination.

### **The Evolving Role of the Principal**

Principals were second only to classroom teachers in their direct impact on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2004; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Leithwood, 2002; Louis et al., 2010; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Just as with the role of the superintendent, the role of the principal evolved in depth and complexity over time. School leaders faced enormous expectation and responsibility in the role. This section will detail a historical perspective and describe the leadership context of the school principal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Role of the Principal (1880s to the Turn of the Century)**

Early conceptualizations of the role of principal and its evolution until the 1960s were shaped by need and major national and international events. Originating in the late 1800s with the development of the American high school in the country's urban centers, school principals were expected to ensure order, standardization and safety (Rousmaniere, 2013). By the early 1900s, principals were considered professional managers (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 107). Beck and Murphy (1993) described the role of the principal in the early nineteenth century as executive, bureaucratic organizer, supervisor, and professional. The Great Depression impacted the role of the principal as the need for schools to provide a variety of social services increased (Drue, 1981). Similarly, the World War II era impacted the role. As an increased number of students left school early to join the military, the nation focused its attention and resources to war-related issues and efforts, and education was not top among them (Fenske, 1995). In the 1950s, three major events shaped public education administration: The 1954 Supreme Court decision on school desegregation; *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*; the launch of the first Russian space satellite, Sputnik; and the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), passed in 1958. These events intensified a focus for the school principal on issues related to race, equality, and educational quality (Fenske, 1985).

The field of educational administration developed after World War II and the 1950s and 1960s was recognized as a time of growth and change in the modern principalship (Derrington, 1989). In addition, in the late 1960s and 1970s the rise of teacher unions and collective bargaining agreements changed the basic nature of the principalship from that of teachers' colleague to representative of the local Board of

Education. This time in history saw an intensified focus on issues related to poverty and schools became a “battle ground in the War on Poverty and the quest for racial equality” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, pp. 214-215). Teachers became more organized and militant as federal policy intensified in reaction to the Brown case. Major policy changes occurred in the areas of desegregation, federal aid to schools serving children of poverty, the development of categorical programs aimed at neglected populations, legislation guaranteeing racial and sexual equity, new entitlements for students with disabilities, state laws demanding minimum standards for promotion and graduation, accountability for student achievement results, bilingual programs, career education, and a host of other reforms (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Principals practicing in the 1970s needed a strong understanding of legal issues as they faced new issues of student rights, inclusion of students with special education needs, and the lowering of the age of majority from 21 to 18 which meant that legal adults were in a school planned for minors (Drue, 1981). Teen pregnancy, drug abuse, alcoholism and truancy became consistent ills faced by principals, and the increased expectation of providing leadership in solving non-academic, community problems became a mainstay in the principal’s job description (Beck & Murphy, 1992; Drue, 1981). Two federal actions occurred in the decade of the 1970s that resulted in new duties for the principal. With the passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, school leaders were expected to assure the school setting was free of gender distinctions, including text selection, course offerings, athletics and hiring (Drue, 1981). The passage of Federal Public Law 94-142, Education for Handicapped Children Act, assured a free and appropriate education for all children with disabilities and added to the efforts of a

century-long movement toward universal public education (Pulliam, 1991).

Principals were now expected to ensure these rights for students; this required that they interpret special education requirements and assure appropriate placement and education of students with disabilities. Alongside special educators, they were also required to develop and implement individualized education plans (IEPs) and provide the necessary resources and facilities to carry them out for all students involved (Drue, 1981).

Principals were now chief compliance officers of federally sponsored, federally funded, and federally mandated entitlements that required local implementation and monitoring. Hallinger (1992) observed that this focus on externally proposed and mandated programs placed emphasis on criteria and compliance rather than on student or program outcomes.

Three waves of school reform occurred in the 1980s (Boer, 1997). These reforms added definition to the role of the school principal—that of instructional leader (Hallinger, 1992). The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), *Action for Excellence* (Education Commission of the States, 1983), and *High School* (Boyer, 1983), marked the first wave of reform and called for increased accountability and student achievement in the context of an increasingly global society. The publication, *A National Prepared* (Carnegie Forum on Education and Economy, 1986), and *Time for Results* (National Governor's Association, 1986), marked the second wave of reform and called for more restructuring of school governance and teacher autonomy. Boyer (1997) described the third wave of reform beginning in 1988 and stretching into the 1990s as emphasizing the involvement of parents, students, and community members in site-based management. This gave rise to the expectation that

“principals become facilitators who help others identify and solve problems collaboratively” (Boyer, 1997, p. 4).

Principals working in the 1990s reported a growing concern regarding workload and their expanded roles (Murphy, 1994). These educational leaders reported growing roles and expectations without the perceived additional funding for schools, though there was an increase of funds through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Conflicts between state and district mandates and local control, between the call for shared governance and strong leadership, between needed resources and increased expectations, created “role overload and role ambiguity” (Murphy, 1994, p. 95). Brubaker (1995) described the themes of change that emerged for principals in the 1990s and included (a) the importance of access to information, (b) the emergency of public accountability, (c) an emphasis on quantitative measures, (d) a demand for more controlled accounting practices, (e) an increase in feminist and ethnic consciousness and career aspirations, (f) an emphasis on curriculum and instruction, (g) an increase in political involvement with both school boards and legislatures, and (h) an impatience with externally imposed innovations. Two additional studies illuminated additional changes in the principal role during this decade (Williams & Portin, 1997; Wulff, 1996). Principals reported the following changes in their role: (a) more collaboration in decision-making, (b) eroding authority, (c) becoming a change agent, (d) additional responsibility, (e) conflicting community demands, and (f) an expanded work week. The result was increased management responsibilities, increased levels of frustration, and diminished enthusiasm about the job.

The turn of the century brought an increased focus on accountability and the standardization of public education. Large-scale standardized assessments developed and implemented by the states heightened the pressure for schools to perform so as to not face public scrutiny or sanctions (NCLB, 2001). The principal was expected to understand data, attract and retain quality staff, and create the climate and conditions that ensure the academic success of all students regardless of disability or socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, or gender (Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009).

President Barack Obama's administration continued a focus on accountability and student achievement results; an additional emphasis was placed on global competitiveness and standardization of academic standards to rival those of foreign nations recognized for academic excellence. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative in 2010 created a new set of challenges for school-level leaders. For states adopting these new literacy and numeracy standards, the work of adoption and implementation was left to individual school districts and schools, placing a burden on administrators and teachers. Principals were largely left to communicate the rationale for the change in educational outcomes and help teachers embrace the more rigorous standards in their instruction (Silver, Dewing, & Perini, 2012).

### **Leadership Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions Required in the Role of the Contemporary Principal**

Knowledge is the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. Leadership knowledge, in the context of education, is the understanding of the components of the educational system, their interrelatedness, and the necessary information required to bring about change. Skills are particular abilities; expertise. Within the field of educational

administration, leadership skills are those particular abilities that put knowledge into action. Dispositions are an individual's inherent qualities of character; the way an individual approaches their work. Educational leaders who are most effective in bringing about change that benefits all students are those who bring a positive and asset-based thinking to their work. Today's school leaders require the leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions that equip them to tackle significant opportunities with intelligence, deftness, and enthusiasm.

Moving into the contemporary age, principals faced greater challenges than ever before. They had to be knowledgeable in a variety of areas including curriculum and instruction, personnel management, student, parent and community relations, data analysis, change management and student discipline. School leaders had to command a more sophisticated skill set to carry out the full scope of their responsibilities than was true for those that preceded them in the role (Lambert, 2001). Principals, as compared to leaders identified in the middle position in the business literature, were required to lead up, down, and across (Maxwell, 2005). These 360-degree expectations of principal leadership helped define the complexities of the role.

The leadership demonstrated by the school principal matters. Michael Fullan (2001) described the major work of principals as they "lead in a culture of change". He detailed the importance of moral purpose, understanding change, building relationships, knowledge building, and coherence making in the success of school leaders. Fullan suggested that authentic leaders display character and that character was the defining characteristic of leadership. Understanding the complexities of the change process and how to lead others through change; garnering buy-in; and supporting, navigating

resistance, and working through what Fullan described as “the implementation dip” (p. 17) along the way were hallmarks of strong school leadership. The school principal would not get very far in the implementation of a vision if strong relationships were not cultivated with those responsible for the change. Leaders would require high levels of emotional intelligence and the ability to build strong and trusting relationships in order to see lasting change happen. Principals, Fullan suggested, work in “complex, turbulent environments” (p. 21) within which messiness is continually generated. The need to continually focus on knowledge-building and recognize the responsibility of creating a collaborative culture that valued a constant flow of giving and receiving information so as to inform, support, and guide change would help the school principal succeed in advancing change. Lastly, the principals’ ability to make sense of new information, or “coherence-make” as the school engaged in work to absorb, reflect, and integrate new knowledge was a key characteristic of strong leadership.

Goleman (1995) described five main emotional competency sets that supported Fullan’s focus on the importance of knowing how to build relationships in the work of principals. These were self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Self-awareness was described as knowing one’s internal state, preferences, resources, and intuitions. Self-regulation involved managing one’s internal states, resources, and impulses. Motivation was characterized by emotional tendencies that guided or facilitated one’s ability to reach goals. Empathy, or the awareness of others’ feelings, needs, and concerns, was an integral aspect of emotional intelligence. Lastly, adeptness at eliciting desirable responses from others, or social skill, was key to the success of school leaders. When well developed in school leaders, these competencies

could mean the difference between successful and unsuccessful change management. Fullan's and Goleman's perspectives on the leadership competencies required of today's school leaders are captured below (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Leading in a Culture of Change and the Importance of Emotional Intelligence for Principals*

Leadership Competency	Leadership Behaviors
1. Moral purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display character.</li> <li>• Forge interaction, with purpose, across groups.</li> </ul>
2. Understanding change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertly communicate.</li> <li>• Plan for resistance.</li> <li>• Measure success.</li> <li>• Seek feedback and make mid-course corrections.</li> <li>• Appreciate complexity and embrace ambiguity</li> </ul>
3. Building relationships through emotional intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect individuals to the change.</li> <li>• Set clear standards.</li> <li>• Expect the best.</li> <li>• Pay attention.</li> <li>• Personalize recognition.</li> <li>• Tell the story.</li> <li>• Celebrate together.</li> <li>• Set the example.</li> </ul>
4. Knowledge creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish knowledge sharing practices.</li> <li>• Define knowledge sharing as an organizational value.</li> <li>• Model life-long learning.</li> </ul>
5. Coherence making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize and focus.</li> <li>• Connect new information to existing schema.</li> <li>• Check for understanding.</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from Fullan (2001) and Goleman (1995).

Fullan (2001) and Goleman (1995) identified an ability to understand the change process and its impact on others as a skill necessary for principals in their work in

schools. Kotter (2002) described the steps necessary to successfully navigate complex change. School leaders were expected to establish a vision, garner support for that vision, and execute the vision for improved student achievement. This work was dynamic, interpersonal and messy and required perseverance, tenacity, strategy and resolve (Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Reeves, 2009). Kotter's eight-step change process model began with the establishment of a sense of urgency and ended with the institutionalization of new approaches (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model*

Step	Leadership Action(s)
1. Establish a sense of urgency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine current realities.</li> <li>• Identify and discuss issues and opportunities</li> </ul>
2. Form a guiding coalition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assemble a group to lead the change effort.</li> <li>• Encourage and guide teamwork.</li> </ul>
3. Create a vision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create the vision that will guide the effort.</li> <li>• Develop strategies to achieve the vision.</li> </ul>
4. Communicate the vision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a variety of tools to communicate the vision and strategies.</li> <li>• Teach new behaviors.</li> </ul>
5. Empowering others to act.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminate obstacles to change.</li> <li>• Change systems or structures that undermine the vision.</li> <li>• Encourage risk-taking.</li> </ul>
6. Plan for and create short-term wins.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for visible performance improvements.</li> <li>• Create those improvements.</li> <li>• Recognize and reward those involved in improvement.</li> </ul>
7. Consolidate improvements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use increased credibility to change systems and structures that undermine the vision.</li> <li>• Hire, promote and develop employees who can implement the vision.</li> <li>• Reinvigorate the process with new projects.</li> </ul>
8. Institutionalize new approaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulate the connections between new behaviors and success.</li> <li>• Ensure leadership development and succession.</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from Kotter (2002).

Management and leadership for school leaders, Kotter (1990) believed, were quite different. Management was about seeking order and stability, whereas leadership was about seeking adaptive and lasting change (Kotter, 1990; Northouse, 2004) (see Figure

1). Therefore, building competency with change leadership was a primary endeavor for education administrators.

Figure 2

*Understanding the Differences between Management and Leadership*

<i>Management</i> <b>Produces Order and Consistency</b>	<i>Leadership</i> <b>Produces Change and Movement</b>
<p><b>Planning/Budgeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes agendas</li> <li>• Sets times</li> <li>• Allocates resources/objectives</li> </ul> <p><b>Organizing/Staffing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides structure</li> <li>• Makes job placements</li> <li>• Establishes rules</li> </ul> <p><b>Controlling/Problem Solving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops incentives</li> <li>• Generates creative solutions</li> <li>• Takes corrective action</li> </ul>	<p><b>Establishing Direction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets agendas</li> <li>• Sets long-term goals</li> <li>• Establishes vision</li> </ul> <p><b>Aligning People</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces change</li> <li>• Facilitates job placements</li> <li>• Breaks rules</li> </ul> <p><b>Motivating and Inspiring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is passionate</li> <li>• Strives for incentives</li> <li>• Desires achievement</li> <li>• Works with corrective actions</li> </ul>

*Note:* Functions of management versus leadership. Adapted from *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management*, by J.P. Kotter, 1990, New York: Free Press, pp. 3-8.

Perhaps the most comprehensive examination of the complex task of school leadership, was Marzano et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis of research studies involving student achievement and linkages to leadership practices of principals. This research provided a comprehensive description of the expanse of the role. These researchers examined the role of the principal and its relationship to K-12 student achievement. They concluded that certain school leadership practices can have a measurable, direct impact on academic achievement. These researchers found a significant and positive correlation between specific leadership practices and student achievement and that these practices can be defined. The 21 responsibilities identified by Marzano et al. give further definition

to the complexity of the role of principal and highlight the depth and breadth of their responsibilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Definitions of 21 School Leadership Responsibilities*

<b>Leadership Responsibility</b>	<b>The Extent to Which the Principal...</b>
1. Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures
2. Change Agent	Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo
3. Contingent Rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments
4. Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students
5. Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation
6. Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time and focus
7. Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
8. Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention
9. Ideals/Beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
10. Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies
11. Intellectual Stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture
12. Involvement in Curriculum Instruction and Assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment
13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction and assessment practices
14. Monitoring/Evaluating	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning
15. Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations
16. Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines
17. Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders
18. Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff
19. Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs
20. Situational Awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems
21. Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students

*Note.* Adapted from Marzano et al. (2005), pp. 42-43.

The scholarly research on the past and current role of principals illustrated how the job of school leaders has evolved in depth, breadth, and responsibility over time and

leaders. The next section of the literature review will add another layer of complexity and more fully describe the current context within which these leaders are asked to lead.

### **Changing Demographics of the United States and Their Schools**

Public schools in the United States have long played a key role in attempting to assimilate linguistically and culturally diverse students via educational structures, practices, and policies (Cooper, 2009). However, the majority of U.S. school systems have largely valued Anglo-centric, middle-class norms and values in the process, resulting in a failure to recognize and affirm the experiences, knowledge, and assets of culturally diverse populations (Banks, 1996; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Nieto, 1999). This has led to the disengagement and marginalization of students of color and their families in public schools across the country, even as racial and ethnic minority groups are on the verge of becoming the nation's majority.

Diversity in education is not a new concept. The focus on the issue, however, is currently greater than ever as standardized test scores, accountability, achievement gaps, special education, and discipline referrals are metrics that comprise public, transparent, and high-stakes accountability systems in states and local school districts across the country. These metrics and their public inspection highlight ongoing, and in many cases, worsening discrepancies in achievement. The student demographic landscape in the United States is changing, and school leaders, if focused on delivering on the unfulfilled promise of equal access and success for all students, are in need of information, tools, supports, and strategies to make this reality come to fruition.

Over the last two decades, suburbs have become the location of residential development, consistently attracting more and more residents as “white flight” from urban areas continues. Still perceived by many as prosperous white communities, suburban cities are now the epi-center of racial, ethnic, and political change in America (Orfield & Luce, 2012). Racially diverse suburbs are growing at a faster rate than their predominantly white counterparts. By 2010, just 28 percent of residents living in metropolitan areas (47 million people) lived in traditional suburbs, or predominantly white communities. This is considerably lower than in 2000 when 35 percent, or 54 million people, lived in these kinds of communities. Stated differently, in just 10 years, the percentage of suburban residents living in suburbs of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century stereotype fell from more than half (51 percent), to just 39 percent. Diverse suburban neighborhoods now outnumber those in central, urban cities by more than two to one (Tavernise, 2012). Over half of all members of racial minority groups in large metropolitan areas, including blacks, now live in the suburbs (Frey, 2011). Forty-four percent of suburban residents in the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States live in racially integrated communities, which are defined as places whose inhabitants are between 20 and 60 percent non-white (Tavernise, 2012). In 2011, a majority of the children born in the United States and nearly half of students attending public school in the U.S. were non-white, and by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the United States will have no racial majority (Tavernise, 2012). As summarized in Tables 7 and 8, population growth and changes in demographics during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century suggest continuing trends.

Table 7

*General Population Shifts in Community Types in the 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas, 2000-2010*

Community Type (in 2010)	Number	Population Share % (Metro)	Population Share % (Suburban)	Population Growth %
Central Cities	68	29	-----	4
Diverse Suburbs	1376	31	44	15
Predominantly Non-white Suburbs	478	12	17	11
Predominantly White Suburbs	2478	18	25	12
Exurbs	2176	10	14	17

*Note:* Adapted from Orfield & Luce (2012). Definitions: Diverse suburbs = Municipalities with non-white shares between 20 and 60 percent in 2005-2009; Non-white suburbs = Municipalities with more than 60 percent of the population non-white in 2005-2009; Predominantly white suburbs = Municipalities with white shares greater than 80 percent in 2005-2009; Exurbs = Municipalities with less than 10 percent of total land area urban by Census definition in 2000.

As minority populations continue to grow, suburban school systems will need to acquire new skills and perhaps new beliefs and leadership dispositions that lead to the creation of learning communities that embrace, honor, and value diversity. These systems will further need to develop strategies and expertise in addressing poverty, and linguistic and ethnic diversity. Leading in schools that are working to forward integrative practices in suburban districts experiencing changes in student demographic composition presents a variety of challenges to school leaders and teachers alike. These include issues of faculty efficacy and agency, school identity, and power and politics (Evans, 2007). At present, many educators working and leading in suburban districts are challenged by these changes without the necessary tools, dispositions, or supports to do so with confidence or competence. Shifts in student demographics have caused some suburban districts to experience a crisis in identity. Many affluent, homogeneous suburban districts with a track-record of strong student achievement, particularly those situated near urban

centers, have gone through a period of “rapid racial transitions and now mirror city demographics; some may be experiencing racial and economic diversity for the first time” (Frankenburg, 2012, p. 27).

### **Discrepancies in Achievement**

According to the results of the most recent administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Education Commission of the States, 2013), discrepancies in achievement in both reading and mathematics between white students and their non-white counterparts persisted since the first administration of this examination in 1990 (see Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8

*Trends in Fourth and Eighth Grade NAEP Reading and Mathematics Scaled Score Gaps between White and Black Students*

	Gap between White and African American students scaled score			
	4 <sup>th</sup> grade reading	8 <sup>th</sup> grade reading	4 <sup>th</sup> grade mathematics	8 <sup>th</sup> grade mathematics
1990	32	30	32	33
2013	26	26	26	31

*Note.* Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1990–2013 Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

Table 9

*Trends in Fourth and Eighth Grade NAEP Reading and Mathematics Scaled Score Gaps between White and Hispanic Students*

	Scaled Score Gap Between White and Hispanic Students			
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics
1990	27	26	20	24
2013	25	21	19	22

*Note.* Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1990-2013 Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

2013 NAEP data also indicated no closing of the achievement gap between students eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch and those who are not. The achievement gaps in both reading and math at both the fourth and tenth grade levels have persisted over the past decade (see Table 10).

Table 10

*Trends in Fourth and Eighth Grade NAEP Reading and Mathematics Scaled Score Gaps between Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch and Those Not Eligible*

	Scaled Score Gap Between Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and those who are not			
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics
2003	28	24	22	28
2013	29	24	24	27

*Note.* Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 2003-2013 Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

The student achievement landscape in Wisconsin, the context of this study, was even direr than the national profile of NAEP performance (see Table 11). Wisconsin ranked last among the states, 50/50, at both the fourth and eighth grade levels, in both

reading and mathematics in 2011, with respect to the severity of the achievement gap between White and African American students.

Table 11

*Wisconsin Score Gaps in NAEP Performance between Students Who Identify as White and African American in 2011*

	4 <sup>th</sup> grade Reading	8 <sup>th</sup> grade Reading	4 <sup>th</sup> grade Mathematics	8 <sup>th</sup> grade Mathematics
Wisconsin's rank among 50 states	50/50	50/50	50/50	50/50
Average scaled score difference between White and African American students	36	43	36	35

*Note.* Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Despite decades of education reform, little measurable progress has been made as a nation, to significantly reduce these gaps in achievement. Scholarly research on the subject of closing the achievement gap in the public schools of the United States has identified a set of leadership and teaching practices that appear to have a significant impact on this problem (Brown et al., 2011; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Reeves, 2009; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2008) and included rigorous standards of student performance, integrative and inclusion practices, high expectations for achievement for all students, family involvement in the schoolhouse, and an intensive and unrelenting focus on instruction. Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of factors that contribute to success for all students was conducted by the Washington Department of the State Superintendent in 2007. The authors reviewed over 200 studies and identified the following nine characteristics of high-performing schools: 1) a clear and shared focus; 2)

high standards and expectations for all students; 3) effective school leadership; 4) high levels of collaboration and communication; 5) curriculum, instruction and assessment aligned to state standards; 6) frequent monitoring of teaching and learning; 7) focused professional development; 8) supportive learning environments; and 9) high levels of family and community involvement (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). The implications of each of the factors were recognized as positively contributing to the success of all students regardless of race, for the school principal, and further explained the complexity and significance of the role (see Table 12).

Table 12

*Leadership Actions Related to the Nine Characteristics of High-Achieving Schools*

	Characteristic of High-Achieving Schools	Associated Leadership Actions
1.	Clear and shared focus.	Development of mission, vision, values and goals. Consensus building. Data analysis.
2.	High expectations for all students.	Willingness to confront ineffective teaching. Forwarding inclusive and integrative practices.
3.	Effective school leadership.	Mastery of the 21 responsibilities of school leadership (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).
4.	Collaboration and communication.	Establishment of collaborative schoolhouse structures. Proficient oral and written communication skills.
5.	Curriculum aligned to standards.	Development of aligned teaching and learning plans.
6.	Frequent monitoring of instruction.	Classroom inspection. Performance feedback to teachers.
7.	Focused professional development.	Facilitation of ongoing, job-embedded learning directly linked to school goals.
8.	Supportive learning environments.	Development of systems to identify and support struggling students.
9.	Family and community involvement.	Securing partnerships.

*Note.* Adapted from Shannon and Bylsma (2007).

### **Challenges Faced by Suburban Principals Working in Demographically Diverse Contexts**

There was substantial literature that detailed the complexities involved in leading on issues of diversity (Cox, 1994; Madsen & Mabokela, 2005; Thomas, 2008). For school leaders working in school contexts experiencing changing demographics, the changes brought on by diversity were unique and had to be confronted head-on. Principals working in schools with increasing numbers of demographically diverse groups were constantly managing potential conflicts because of differences in culture (Nkomo & Cox, 1996). The need for these leaders to understand the subtleties that occur

in groups due to differences in culture has never been more pressing (Madsen & Mabokela, 2013). In schools with shifting demographics, there may exist a mismatch or disconnect between the norms and values of teachers, and those of the students they serve (Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2009). A negative work environment can be created when teachers and leaders are asked to adjust to working with students of color. If leaders at both the district and school levels do not recognize changing demographics, they will not be able to effectively and proactively address teachers' disputes. These contradictions amongst staff affect organizational climate, turnover, absenteeism, and recruitment efforts (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

*Properties of Intergroup Conflict*

<b>Type of conflict</b>	<b>Conflict definition</b>
Competing Goals	Differences in majority and minority workers results in goals that are in competition that are influenced by goal priorities, work styles, and norms among these groups (Cox, 1994).
Competition for Resources	Resource allocation that is influenced by embedded organizational issues such as training priorities, the acknowledgement of group identities and expansion of resources, can lead to competition between majority and minority groups (Cox, 1994).
Cultural Differences	Cultural differences between members of different groups can occur due to misperceptions and misunderstandings (Cox, 1994).
Group Boundaries	Both psychological and physical group boundaries determine membership. Variations in the permeability of these boundaries regulate transactions among groups (Alderfer & Smith, 1982).
Affective Patterns	The significance of conflict between groups impacts the polarized feelings among the groups. Group members tend to associate positive feelings with their group and negative feelings with the minority group (Alderfer & Smith, 1982).
Cognitive Formations	Group boundaries shape and influence the creation of power differences and affective patterns that lead to the development of their own language, influence members' perceptions of subjective and objective criteria of other groups and their work efforts, an transmits propositions about other groups in relation to their own group members (Alderfer & Smith, 1982).
Leadership Behavior	The group leader impacts the boundaries of groups and the interactions among them. The leader has a powerful role in the intensification of intergroup conflict (Alderfer & Smith, 1982).
Power Differences	The power structure in an organization is impacted by the advantages held by majority groups of minority groups. Hostility between these groups can result in disagreements regarding the redistribution of power. Density in the minority group poses a threat to the existing power structure (Cox, 1994; Alderfer & Smith, 1982).

*Note.* Adapted from Madsen and Mabokela (2013).

As changes in demographics continue to alter the linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic make-up of schools across the country, there is an urgent need to learn from those leading and learning through this change. Students need leaders who are advocates and change agents, ready to take on complex issues of race, power, and relationships. Suburban schools, now facing issues typically associated with their urban counterparts, need leaders at both the school and district levels who are equipped with the

knowledge, strategies, support, and courage to make curriculum, instruction, family partnerships, and student engagement decisions that will positively impact all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic or language status, ethnicity, or disability (Cooper, 2009).

Leading schools in diverse suburban contexts is courageous and important work. Principals must be equipped to recognize when well-intended educators, who largely regard themselves as caring about all students, can unknowingly devalue students' culturally relevant knowledge, experiences, and language (Nieto, 1999), and must intervene in a consistent manner so as to interrupt discriminatory practices (Evans, 2007). The culture and climate of the school or district can create conditions and forces that put pressure on principals to continue inequitable practices. There appears to be a disconnection in the literature between the value school leaders give to inclusive practices and equity, and the actions they take to ensure they occur (Welton, Diem, & Holme, 2013). School leaders have been found to give voice to social justice values but do little to advance this kind of change in their schools (Cooper, 2009). The work of creating equitable and inclusive schools is a Herculean task that demands the efforts and energies of all stakeholder groups. The skill and will of these stakeholder groups matters in the transformative work of school leaders. Evans (2007) found in her study of racially changing schools that even though the leaders were well-intentioned and focused on inclusive practices, their efforts were undermined by parents and teachers who wanted to protect the status quo.

The "politics of difference" (Cooper, 2009, p. 701), is relevant in leadership contexts of today with the growing presence of people of color in historically white

neighborhoods and schools (Evans, 2007; Zhou, 2003). Educators and community members have a tendency to perceive immigrant youth or newly-arrived Black students as being “more deficient, violent, underachieving, value-deprived, and socially troublesome than White U.S.-born youth” (Cooper, 2009, p. 701). Murillo (2002) explains how Latino students entering U.S. schools are viewed by educators and community members as somehow less deserving and a drain on school resources.

West (1999) offers a framework that describes a new politics of difference and its application to school leadership that helps broaden the understanding of the complexities involved in school leadership in diverse contexts. West places an emphasis on the need for educational leaders to respond to cultural diversity through appreciation and the rejection of deficit-based perspectives and the advancement of “freedom, democracy and individuality” (p.120) rather than division or assimilation. In order to be successful in these efforts, according to West, educational leaders must recognize and name power inequities, promote collective action, empower minority groups, and be straightforward about vision, purpose, and shared goals. The engagement in these efforts on the part of educational leaders makes them cultural workers (Cooper, 2013).

The educational leader as cultural worker involves constructive critique and continuous analysis of dominant structures, seeking first to understand before being understood, and creating change while resisting the temptation to dismantle traditional structures, standards, or policies. The goal of the cultural worker is not to dismantle, but to transform (West, 1999). This balancing act of constructive criticism of existing structures and practices while holding onto the best of what these constructs have to offer is part of the art of educational leadership. For school leaders, this means being a

supporter and cheerleader for all public education has to offer, while recognizing inequity and developing systems and strategies to address it. Cultural leaders working in educational contexts strive to reject overgeneralized dichotomies of Black-White, normal-deviant, right-wrong, etc., which West (1999) believes is especially important in matters of race. As Dantley (2005) explains, leaders in education who embrace West's framework are thought of as "intellectual practitioners" who recognize that "intellectual activity is not divorced from political action" (p. 667).

### **The Superintendent/Principal Relationship**

School leadership has always been challenging. Hess and Kelly (2005) state that "today, principals are asked to lead in a new world marked by unprecedented responsibilities and challenges..." (p. 244). Over the past ten years in public schools in Wisconsin, the challenges associated with changing demographics, an increase in the number of English Language Learners, an increase in the number of students and families living poverty, and the political noise surrounding the public education sector, have been contributing factors to what Hess and Kelly refer to as "unprecedented responsibilities, challenges,..." (p. 244). Madsen and Mabokela (2002) further explain that "increasing diversity among teachers and students is one of the most critical adaptive challenges schools face" (p. 1).

Regardless of the challenges confronting them, principals and superintendents must realize that "...successful reform and restructuring initiatives are related to leadership" (Cooley & Shen, 2000, p. 443). Principals' and superintendents' understanding and skills pertaining to diversity are important in leading diverse schools (Hernandez & Kose, 2012). This is a source of optimism for school and district leaders,

as it suggests that strong and focused leadership can result in positive results for students. Leadership for continuous improvement at both the district and school levels that focuses on individual student groups requires courage, resolve, and perseverance (Cooper, 2009). Madsen and Mabokela explain that “leadership and diversity are invariably connected” (p. 2), and Cooper (2009) further clarifies that “as demographic change alters the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic make-up of school populations... there is a dire need to reframe education accountability discourse and policies” (p. 695).

Superintendents must examine the skills, qualities, and leadership approaches of their school principals as they work to meet the needs of all students. With shifts in demographics, more students arrive at the school house doors coming from backgrounds of poverty, speaking different languages in their homes. Leone et al. (2009) believe the principal a student needs today is an “active change agent in the school” (p. 92). These leaders must challenge the status quo through their continuous improvement efforts. Because principal preparation programs often fail to adequately prepare new school leaders for their posts (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hull, 2012; Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Stratton, 2003), superintendents must provide immediate and ongoing professional support and learning, to ensure principals can carry out all of their responsibilities in a successful way. Grissom and Loeb (2011) suggest that both new and veteran principals need ongoing training and support in both instructional leadership and traditional management skills. Many principals report feeling unprepared for the enormity of the job and very few are afforded a mentor for support and assistance (Shoho

& Barnett, 2011; Stratton, 2003). Most principals are left to discover on their own, the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of the position (Spillane & Hunt, 2010).

Robust professional development structures and opportunities that begin with a focus on “meaningful induction” (Shoho & Barnett, 2011, p. 587) and include a continuous focus on instructional leadership (Lashway, 2002) are necessary for successful principals. Superintendents can build strong learning communities through an unrelenting focus on professional learning for principals. Through coaching and ongoing performance feedback, principals should be allowed to put new learning into practice, be afforded an opportunity to reflect on and refine their skills, and build competence and capacity overtime. Fullan (2002) refers to this as learning in context and views this as a critical aspect of principal development and principal support. This can only be accomplished if appropriate systems of support are provided (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

Due to the increased expectations of principal leadership, superintendents are holding school leaders to higher expectations of school improvement (Hess & Kelly, 2005). As principals face this increased accountability and higher expectations of job performance, they require significant supports and assistance to meet these challenges. White-Smith and White (2009) discovered that with the changing roles and expectations faced by principals due to changing demographics and re-conceptualized roles and responsibilities, and demands from a variety of stakeholder groups, it is critical to “assist principals in the work of re-conceptualizing the task so that they see not only the new demands, but also the opportunity to use skills to succeed within this new context” (p. 277). Superintendents must provide the necessary supports for principals so that they can

successful take on the work of achieving equity for all students. Theoharis (2010) fully details what these reform efforts should include, explaining that, “school leaders must create school structures, teaching staff, a climate, communities, and achievement results that support and demonstrate success for every child” (p. 332). District and school leaders must be truly committed to work of this nature in order for reform efforts to take hold. Fullan (2002) states that, “school leaders with moral purpose seek to make a difference in the lives of students” (p. 17). District and school leaders with a commitment to meeting the needs of all students will “get rid of school structures that marginalize, segregate, and impede achievement; they will ensure teacher professionalism, make the school culturally welcoming to all and their families, and address the differences in student achievement” (Theoharis, 2010, p. 340). Fullan calls this kind of school leader a cultural change agent and identifies key attributes of leaders who convey in all they do that learning is paramount, involve teachers in the work of monitoring student learning, treat all stakeholders with respect, encourage teachers to lead, and cultivate a collective and comprehensive moral purpose (p. 17). Leaders who engage deeply in this work benefit from developing networks with other like-minded school administrators, as these networks can be a source of resources, support, and inspiration (Theoharis, 2010).

Increased demands, changes in society, and external pressures placed on public education leaders related to accountability have led to the occupations of superintendent and principal becoming the most difficult positions in educational leadership. It is important, therefore, to examine what principals need to be successful in their roles as school leaders, how the relationship between the principal and superintendent impacts

their job satisfaction and performance, and how superintendents can support and retain their principals.

### **Mutual Expectations**

In order to gain a full understanding of how the principal-superintendent relationship can be most productive, it is vital to examine the expectations supervisors and subordinates have of one another. Common themes emerge from a review of literature in the field of education, industry, organizational psychology, and business. These were trust, collaboration, a positive work environment within which attitudes and approaches focus on what is best for the organization, and an appraisal process that fosters continuous improvement.

### **Trust**

Supervisors and subordinates need trust in their working relationship. Hoy and Miskel (2012) suggest the value an organization places on building trust and relationships amongst its members is essential to the success and culture of the organization. Covey and Merrill (2008) support this by explaining that “trust is the one thing that changes everything” (p. 1). Trust is a bedrock of the superintendent-principal relationship. West and Derrington (2009) explain that the success of this relationship is dependent upon the ability to earn and establish mutual trust. Mutual trust is essential for the organization to successfully meet challenges and achieve the organization’s strategic objectives and mission (Target & Hoy, 1988). Covey and Merrill (2008) believe a leader’s “ability to establish, grow, extend, and restore trust with all stakeholders is the critical leadership competency” (p. 323). An attribute of a high-trust environment is inspiring others to work hard, and Sinek (2011) explains that, “to inspire employees the leaders of the company

must gain the trust of those who work under them” (p. 53). Followers will buy into the work of the organization and the organization’s leadership if trust has been firmly established (Hoy & Miskel, 2012).

Supervisors and subordinates must build and develop relationships based on confidence and trust (Saban & Wolfe, 2002; Covey & Merrill, 2008). When trust is established between supervisors and subordinates, loyalty and confidence in their work grows. Kannan-Narasimhan and Lawrence (2012) discovered that the trust employees have in their supervisors directly impacts the amount of trust they have in top-level management. Therefore, it is in the best interest of superintendents to be concerned with the way their principals work with one another and their subordinates, as these relationships impact the perceptions subordinates have of the superintendent. When supervisors show a belief in their employees’ capabilities, subordinates feel an increased sense of trust (Sahertian & Frisdiantara, 2012). Vie (2012) further suggests that supervisors can demonstrate trust by giving their subordinates autonomy in their job. This is substantiated by the work of Gupta and Singh (2013) who posit that supervisors should empower their employees in order to gain buy-in and trust (p. 82). Employees experience personal worth and an increase in motivation, which helps them perform at a higher level when supervisors show confidence and trust in their work (Dasgupta, Suar, & Singh, 2013). Expanding on this concept, Leroy, Palanski, and Simons (2012) state that, “leader integrity drives follower performance” (p. 255). Sinek (2011) adds that “without trust, the buy-in is not there, and a common goal is not present” (p. 53).

It is important to examine how trust can be earned between supervisors and subordinates. The literature identifies several ways to develop trust. These include the

demonstration of integrity, adherence to core values, high integrity, honesty, and personal regard for work (Kannan-Narasimhan & Lawrence, 2012; Low & Zain, 2012; Eller & Carlson, 2009). Peus et al. (2012) further suggest that the open sharing of information and transparent communication build trust. According to Fullan (2002), when relationships improve, schools improve. Hoy & Miskel (2012) state quite plainly that leaders cannot transform their organizations without influence, which is built on trust.

### **Relationships**

The relationship between the principal and superintendent is imperative in the principal's ability to maximize their full potential and lead their school with competence and confidence. Peterson (2002) suggests that superintendent-principal relationships are essential to leading an academically successful school district and that this relationship should be the "starting point in investigating the instructional leadership of the superintendent" (p. 168). Leading change efforts, according to Fullan (2002) depends upon strong relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Trust and confidence must be the hallmarks of the superintendent-principal relationship (Saban & Wolfe, 2002).

### **Collaboration**

A need for collaboration was expressed throughout the literature as necessary for trusting environments and relationships in the workplace. Gano-Phillips et al. (2011) posits that collaborative leadership requires trust. Because subordinates want to feel part of a team, Fullan (2002) explains that, "Creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership" (p. 18). Allowing for shared decision making and collaboration can

foster team dynamics (Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011). Supervisors, as explained by Derrington (2009), want team members who excel in team environments and yearn for a sense of belonging.

### **Work Environment**

Some common expectations of the type of work environments most desired by both supervisors and subordinates are evident in the literature. Leone, Warnimont, and Zimmerman (2009) suggest that both groups expect the other to be hard working. Noeverman and Koene (2012) agree and state that hard work and dependability are essential to the success of any organization. Being predictable, accepting responsibility and accountability, and being decisive define a dependable supervisor or subordinate (Peus et al., 2012). A supportive work environment fosters the supervisor-subordinate-relationship and can be created through treating one another with respect and dignity (Reed et al., 2011). Supervisors can have a positive impact on the work environment through ordinary activities such as listening and chatting (Vie, 2012). Relationship leadership, taking the time to show others that you have a genuine care for and interest in them, can be a powerful tool in climate and culture building (Vie, 2012). West and Derrington (2009) believe that “effective leaders are affective leaders” (p. 22). Millbourn (2012) further states that supportive leadership practices foster risk-taking and creativity.

Caldwell et al. (2011) identify the need for share commitment to the individuals and goals of the organization as a work-place characteristic most desired by supervisors and subordinates. “Leaders that seek to benefit individuals within their organization, the organization itself, and society will achieve greater profitability” (p. 177). Deprioritizing

personal agendas for the greater good of the organization is vital to achieving the goals and mission (Fulla, 2002; Harriss & Witwicka, 2012).

### **Appraisal Process**

The appraisal process is another important component of the supervisor-subordinate relationship. “The antecedent of an effective evaluation process is the establishment of a positive supervisory relationship based on trust” (Derrington & Sanders, 2011, p. 34). Zheng, Zhang, and Li (2012) further explain that the ability to collaborate with subordinates, keenly observe their behaviors, and give them honest and useful feedback, are critical skills of performance appraisal that need to be used by supervisors. The appraisal process will only be effective if clear standards of performance have been set and well-communicated (Eller & Carlson, 2009). The supervisory process then, has to allow for support and guidance in order for subordinates to meet the expectations of those standards. Derrington and Sanders (2011) suggest that supervisors must demonstrate that the supervisory relationship is intended to help and support, not punish or demean. Ongoing feedback, high visibility of the supervisor in the work environment of the subordinate, frequent checks for understanding and progress, and praise of minor and major accomplishments are vital to a successful appraisal process (Vie, 2012; Noeverman & Koene, 2012).

### **What Principals Need**

Superintendents communicate their beliefs and values in the roles they expect their principals to play and the responsibilities they expect them to uphold (Spanneut & Ford, 2008). These expectations are continually clarified and reinforced through the support they provide to principals as they work to develop and refine their competence

and effectiveness. Kafka (2009) posits that principals should be “strategic, instructional, organizational, political, and community leaders, and they should be afforded the autonomy commensurate with their responsibilities” (p. 328). The main role of the superintendent, according to Matthews (2002), is to focus on the development of principals, as they are second only to teachers when it comes to impact on student achievement (Fullan, 2001, 2008a, 2008b; Leithwood, Lewis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Reeves, 2009; Whitaker, 2003). The development of principal expertise occurs through the provision of support, assistance, quality training, professional learning, and opportunities for networking and collaboration. Derrington and Sanders (2011) state it plainly and suggest that, “because of increased principal responsibilities and rigorous standards, principals need support and guidance from a supervisor” (p. 33).

Effective supports for principals are defined in the literature. Fink and Resnick (2001) describe this support as ongoing coaching and evaluation within which the principal is in ongoing discussion throughout the year with their supervisor about the work they are doing to reach district and school goals. Moore (2009) adds by stating that principals must be evaluated in a way that increases their capacity to lead their schools.

Principal preparation programs often fail to adequately prepare new school leaders for their posts (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hull, 2012; Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Stratton, 2003), therefore superintendents must provide immediate and ongoing professional support and learning, to ensure principals can carry out all of their responsibilities in a successful way. Grissom and Loeb (2011) suggest that both new and veteran principals need ongoing training and support in both instructional leadership and traditional management skills. Many principals report feeling unprepared

for the enormity of the job and very few are afforded a mentor for support and assistance (Shoho & Barnett, 2011; Stratton, 2003). Most principals are left to discover on their own, the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of the position (Spillane & Hunt, 2010).

Robust professional development structures and opportunities that begin with a focus on “meaningful induction” (Shoho & Barnett, 2011, p. 587) and include a continuous focus on instructional leadership (Lashway, 2002) are necessary for successful principals. Superintendents can build strong learning communities through an unrelenting focus on professional learning for principals. Through coaching and ongoing performance feedback, principals should be allowed to put new learning into practice, be afforded an opportunity to reflect on and refine their skills, and build competence and capacity overtime. Fullan (2002) refers to this as learning in context and views this as a critical aspect of principal development and principal support. This can only be accomplished if appropriate systems of support are provided (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

### **How Superintendents Can Support and Retain their Principals**

The superintendent has the responsibility for the moral and intellectual focus of a school district (Schlechty, 2009). Eller and Carlson (2009) explain that principals are looking for the following from their superintendent: clear and reasonable expectations of performance, an emotionally safe workplace, an absence of micro-management, honest and open communication, a clear vision and direction for the district, a visible and ongoing supervisory process, feedback about performance, and support and guidance without the fear of reprisal. The development of common beliefs, traditions, and values are also cited as effective in bringing a team together (Schlechty, 2009). Houston (2004)

explains that the work of a superintendent is people work and that superintendents must be the source of possibility in the organization.

The superintendent sets the tone of the organization. To ensure a positive tone, the superintendent must assume that all team members have the best intentions, allow ideas to be heard without immediate judgment, and listen to team members before offering solutions (Eller & Carlson, 2009). Trust, rapport, and climate are critical components of success and add to the tone of the organization. These are developed through effective communication (Kowalski, 2005). A superintendent's trustworthiness impacts a principal's effort and buy-in. High-trust environments, as outlined by West and Derrington (2009), are characterized by the following: team members are allowed to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions without fear; cooperation is evident across teams; subordinates feel listened to and valued; communication is frequent and honest, promises are kept; and finally, teammates look for ways to help one another. Principals who work in high-trust environments are more invested and willing to work harder towards the goals of the district (Kowalski, 2005).

Principals who have a strong connection to and rapport with their superintendents feel more connected and part of the district team (West & Derrington, 2009). Superintendents effective in rapport building with their principals commiserate with them, advise them and act as their best cheerleaders and encouragers. These actions solidify trust and commitment. The most effective superintendents also regularly bring together their principals to conduct business, share information, identify problems and solutions, and celebrate accomplishments (Fink & Resnick, 2001), creating a culture of mutual dependency. These superintendents expect their principals to speak their mind

(West & Derrington, 2009). According to Sinek (2011), “great leaders create an environment in which great ideas happen” (p.99).

Lastly, principals must have support and guidance from the superintendent (Eller & Carlson, 2009). Since superintendents realize the instructional leadership skills and capabilities of their principals have a direct impact on student achievement, they constantly reinforce this truth by providing ongoing and robust systems of support (Spanneut & Ford, 2008). Fink and Resnick (2001) suggest that coaching and support of principals should be the number one priority of superintendents and deputy superintendents.

### **Summary**

The work of school leadership is complex, ever-evolving, and never more important in these times of increasing accountability for the success and achievement of all students regardless of race, ethnicity, socio-economic, disability, or language-learning status. Leadership challenges historically faced by principals and superintendents working in urban districts are now impacting those serving in suburban schools. As families of color and linguistic diversity continue to move into suburban neighborhoods, principals and superintendents need to learn how to best support not only students, but staff and their parent communities so as to create dynamic learning communities within which all students can prosper. These school leaders must find appropriate resources and information to inform their own leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In order to achieve this preferred future reality, it is vital to learn from school and district leaders currently immersed in these contexts—those learning to lead while dealing with

demographic change in their school or district. The question must be asked, “How are changing demographics impacting suburban school leadership?”

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“The field does not need yet another adjective in front of the term leadership. It needs the firm empirical footing only a substantial accumulation of theoretically informed evidence can provide.” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005, p. 194).

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological strategies and the analytical procedures of this study. The focus of this study is the impact on suburban school leadership of changing student demographics, specifically, the increase of students who are African American and Hispanic. Viewing suburban school leadership in these changing contexts through transformational leadership theory will provide a clearer understanding of the leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions being employed by principals and superintendents serving in these schools and districts. Educational leadership has been a long-standing topic of research (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Fullan, 2005; Razik & Swanson, 2010; Yukl, 2010). This study of the leadership impact of changing demographics on school principals adds to the previous body of work, but allows for deeper understanding of this particular school leadership context. As the country’s suburban school districts become more racially diverse with each passing year, the opportunity to learn how to more competently equip current school leaders serving in suburban contexts with the resources and strategies to help all students be successful and prepared for success after high school graduation is timely and relevant to the field.

Research questions foreshadow, shape, and define the entirety of the work. This research study explored how principals and superintendents serving in suburban settings experiencing increases in students who are African American and Hispanic are

responding to these changes and what specific resources and supports are most helpful to these leaders in this work.

1. What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles?
2. What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully meet the challenges of creating school environments within which all students succeed?
3. How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies in proactively supporting such racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized such groups of students?

To investigate these questions, a qualitative study was designed. Using transformational leadership theories, the practices of suburban principals and superintendents currently serving in schools and districts experienced considerable shifts in student demographics was investigated. Researchers have outlined information that indicates an indirect, yet significant connection between leadership and student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Therefore, studying the impact on changing demographics on suburban school leadership in contexts experiencing swift and significant change will consider information that is pertinent to increasing the effectiveness of leadership in these

settings—settings that are becoming more prevalent as our nation continues to experience changing demographics in suburban areas.

Participant selection was done in a purposeful manner. Study participants represented districts that have characteristics specific to suburban settings experiencing significant and swift increases in the number of students who are African American or Hispanic. A guarantee of confidentiality increased the likelihood of authentic and open participation. Semi-structured interviews provided a framework for data collection. Archival documents from principals and superintendents provided additional information about leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions employed in suburban school settings experiencing significant demographic shifts and the relationship between district and school leadership. Data analysis was conducted with a deliberate approach, including plans for validity and the acknowledgement of researcher positionality. Through the design of a high-quality, qualitative study, the impact of changing demographics on suburban school leadership was researched with the goal of providing contextualized information to better understand what leaders serving in these contexts need to perform their jobs with efficacy and effectiveness.

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is an evolving process that is iterative in nature with ongoing interconnection and interaction among the different design components (Maxwell, 2005). The qualitative study design acknowledges the role of subjectivity and researcher-participant interaction. The data of qualitative research are complex and only to be understood in context (Richards, 2009).

In the field of educational leadership, qualitative research has gained momentum as a method of inquiry (Pring, 2004; Seidman, 2006; Yukl, 2010). Leadership can be described as dynamic, multi-faceted, and complex. The layers of leadership are intertwined and require constructive and descriptive research. Qualitative studies of educational leadership are particularly suited for this kind of thoughtful analysis. The idea of constructed meaning or truth is particularly poignant in matters of leadership, as scholars who seek to answer questions about meaning and culture have found quantitative methods insufficient in their attempts to explain the phenomenon they wish to study (Ospina, 2004).

A qualitative approach was employed in this study of principals and superintendents serving in suburban school districts experiencing increases in students who are African American or Hispanic. A qualitative approach allowed for intensity of detail as Patton (1985) explains,

[Qualitative research] “is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting... The analysis strives for depth of understanding” (p.5).

The results of this study are transferable to both principals and superintendents alike. Due to the limited number of participants in this study, generalization was prevented. However, through validity within and amongst participant interviews and the

triangulation of data, the results are transferrable to principals and superintendents working in similar settings (Richards, 2009; Seidman, 2006).

Principals can learn how to gain efficacy and efficiency in their leadership of suburban schools facing significant shifts in student demographics. Superintendents can learn how to better support these school leaders as they face the day-to-day challenges and complexities of their roles. Finally, those facilitating education leadership preparation programs may gain a better understanding of the current and potential future needs of suburban school principals and superintendents as they work to create a tighter alignment in philosophy and practice. These research implications are important when considering that school and district leadership are connected to student achievement.

Researchers have documented the positive impact of leadership on school conditions (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). The more definitive research is on leadership and its impact on obstacles such as change resistance, gaps in achievement, and differences in expectation for different student groups, the more the field will benefit. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) state, “without minimizing the considerable progress that has been made over the past 15 years, it is safe to say that the nature of effective school leadership still remains much more of a black box than we might think” (p. 2). Very few research studies detail the impact of demographic change on suburban school leadership. In addition, little is known about the relationship between suburban school leaders serving in these contexts and how they employ the components of leadership theory.

## **Participant Selection**

Maxwell (2005) suggests that decisions about where to conduct research and whom to include are critical decisions for research methods. Purposeful selection of participants was utilized in this research study. Purposeful selection is defined as the deliberate selection of particular settings, people, or activities in order to provide information that can't be derived from other choices (Maxwell, 2005). Participants included suburban principals and superintendents in four Wisconsin school districts.

Suburban districts are defined in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this study, the definition of a suburban educational institution is influenced by the following: location, built environment characteristics, transportation, activities, political places, styles of building, design, planning, critical assessments, indices, and sociocultural influences. In addition, participants selected for this study are leading in suburban school districts recognized as experiencing significant increases in the number of students identified as African American or Hispanic over the past ten years. This research study took place in Wisconsin, the state that has been identified as having the largest racial achievement gap in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The demographic change data was analyzed from the forty largest school districts in Wisconsin. Significant was defined as above the average of the forty largest school districts in Wisconsin for demographic change in either the number of students identified as African American and Hispanic from 2004-2005 to 2013-2014. Four school districts were identified for participant selection.

Four districts, Northtown, Stratton, Lakeside, and Millerville, have each experienced increases in the number of students who identify as African American and

Hispanic since 2004-2005. The four districts selected serve between 7,475 students and 13,485 students. Two districts, Northtown and Stratton, are geographically situated adjacent to a large, urban center, and can be defined with a traditional notion of a “suburban” city whereas Lakeside and Millerville were selected for study participation using an expanded definition of the construct, “suburban”, considering political, economic, structural, and socioeconomic factors.

Table 13

*Summary of the Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American in the Four Districts Selected for Study Participation: 2004-2005 to 2013-2014*

District and Number of Students Currently Served	% Increase in students who identify as Hispanic	% Increase in students who identify as African American
Northtown – 13,485	7.06%	1.9%
Stratton – 9,885	13.4%	5.0%
Lakeside – 7,475	4.4%	3.0%
Millerville – 10,260	6.2%	1.0%

*Note:* Source: The Wisconsin State Information System (2014).

Participants included both principals and superintendents and included four superintendents, four high school principals, four middle school principals, and four elementary principals, for a total of sixteen participants. All principals and superintendents serving in each of the four Wisconsin suburban school districts were contacted as study participants. Exclusionary variables for principal selection such as tenure in the position, years of experience in the field of educational administration, age, gender, and race were considered but rejected so as to capture the breadth and depth of the lived experiences of principals serving in these suburban contexts. With respect to superintendent participant selection, criteria included tenure in that particular district for at least two years. Specific information about the demographic composition of student

clientele of the school and/or district was verified by data released by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2014).

To secure district participation and that of individual principals and superintendents, the researcher completed the following steps:

1. The Wisconsin school district demographic data analysis that led to the identification of four suburban districts whose demographic trends are deemed as significant was presented to the dissertation committee.
2. Upon receipt of the Institutional Review Board approval, a summary of the study, including the specific participant activities, was presented to district officials.
3. Once a district expressed interest in study participation, a phone conference was scheduled with each superintendent to explain the details of the research project, the benefits to the district, and the need to identify and engage principals in study participation. The researcher then secured names and contact information for all school principals.
4. Once a superintendent was confirmed as a participant, he/she was asked to complete an Individual Consent Documentation form.
5. Individual school principals were contacted, provided an overview of the study, and invited to engage as a study participant.
6. Once a principal was confirmed as a participant, he/she was asked to complete an Individual Consent Documentation form.

After serving as a school administrator in the state of Wisconsin for the last eight years in the same general region as some of the potential study participants, there have

been many occasions to meet other school administrators through participation in workshops and conferences, email exchanges, or phone conversations about staff recommendations. Knowing there is a likelihood of future interaction, this researcher was transparent in her dual identity as an acting school administrator and doctoral candidate researcher. The researcher confirmed that each study participant was comfortable in the likelihood of future professional interactions.

The confidentiality and comfort of research study participants was essential in the design and execution of the study. There was an ethical obligation to protect study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Participants are not likely to speak freely in the absence of confidentiality (Seidman, 2006). This study had low risk to participants as confidentiality will be guaranteed. Meeting times and locations were selected by participants to ensure a safe and comfortable environment.

Audio recordings were made of interviews, but identifying information was avoided through the use of pseudonyms within the verbatim transcriptions. Any identifying information, including the name of a school or district, was substituted with pseudonyms. Participants were given the contact information of both the primary researcher and faculty advisor in writing. Participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any point, including the option to withdraw the data associated with their participation.

Each of the four districts identified for study participation, though all meeting the criteria within an expanded definition of “suburban”, were unique in setting, school building configuration, community history and characteristics, and demographics. Each individual district context set the stage for each interaction with the researcher and added

depth and nuance to the data analysis. Moreover, the professional background and experiences of each individual study participants informed and influenced the interactions between this researcher and demand explanation and description.

### **Northtown**

Northtown School District is situated approximately nineteen miles outside of a large, urban center. Currently serving 13, 485 students in thirteen elementary, three middle, and three high schools. The district also hosts the state’s largest secondary virtual school that serves students in grades six through twelve. The district has experienced a significant and steady increase in the number of students who identify as either Hispanic or African American over the past several years, though the demographic composition of Northtown’s schools have not all experienced these significant shifts.

Table 14

#### *Student Demographic Change in Northtown*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	80.7%	12.5%	3.4%
2014	68.0%	20.1%	5.3%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

Lifelong residents of Northtown, in many ways a typical rust-belt suburb with a history of a strong manufacturing industry, a hard-working, blue-collar populace, and pride in the local school system, have experienced significant change over the past decade as manufacturing jobs have faded with a struggling economy. Situated adjacent to a large, metropolitan city grappling with its own significant issues related to socioeconomics and race, Northtown has seen the face of its once homogeneous

community change with the steady migration of city-dwellers seeking a better life in the suburbs and immigrants from many different countries searching for prosperity and hope in the United States. The district currently serves students and families who speak more than forty-two languages and an increasingly impoverished student clientele. In 2005-2006, 21.7% of Northtown's students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, compared to 32.5% in 2014-2015.

While the district as a whole has experienced significant shifts in student demographics, this has played out differently across Northtown's twenty schools. Diversity, as defined by poverty and ethnicity, looks very different depending upon each school's location in the city. School district insiders described "country-club schools" and "inner-city schools" demarcated by certain ethnic or socio-economic factors. For example, Benson Elementary School, located near the downtown area of Northtown, serves a very diverse student clientele, currently comprised of students who are 77.5% economically disadvantaged, 19.3% white, 70.3% Hispanic, 3.5% African American, and 4.6% Asian. These statistics were in sharp contrast to Rock Grove Elementary School, located on the far Southwest side of the district's attendance area which serves a far less diverse student clientele, comprised of students who are 95.1% white and 4.6% economically disadvantaged (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014). These disparate demographic compositions across Northtown's schools created complexities for school district personnel and community members alike. A very liberal "intra-district" school choice policy that allowed district families the ability to enroll in any Northtown school of their choosing intensified the community conversations about race and socioeconomics and served as an accelerator of disproportionality in many of

the district's schools. As illustrated in Table 15, the percent of students who identify as either Hispanic or African American varied widely across Northtown's schools.

Table 15

*Percent of Students Who Identify as Hispanic or African American in Northtown's Schools*

<b>School</b>	<b>% of students who identify as Hispanic</b>	<b>% of students who identify as African American</b>
<b>Elementary Schools</b>		
Barker	54.6%	4.1%
Bell	22.0%	4.0%
Benson	70.3%	3.5%
Hartwell	22.9%	11.1%
Hawley	18.5%	9.4%
Herman	50.1%	3.9%
Hillview	8.7%	2.4%
Lodi	16.7%	9.6%
Martin	11.9%	4.1%
Poppy	9.0%	6.2%
Rock Grove	2.9%	1.1%
Smith	8.2%	3.1%
Westview	21.3%	22.3%
<b>Middle Schools</b>		
Bowman	19.0%	4.6%
Harper	35.4%	4.6%
Lark	16.9%	6.6%
<b>High Schools</b>		
Niles	14.5%	4.9%
Sullivan	28.4%	8.1%
Washburn	7.3%	3.1%

*Note:* Source: Wisconsin Student Information System, 2014.

While the current demographic comparisons across Northtown's schools provided important context, revealed considerable discrepancies and elicited a variety of questions and potential research directions, the most salient inquiry to this particular research study was in regard to the demographic changes that have occurred over the past ten years in

Northtown. These examinations led to the identification of individual study participants – Northtown principals leading in schools that have experienced significant student demographic change.

**Jennifer.**

Jennifer has been the principal at Niles High School in Northtown for the past four years, serving in the role of assistant principal there for three years before assuming the lead administrator role. Slight in build but confident in posture and presence, Jennifer spoke proudly about her district and her school and when asked how her day is going, she is known to frequently respond with a heartfelt, “Living the dream!” Niles has experienced a changing student clientele over the past several years, seeing increases in both the number of students who identify as Hispanic and African American (see Table 16).

Table 16

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Niles High School in Northtown: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	87.4%	8.2%	2.1%
2014	75.5%	14.5%	4.9%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

**Vince.**

Vince, the principal of Harper Middle School in Northtown, is a product of the district who taught at Harper for fifteen years before getting into administration, first as an assistant principal and then as principal, a role he has occupied for the past seven

years. He has witnessed, first hand as a member of the Northtown community, significant demographic changes in his school (see Table 17) and in his neighborhood. As principal of the school where he served also as a classroom teacher, Vince reflected frequently on the challenges related to leading those with whom he was served alongside in the teacher ranks.

Table 17

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Harper Middle School in Northtown: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	83.6%	9.4%	2.2%
2014	52.9%	35.4%	6.5%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

### **Stacy.**

Stacy is the principal of Martin Elementary School in Northtown, a school that has historically seen very little diversity in its student clientele until recently (see Table 18). Stacy has served in several different roles in the district, including high school English teacher, athletic director, associate principal at both the middle and high school levels, and at present, as an elementary principal. She was exuberant and enthusiastic about her work but has struggled to help those with whom she works change their practices in order to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student population.

Table 18

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Martin Elementary School in Northtown: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	90.7%	1.6%	1.1%
2014	76.6%	11.9%	4.1%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

Northtown's superintendent has been serving in the role of district administrator for the past six years. Tom, a fifty-eight year old white male, worked as a business teacher and assistant superintendent for business operations in three Wisconsin school districts before assuming his current post in Northtown. Hired in Northtown for his financial acumen, his primary focus during his tenure has been on "righting the district's financial ship". The principals with whom he works described him as kind, self-deprecating, and consumed by the political enormity of his position.

### **Stratton**

Located adjacent to a major metropolitan area, the landscape of Stratton is filled with abandoned factories that once thrived and served as the economic foundation of this blue-collar city. Stratton's is a community full of prideful, hard-working people who trust in their schools, but have struggled to come to terms with an increasingly diverse student clientele (see Table 19). On the verge of becoming a "minority/majority" school district, the community is facing an identity crisis within which the school district plays a major role.

Table 19

*Percent of Students Who Identify as Hispanic or African American in Stratton's Schools*

School	% of students who identify as Hispanic	% of students who identify as African American
<b>Elementary Schools</b>		
Francis	23.0%	7.9%
Hooper	11.0%	11.8%
Hartman	34.8%	14.4%
Independence	16.9%	6.3%
Johnson	26.3%	9.1%
Lincoln	34.9%	10.3%
McArthur	18.9%	5.4%
Miller	11.0%	6.7%
Pertel	47.1%	12.2%
Washington	12.0%	7.3%
Wittmore	19.9%	5.2%
<b>Middle Schools</b>		
Farmington	17.4%	8.8%
Lark	12.3%	20.7%
Westby	40.6%	23.0%
<b>High Schools</b>		
Century	33.7%	19.4%
National	17.0%	7.7%

*Note:* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014.

Of particular interest in Stratton is a divide within the district that runs along racial and socio-economic lines that creates an “east side/west side” chasm. The schools on the east side of the district serve a heterogeneous student population, while the west side schools have yet to experience considerable student demographic shifts. The three schools selected for participation in this study are located on the east side of the district and the three principals selected are serving in racially diverse school settings.

### **Tess.**

Tess is the principal of Lincoln Elementary School. She describes a passion and mission for urban education and relishes the opportunity to serve and lead others. Short in stature but big in personality, Tess's leadership presence resonates throughout the halls of the small, old, yet homey Lincoln. The staff at Lincoln serve a diverse student clientele as defined by socioeconomic and racial differences. These differences have become more pronounced in recent years (see Table 20).

Table 20

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Lincoln Elementary School in Stratton: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	73.4%	15.7%	8.5%
2014	46.2%	34.9%	10.3%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

### **Darius.**

Darius, a large, imposing man with a sweet smile and a gentele demeanor, serves Stratton in the role of principal at Westby Middle School. Darius, the only subject who identifies as African American, leads in a school with a diverse student clientele in a school also located on the east side of Stratton. His mission to help students succeed in order to have as many opportunities open to them after high school graduation, provides him the inspiration and motivation he needs to face the daily challenges of leadership. His largely veteran teaching staff, particularly those who have taught at the school their

entire career, is struggling to meet the needs of Westby's students, particularly in recent years when diversity has increased (see Table 21).

Table 21

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Westby Middle School in Stratton: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	68.9%	16.4%	8.8%
2014	26.5%	40.6%	23.0%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

**Chet.**

Stratton has two, large, comprehensive high schools that serve students in grades nine through twelve. The district employs a liberal intra-district choice policy at the high school level that allows families to select which high school to attend. Overtime, this has led to racial and socioeconomic disproportionality as one high school serves a racially and socioeconomically diverse clientele while the other does not. Chet is the high school principal at Century High School, the more diverse of the district's two high schools who describes the inequities across the two buildings as unfair and unjust. Every school year, his staff welcome an increasingly diverse student body (see Table 22) and Chet works to help build the capacity in his building to help all succeed at the very highest levels of student achievement.

Table 22

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Century High School in Stratton: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	81.1%	8.8%	6.4%
2014	39.5%	33.7%	19.4%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

Stratton’s district administrator, Russell, a life-long resident who has served the district in a variety of roles from teacher to principal to superintendent, is deeply invested in the community. He marvels at the socioeconomic and racial shifts that have occurred in his city and is committed to creating a school system within which all students succeed and are valued. His principals describe him as a caring man who trusts them to do good work in the schools but is out of touch of the daily operations and challenges faced by teachers and administrators.

### **Lakeside**

Located ninety miles from the nearest urban center, Lakeside is a quiet community situated amongst farm fields and the rolling plains of Wisconsin. Another city with a strong history of a manufacturing presence, residents, many of whom are third or fourth generation Lakesiders, take pride in their hearty work ethic. In recent years, the community has seen an influx of residents from different races and cultures, resulting in a very diverse student clientele in the district’s nine elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school (see Table 23).

Table 23

*Percent of students who identify as Hispanic or African American in Lakeside's schools*

School	% of students who identify as Hispanic	% of students who identify as African American
<b>Elementary Schools</b>		
Charles	20.4%	9.2%
Everet	8.6%	4.3%
Lark	2.6%	0.7%
Parson	28.2%	14.2%
Piper	7.6%	8.6%
Ripon	30.7%	10.9%
Roland	6.8%	2.1%
Rowan	6.3%	5.6%
Walters	5.9%	1.1%
<b>Middle Schools</b>		
Sawyer	15.8%	8.8%
Terry	10.1%	5.4%
Watson	9.4%	3.3%
<b>High Schools</b>		
Fitzgerald	8.5%	3.9%

*Note:* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014.

The Lakeside principals selected for participation in this study were leading in schools that have been particularly impacted by changing student demographics. Each individual school leader reported these changes as having an influence on their leadership practices.

### **Sam.**

Sam is the principal of Fitzgerald High School, a large, comprehensive high school that serves more than 2,000 students. A young administrator at the beginning of his career, Sam spoke passionately about his desire to help others change in order to better serve the school's student and how this has been made increasingly challenging for his largely white teaching staff (see Table 24).

Table 24

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Fitzgerald High School in Lakeside: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	89.4%	4.5%	1.9%
2014	82.0%	8.0%	3.9%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

### **Scott.**

Watson Middle School is led by Scott, a post he has held for the past nine years. Like his high school colleague, he described an ongoing effort to build capacity in his school to truly meet the needs of Watson's students. Everything about Watson's physical plant communicates what was valued in a different era. An old and dilapidated building houses students in grades six through eight, a group that has changed with respect to racial composition in recent years (see Table 25).

Table 25

*Increases in the percentages of students who identify as Hispanic and African American at Watson Middle School in Lakeside: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	92.3%	4.3%	1.6%
2014	80.6%	9.4%	3.3%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

### **Stacy.**

Parson Elementary School, another old school situated near the center of the city, has experienced perhaps the most significant student demographic change in the district (see Table 26). The school's leader, Stacy, described the intensity of her position and how she her staff works diligently to create a learning environment within which all students can succeed.

Table 26

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Parson Elementary School in Lakeside: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	79.7%	9.6%	3.4%
2014	47.4%	28.2%	14.2%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

Lakeside's superintendent, Rick, has served the district in his current role for the past eight years. Focused on continuous improvement and equipping his district with the resources and competencies to help every student be college and career ready at the time of high school graduation, he acknowledged the need to learn and change in order to close achievement and opportunity gaps in Lakeside.

### **Millerville**

Sixty miles from a large, urban city, Millerville is situated on the shores of Lake Michigan. Residents work in a variety of manufacturing and service industry businesses and students attend one of the district's ten elementary, four middle, and three high

schools. Racial diversity has increased in most of the schools (see Table 27) in Millerville, making cultural competency a main system priority.

Table 27

*Percent of Students Who Identify as Hispanic or African American in Millerville's*

*Schools*

School	% of students who identify as Hispanic	% of students who identify as African American
<b>Elementary Schools</b>		
Clark	19.8%	2.4%
Cotton	12.0%	2.1%
Grable	19.4%	4.2%
Jarvis	14.0%	8.1%
Jamison	23.1%	9.3%
Lamont	7.2%	1.9%
Longbow	23.3%	11.1%
Parkview	6.8%	1.7%
ShIPLEY	63.3%	3.1%
Wilmont	13.1%	2.3%
<b>Middle Schools</b>		
First Avenue	18.7%	7.4%
Georgetown	26.2%	1.6%
Hopkins	24.7%	4.2%
Sunnyside	16.1%	3.8%
<b>High Schools</b>		
Crestwood	33.0%	7.8%
Nelson	12.4%	2.9%
Stevenson	17.8%	3.8%

*Note:* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014.

### **Charles.**

Nelson, one of Millerville's three, large, comprehensive high schools, is led by Charles, an administrator in his fourth year in that role. A "no nonsense" communication style and an imposing physical presence make him a powerful figurehead at Nelson.

Juggling multiple state-level mandates while helping a largely veteran teaching staff

embrace instructional change while valuing and honoring increasing diversity in their student population (see Table 28) occupy much of Charles's thoughts.

Table 28

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Nelson High School in Millerville: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	74.0%	6.9%	2.0%
2014	62.7%	12.4%	2.9%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

### **Matt.**

For the past five years, First Avenue Middle School has been led by Matt, an energetic, jovial, and positive principal searching for ways to inform his own leadership so as to better serve his students and his staff. As one of four middle school principals in Millerville, Matt and his three principal colleagues working at the middle level work share the responsibility of creating learning communities within which all students succeed regardless of race. A changing student demographic (see Table 29) has informed and influenced Matt's leadership and encouraged him to continuously learn in order to better serve.

Table 29

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at First Avenue Middle School: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	65.4%	13.7%	4.4%
2014	55.5%	18.7%	7.4%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

**Nancy.**

Jarvis Elementary School, where the district once housed a selective program for gifted and talented students, is now one of the schools that has seen the most significant demographic change (see Table 30). Nancy, the school's principal, spent several years as a teacher at Jarvis before leaving the district to assume her first administrative position. Several years later, she returned to Jarvis as principal and was amazed at how the faces of the school's students had changed in her absence.

Table 30

*Increases in the Percentages of Students Who Identify as Hispanic and African American at Jarvis Elementary School in Millerville: 2005-2014*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	81.4%	8.2%	3.7%
2014	59.9%	14.0%	8.1%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

## **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews and archival collection were used for data collection. According to Maxwell (2005), interviews allow researchers to gain a description of actions and events, often including events that cannot be observed due to access or time. Silverman (2001) suggests that understanding how artifacts are used can provide insight into the social organization of the organization, how processes are constructed and administered, and the meaning of leadership to the organization. Through student demographic data, interviews, and archival data review, triangulation was applied. In order to critically consider the recurrence of themes, triangulation of data was an important step within the research process as the researcher analyzed multiple data sources to achieve a greater and more thorough understanding of the subject at hand. Triangulation helped ensure validity amongst the data sources.

## **Interviews**

Seidman (2006, p. 7) suggests the process of interviewing study participants is a meaning-making process. Anderson and Jack (1991), in order to better recognize the more subtle interactions during an interview, remind researchers to listen beyond what is spoken: body language shifts, changes in vocal quality, clarifications of word choices and personal definitions, and what is said versus what is not said. Information from study participants was gathered through a phenomenological interview process that included three interviews with each participant. Seidman (2006) states phenomenological interviews must be grounded in open-ended questions with the ultimate goal of the participants' reconstruction of their experiences within the topic of study. Semi-structured questions guided the interviews. Seidman (2006) summarizes this approach:

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test Hypotheses, and not to “evaluate” as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of the experience. (p. 9).

**Interview one: An introduction.**

Each participant engaged in three interviews, each designed with a different purpose in mind. The first established the context of the participant’s experiences through the inquiry regarding personal and professional experiences up to the present time. The focus of this state of the interview process was to build rapport prior to asking more serious questions related to the impact of changing demographics on suburban school leadership. Since this researcher had never met eleven of the sixteen study participants, this first interaction was important in creating a comfortable atmosphere within which to conduct future interactions. The researcher attempted, through a casual and personal communication style, to get to know each participant by asking questions about professional background, educational experience, and likes and dislikes about their current position. Even through interactions with the five study participants with whom the researcher had had previous interactions, the introductory interview proved helpful in reestablishing a connection and setting a stage for future conversations. Most of these first interactions occurred in person, but a few needed to occur via telephone due to scheduling difficulties. The fact that the researcher worked in the same field as the study participants, having once served as a principal and at present, in a district office role, provided substantial common ground upon which to build a relationship. Conversations about professional and educational experiences, current realities in the field of public

education, and discussion about the excitement and perils associated with educational leadership in a time a constant change of political interference occurred naturally and comfortably.

**Interview two: Learning about lived experiences.**

The second interview was constructed to elicit information about the participant's present experience with the area of changing demographics and their impact on suburban school leadership. Follow-up questions elicited further reflection, detail, and emotional connection. The goal of the second round of interviews was to progress to more detailed descriptions of leadership experiences and connections to the changing demographics. The researcher attempted to establish a level of comfort and familiarity with participants during the introductory phase of the interview process. Therefore, principals and superintendents seemed at ease and engaged during this second interaction. Again, most second interviews were conducted in person and held at the school or district office building where each participant worked. This was done intentionally to put principals and superintendents at ease in their own environment. It afforded the opportunity to stroll the halls while conversing about study questions or to observe a specific location in a school that helped deepen the conversations between the researcher and the participants. For example, when one principal was discussing his desire to reimaging learning spaces in his building, he took the researcher on a school tour, highlighting the specific areas he was targeting for reimagined space. These second interviews were much longer in duration than the introductory conversations, as many discussions lasted more than one hour. The researcher found most principals involved in the study to be highly engaging, generous, and interested in the conversations. Scheduling the interviews

during summer months when the distractions of the school year did not interfere with each principal's attention and focus was done intentionally. Gaining access to each of the four superintendents was more challenging though once involved in the interview process, each district leader was accommodating and cordial, though seemingly not as comfortable in the exchange. The researcher sensed nervousness or guardedness during several of the interactions the four superintendents. The researcher must recognize that the commonalities with the principal research subjects potentially played a major role in the creation of a comfortable and trusting environment during the interviews that was not exactly present during interactions with superintendents. As a female district office administrator who has never held a superintendency interacting with four male superintendents with long tenures in the position, an invisible hierarchy may have contributed to the formality of the exchanges.

**Interview three: Follow-up and clarification through vignette analysis.**

The third and final participant interviews prompted reflection of principals and superintendents on the meaning of their experiences. A vignette was created from interviews one and two to summarize the most poignant information. Seidman (2006, p. 119) states, "crafting a file or vignette of a participant's experiences is an effective way of sharing interview data and opening up one's interview materials to analysis and interpretation". A vignette was sent to each study participant in advance of the third interaction, allowing time for review and reflection. Some participants immediately sent written feedback to the researcher either confirming the accuracy of the information conveyed through the vignette, or providing changes or adjustments to the vignette's contents. The final interaction was important in cases where specific follow up or

clarification was needed by the researcher as she began to analyze transcripts from the first two conversations.

Maxwell (2005) states that verification, or respondent validation, systematically solicits feedback from the participants about data and conclusions. Sharing the vignette with each participant during the third interview interaction served several purposes. This step in the process sought to honor the participants' experiences with as much integrity as possible (Maxwell, 2005).

### **Archival Data**

The review of archival documents is one means of determining a leader's behaviors within the context of the position. School-based documents included faculty and department meeting agendas, notes, and school newsletters; district-based documents included leadership team meeting agendas, notes, and district newsletters. A review of these documents revealed how the writings' of these leaders reflected the ideas expressed during interviews. Archival documents served as a way to determine if the perceived leadership practices of principals and superintendents, obtained during the three interviews, matched the written correspondence.

Maxwell (2005) states that document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of data triangulation. Documents serve as a source of data and provide information and insight that could not be derived from other methods (Bowen, 2009). The document analysis took into account the following considerations (Bowen, 2009):

- avoiding word-level analysis by establishing the meaning of the document and its contribution to the issues;

- alignment with the conceptual framework by matching the document meaning to the research relevance;
- assessment for completeness to determine if the document is comprehensive or selective;
- consideration of the purpose, author, and audience of the document and whether it was generated from first-hand experience; and
- determining the quality versus quantity of documents in relation to the purpose of the study.

The review of archival data as part of a qualitative research study is only meaningful if the researcher makes use of the document, not to search for proof, but to construct it. Therefore, document analysis is a process of evaluating documents in a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding is developed. It is not a matter of lining up a series of artifacts and printed materials to convey whatever idea comes to the researcher's mind. The research should strive for sensitivity and subjectivity and maintain balance between both in order to get to the truth (Bowen, 2010, p. 33-34).

Obtaining archival data from each study participant was perhaps the greatest challenge in the data collection phase of this study. While some participants were immediately giving of a variety of examples of written communication that supported their contributions during the interviews, others were much less willing to provide this data to the researcher. For some study participants, the researcher made more than five requests for archival data and the case of two participants, never received anything. Some participants provided online access to school district intranet functions, allowing the researcher up-to-date access to data such as leadership team meeting agendas and

minutes, school newsletters, school improvement plans, and other planning documents that were aligned to school goals and initiatives.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative researchers are given the responsibility for representing and interpreting the constructed reality of others. This responsibility is significant, and a deep sense of duty should be felt by the qualitative researcher. Data analysis in a qualitative study is not an easy or quick process as researchers must first determine the organization of data, then methods of reconstruction to create a whole picture, and finally, an explanation to readers about the whole picture (LeCompte, 2000).

From the initial interview through the second to the third, trust was imperative and the importance of confidentiality discussed on multiple occasions. The involvement of study participants was respected and their needs attended to (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). No right or wrong answers were established, and all shared thoughts were considered legitimate and worthy.

### **Interview Data**

Data management involved two strategies. There was a record of all interactions with each study participant. This record included signed consents, interview confirmations via email, dates of transcriptions, etc. This administrative work was conducted to facilitate tracing interview data to the original source at all times during the research process (Seidman, 2006). Secondly, in relation to the actual analysis process, not only were dates included, but documents such as transcribed interviews, coded data, and corresponding notes were included. The second of these two strategies was the foundation for high-quality analysis.

Richards (2009) suggests that qualitative data has no predetermined schedule and no imperative for a prescribed process. Before being transcribed, each recorded interview was played and initial impressions recorded in a memo. Words and phrases that were emotionally charged, repetitive, and contradictory were examples of spoken words that made an initial impression. A verbatim transcription of each interview was next created to capture contextual nuances of meaning. Richards (2009) reminds the qualitative researcher that issues of context are critical to interpretation. Transcriptions were read and listened to simultaneously in order to record impressions and verify accuracy, a strategy Richards (2009) refers to as purposeful reading. The goal of purposeful reading is to move from an analysis centered on “that’s interesting thinking” to the “why” analysis. Lastly, phrases were topically and analytically coded in an effort to view and understand patterns and themes.

### **Archival Data**

To support triangulation within this study, archival data was another source of information analyzed. The information obtained during archival data analysis was used to reinforce or negate the data gained during interviews. The data obtained through this analysis was used to determine if the issues related to demographic change emerged as priorities in leadership as potentially communicated during the three participant interviews. Themes identified in the analysis of archival data were compared to themes from the interview analysis to identify similarities, differences, connections, and disconnections between leadership thought and practice. The analysis of archival data related to both principal and superintendent leadership provided an opportunity to compare, contrast, and triangulate data (Pring, 2004; Maxwell, 2005).

## **Analysis Techniques**

The goal of data analysis is the use of small pieces of information to create a fuller picture. Analysis is a progressive process through which relationships between data begin to indicate patterns and themes. By exploring data categories, coding data, and writing memos, the qualitative researcher becomes familiar with the text (Richards, 2009). Coding and text searches were two tools that aided in data analysis. A coding software program was used to identify data categories, codes, and themes. Written memos, interview transcripts, and archival data were analyzed and coded within the software program. Additionally, hand-written notes and field memos were analyzed and coded by hand.

In order to investigate relationships and patterns amongst codes, code searches were employed. By creating concept maps or writing memos, the qualitative researcher can begin the process of theory development about the relationships that exist within the data. Code searches help a researcher move from description to analysis. Richards (2009) states, "It is essential also to explore the relationship of those categories, and to build on them. Searches of coding are one way of building up from small hunches to the bigger grain sizes of little theories: (p. 160).

## **Codes to Themes**

Four major guidelines for analysis were used in this research study; however, the essential link was the researcher (Richards, 2009). The codes created through transcript analysis were kept consistent, which meant cognizance throughout the transcription process. Secondly, context remained at the forefront of analysis; as it is not words nor phrases that constitute analysis, the context surrounding the words and phrases inform

meaning. Thirdly, memos aided in reflection, and the funneling of codes, themes, captured thoughts, and reflections about change. Finally, a qualitative matrix was used in an effort to condense a vast amount of information into smaller, more descriptive pieces (Richards, 2009). Through the use of these four tools of analysis, a shift from the analysis of the “what” moved to the analysis of the “why”.

Interview transcripts and archival data were analyzed for codes that eventually informed the identification of themes. The process of coding was aided by the use of a software program for the purposes of organization and analysis. The initial analysis of data resulted in the identification of twenty-three individual codes. Through reflection, categorization, and consolidation of codes, eleven themes and eleven subthemes were identified (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

*Codes and Themes Identified through the Analysis of Interview and Archival Data*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Themes and sub-themes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positivity</li> <li>• Feedback</li> <li>• Crucial conversations</li> <li>• Perseverance</li> <li>• Understanding the role</li> <li>• Peer supports</li> <li>• Mission</li> <li>• Vision</li> <li>• Strategies to disrupt marginalization</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Disconnections</li> <li>• Isolation</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Data focus</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Poverty over race</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> <li>• Autonomy</li> <li>• Change</li> <li>• Supervision and evaluation</li> <li>• Mentors</li> <li>• Community education</li> <li>• Service to others</li> </ul>	<p>#1: What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles?</p> <p>#2: What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully deliver on the promise of creating school environments within which all students succeed?</p> <p>#3: How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies and supporting principals in proactively leading through racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized such groups of students?</p>	<p>Leadership dispositions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth mindset</li> <li>• Service orientation</li> <li>• Grit</li> </ul> <p>Leadership knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change management</li> <li>• Supervision and evaluation</li> <li>• Data literacy</li> </ul> <p>Leadership skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crucial conversations</li> <li>• Strategies to disrupt marginalization</li> </ul> <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal mission</li> <li>• Peer collaboration</li> <li>• Mentors</li> </ul> <p>Shared mission and vision Performance feedback Trust Autonomy</p> <p>Supporting principals Educating the community Poverty over race Learning in order to lead</p>

**Validity**

Quantitative researchers may question the validity, objectivity and reliability of qualitative research. However, the qualitative researcher embraces terms such as transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability in exchange for traditional one-truth sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative researcher, however, must

acknowledge the rigor expected and the multi-analyses within this kind of research that supports and validates the deep description and understanding of constructed meanings.

By limiting the participants of this study to principals in four suburban districts and their superintendents, there was no guarantee that the sample size was a true representation of the larger population of suburban principals and superintendents. Through the facilitation of consistent interview processes it was hoped that the information became transferable to suburban principals and superintendents serving in other school districts where swift and significant demographic changes are also occurring.

Member checking can add to the trustworthiness of this research. Each participant was given a vignette that captured the essence of the first and second interviews. Each participant was then asked to make clarifications as appropriate. Maxwell (2005) calls this “respondent validation” and describes it as “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on” (p. 111).

Richards (2009) discusses the importance of building internal validity into a qualitative research design. To accomplish this, each participant was asked the same types of questions so as to make comparisons across interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest this helps build confirmability between and within interviews. Codes were also recorded consistently across the different transcriptions. As transcriptions were analyzed, the analysis was not done at the word or phrase level. With each text search or code, the new information gained was documented in order to track the acquisition and

the journey of discovery. Through the incorporation of these tools, the researcher intended to cultivate trust with the study participants.

### **Positionality**

Since qualitative interpretations are constructed, the interpretation stems from the interactions between the observer and the observed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative researcher cannot deny his or her own history, gender, race, biography, social class, or ethnicity when embarking upon the interpretation of others' lived experiences and likewise, the participant is influenced by these same factors. These factors shape language, sentiment, interaction, and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Carini (2001) discusses these realities of the qualitative researcher as a complex interpretation of "describing describing".

This researcher identified not only as the researcher, but also acknowledged the role of colleague working the same field and in the same general geographic region as the study participants. This professional role as an assistant superintendent serving in a public school district must be disclosed. The personal and professional experiences of this researcher impacted the comfort of participants and the participants' reaction to the interview questions. This researcher decided to study how changing student demographics impact suburban school leadership based on professional experiences as a suburban school principal and district-level administrator. According to Toma (2000), qualitative researchers should not hide their passion for the topic or people they study because the research is inherently personal. It is the duty of a qualitative researcher to constantly search for subjectivity within the topic and personal interactions with study participants.

Doctoral candidates are encouraged to select a research topic that is motivating and based on intrinsic values. Influence and subjectivity are impossible to eliminate (Seidman, 2006). Since qualitative research is grounded in interpretation, it is easy to deduce that objectivity is a challenge to capture. Vincent and Warren (2001) suggest that the voice of qualitative researchers remain dominant even when it is the study participants who are doing the talking. It is the personal experiences of this researcher as both a suburban school principal and district-level administrator that led to the selection of this topic and that aided in the ability to gain a deep understanding of the factors that impact suburban school leadership practices.

There were benefits to the commonality of the professional experiences of this researcher and those of the study participants. The professional backgrounds of the study participants and the researcher were similar and therefore, the interview questions that were crafted captured more fully the lived experiences of suburban school principals and superintendents alike. However, this researcher needed to reflect on this bias so that it did not taint the data. Seidman (2006) suggests that it is important for the researcher to identify her or her interests and experiences with the subject under study and ensure this interest is not “infused with anger, bias, or prejudice” (p. 117). The need to reflect on bias so as to not jump to conclusions about the data before truly analyzing and reflecting upon it was omnipresent during each stage of the interview process and subsequent transcript analyses.

As a white, female district-office administrator with a strong belief in the responsibility of principals and superintendents to create learning communities within which all students are valued, feel a sense of true belonging, and are provided high

quality opportunities that will prepare them for college and career success regardless of race, gender, disability status, second language learning need, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, it was imperative for the researcher, during the data collection phase of this study, to let the data in without filtering it through her worldview. This perspective on the roles and responsibilities these administrators play in the lives of children could cloud or interfere with the ability of the researcher to clearly hear and understand the views and opinions of her study participants.

### **Conclusion**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). For this study of suburban school principals and superintendents, leading in districts experiencing significant increases in the numbers of students identified as African American or Hispanic, interviews and archival data reviews were the methods employed to collect data. To ensure these methods were effective, the qualitative researcher accepted interpretation as an important aspect of the process.

Through interactions between the observer and the observed, interpretation emerged and led to analysis, reflection, and conclusions. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) remind the qualitative researcher against the denial of his or her own personal history, social class, race, biography, gender, or ethnicity when engaging in the act of interpretation of study participants’ lived experiences. Likewise, the observed participants will be influenced by these factors as they shape interaction, sentiment, and language, which in turn impacts interpretation.

Success of a school district and its individual schools is dependent upon effective leadership (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004; Fullan, 2005). A qualitative study of the impact of changing student demographics on suburban school leadership will build upon current empirical research but add new information to the field by focusing on leadership in this particular context. Semi-structured interviews and archival document data will serve as the foundation of analysis. As more and more families identified as African American or Hispanic continue to move out of urban and into suburban areas, the need to understand the implications of these shifts on schools and the professionals who lead them becomes more imperative. The analysis of this data is explained and detailed in the chapter 4, Findings.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to discover and describe what suburban school principals working in increasingly diverse settings need in order to help their schools meet the needs of all students. Specifically, the research questions guiding this study were:

1. What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles?
2. What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully deliver on the promise of creating school environments within which all students succeed?
3. How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies and supporting principals in proactively supporting such racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized such groups of students?

The design of this study was qualitative and employed the data collection methods of semi-structured interviews and archival document analysis. Through an analysis of demographic change in the numbers of students who identify as either African American or Hispanic across the largest suburban districts in Wisconsin, four districts with the most significant increases in both demographic groups were identified for this study. “Suburban”, for the purposes of this study, was defined broadly considering the

dimensions of location, physical characteristics, transportation and commuting distance to a large city, recreation and activities afforded to residents, and socio-cultural components of residents' lived experiences (Gober & Behr, 1982; Harris & Larkham, 1996; Harris, 2010; and Johnson, 2006). Within each district, an elementary principal, middle school principal, high school principal and superintendent participated in the study for a total of sixteen study participants.

Individual interviews were the primary source of data for this study. Each participant was interviewed three times for a total of forty eight interviews. Participants were chosen based on the demographics of the school and/or district. Each participant was asked to share documents that represented leadership practices and the interaction between the superintendent and principals. Pseudonyms replaced all identifying information including: the participant's name, the school/district name, the location of the school/district, and other identifying information.

Each participant's work location was in a small, suburban area with a population of less than 100,000 people. Four superintendents participated in this study. Russell is a 57-year-old superintendent of a suburban school district of approximately 10,000 students. Tom is a 56-year-old superintendent of a suburban school district of approximately 14,000 students. Rick is a 48-year-old superintendent of a suburban school district of approximately 7500 students. Greg is a 59-year-old superintendent of a suburban school district of approximately 10,000 students. Four high school principals participated in this study. Jennifer is a 40-year-old high school principal of approximately 1400 students in a suburban school setting. Charles is a 37-year-old high school principal of approximately 1800 students in a suburban setting. Sam is a 34-year-old high school

principal of approximately 2100 students in a suburban setting. Chet is a 38-year-old high school principal of approximately 1600 students in a suburban setting. Four middle school principals participated in this study. Vince is a 55-year old middle school principal of approximately 900 students in a suburban setting. Matt is a 35-year old middle school principal of approximately 600 students in a suburban setting. Scott is a 45-year-old middle school principal of approximately 500 students in a suburban setting. Darius is a 46-year-old middle school principal of approximately 500 students in a suburban setting. Lastly, four elementary principals participated in this study. Tess is a 38-year-old elementary principal of approximately 325 students in a suburban setting. Janet is a 36-year-old elementary principal of approximately 350 students in a suburban setting. Nancy is 53-year-old elementary principal of approximately 350 students in a suburban setting. Finally, Stacy is a 37-year-old elementary principal of approximately 500 students in a suburban setting.

### **School District Profiles**

Each of the four school districts involved in this study were selected based upon the significance in the increases of students who identify as African American or Hispanic over the past five years. A brief profile of each district and research study participant includes pertinent contextual information related to demographic change, geography and structure. A summary of the changes in student demographics in each of the four districts is described in the following tables.

Table 31

*Student Demographic Change in Northtown*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	80.7%	12.5%	3.4%
2014	68.0%	20.1%	5.3%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

Table 32

*Student Demographic Change in Millerville*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	66.3%	11.8%	3.2%
2014	58.0%	18.0%	4.2%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

Table 33

*Student Demographic Change in Lakeside*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	87.5%	6.4%	2.3%
2014	77.6%	10.8%	5.3%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

Table 34

*Student Demographic Change in Stratton*

	% of students identified as White	% of students identified as Hispanic	% of students identified as African American
2005	79.5%	10.1%	6.1%
2014	56.1%	23.5%	11.1%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

### **Northtown School District**

Northtown School District is situated approximately twenty miles outside a large, metropolitan city in the Midwest. The district serves approximately 14,000 students in three large comprehensive high schools (9-12), one virtual secondary school for students in grades sixth through twelfth, four middle schools (6-8), and fourteen elementary schools (5K–5). The district also serves students who are ages three and four in an early learning center. This school provides instruction in both English and Spanish. Northtown has undergone significant changes in student demographics over the past ten years. According to the Wisconsin Information System for Education Data Dashboard (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014), during the 2006-07 school year, the district served 1264 students who identified as Hispanic and 240 students who identified as African American. These numbers have grown substantially over the past ten years and now the district serves 2675 students who identify as Hispanic and 642 students who identify as African American (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014). Four educational leaders from Northtown were selected for participation in this study.

#### **Tom.**

Tom has been the superintendent of Northtown for the past five years. Previous to coming to Northtown, he served in a variety of other educational leadership roles including Business Manager for two suburban districts in the Midwest. Tom became a superintendent to have a greater influence on student achievement and, he states, he was recruited because of his knowledge and experiences in the area of school finance.

**Jennifer.**

Jennifer has been the principal of one of Northtown's three high schools for four years. She previously served in the same school as an assistant principal for three years, and as a department chairperson in the district for three years. Like Tom, Jennifer states that she entered educational leadership to make a difference in the lives of students by transforming the system within which adults work and students learn. Jennifer's school has seen significant demographic shifts over the past ten years. Wisconsin Information System for Education (2014) data indicates the school served thirty-seven students who identify as Hispanic during the 2006-2007 school year as compared to 153 students during the 2013-2014 school year. Twenty-seven students who identify as African American attended Jennifer's school during the 2006-2007 school year as compared to fifty-six students who identify as African American during the 2013-2014 school year (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014).

**Vince.**

Serving Northtown as a middle school principal for the past six years, an assistant principal for ten years previous to his principalship and as a social studies teacher in the same school for fifteen years previous to his career in administration, Vince has seen many changes in his school over the past several years. Wisconsin Information System for Education (2014) data indicates an increase in both students who identify as Hispanic or African American in Vince's school over the past several years. In 2006-2007, the school served twenty-six students who identify as Hispanic and students who identify as African American, as compared to 226 students who identify as Hispanic and forty-four students who identify as African American in 2013-14.

**Stacy.**

Stacy is an elementary principal in Northtown who has served in her current position for the past five years. Stacy previously held positions in Northtown as a high school assistant principal, athletic director and middle school assistant principal, serving in the district in an administrative role for the past eight years. Stacy's school, like the others in Northtown, has experienced similar demographic changes. Wisconsin Information System for Education (2014) data indicate thirty-three students who identify as Hispanic and six students who identify African American were served as Stacy's school during the 2013-14 school year as compared to two students who identify as Hispanic and zero students who identify as African American in 2006-2007.

**Millerville School District**

Millerville is a city located approximately ninety miles from a large, urban center. Having all of the characteristics of a suburban area as described by Dunham-Jones and Williamson (2009), students in Millerville attend one of three large comprehensive high schools (9-12), three middle schools (6-8), or eleven elementary schools (5K-5). The district also contains charter school options at the elementary, middle and high school levels and an early learning center that houses all early childhood special education and pre-kindergarten services.

The district has seen swift and significant increases in the numbers of students who identify as either Hispanic or African-American. According to Wisconsin Information System for Education (2014) data, the district served 936 students who identify as Hispanic and 199 students who identify as African-American during the 2006-

2007 school year. During the 2013-14 school year, these numbers increased to 1766 and 450 respectively.

**Greg.**

Greg has been the superintendent of Millerville for thirteen years. He has worked his entire career in Millerville, first as a teacher, then assistant principal and principal, human resource director, and now as the district administrator. His career has spanned thirty five years in Millerville, affording him a unique opportunity to reflect on the district's successes and challenges over decades.

**Charles.**

Charles is the principal at one of Millerville's large comprehensive high schools. Charles has been principal for four years and an associate principal in the same school for three years. One thousand five hundred and five students currently attend Charles's school, 166 of these students identify as Hispanic and fifty-two of them identify as African American (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014). This is in sharp contrast to data that indicates the school served seventy-eight students who identified as Hispanic and thirty who identified as African American that year.

**Matt.**

Matt is a middle school principal in Millerville. He, like Greg, has worked in the district his entire career in education, first as a Title 1 reading teacher, then as an eighth grade science teacher, then assistant principal and principal. Matt has the unique privilege of serving as the principal of the school where he himself attended as a student. His life-long experiences in Millerville inform his current leadership practices and provide a personal and deep connection to his work and that of the district as a whole.

The number of students who identify as Hispanic or African American has increased over the past several years. The school currently serves 111 who identify as Hispanic and forty-three students who identify as African American (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014). This contrasts sharply with 2006-2007 data that indicates the school served sixty-two students who identified as Hispanic and four students who identified as African American that school year.

**Nancy.**

Nancy's experiences in Millerville are exceptionally unique and afford her rare insights into the district's history and current complexities. Nancy began her career in Millerville as an elementary teacher in the school she now leads. She took her first administrative position outside of the district, but then returned to Millerville to assume the principalship at her current school. She worked away from Millerville for seven years and has returned to a district that, as she describes, has undergone significant cultural and demographic changes that she is now working to understand, embrace, and lead.

Nancy's school itself has undergone changes in student demographics. During the 2006-2007 school year, her school served fifteen students who identified as Hispanic and zero students who identified as African American (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014). During the 2013-14 school year, her school welcomed fifty-three students who identified as Hispanic and twenty-eight students who identified as African American.

**Lakeside School District**

Lakeside School District serves approximately 7500 students in one large comprehensive high school (9-12), three middle schools (6-8) and nine elementary

schools (4k-5). The district also has two charter schools, one at the elementary and one at the middle school levels, focused on STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) education. Lakeside is characterized by several suburban dimensions detailed in the research, including sociological and lifestyle attributes (Nicolaidis & Weise, 2006). The district currently serves 801 students who identify as Hispanic and 385 who identify as African American (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014). During the 2006-07 school year, the district served 253 and 113 in these two demographic categories respectively, indicating a steady increase.

**Rick.**

Rick is the superintendent in Lakeside and has held that position for the past eight years. Previous to becoming a district administrator, Rick held positions as assistant principal and principal in the same district. Like other research participants involved in this study, Rick's long tenure in one district affords him the opportunity for rich reflection and meaningful perspective on the current state of district affairs.

**Sam.**

Lakeside has only one large comprehensive high school and Sam serves in the role of principal. Sam served previously as assistant principal in the same school and as a teacher there as well. The school currently serves approximately 2000 students and is one of the largest schools in the state. During the 2013-2014 school year, 171 students who identified as Hispanic and seventy-five students who identified as African American attend the school (WISE, 2014). These numbers were much smaller during the 2006-2007 school year when only ninety-four students who identified as Hispanic and forty-eight students who identified as African American attended Sam's school.

**Scott.**

Scott has been an administrator at one Lakeside's three middle schools for the past fourteen years, first as an assistant principal for five years and then as the principal for the past nine. His background as a special education teacher drew him to the field of educational administration as he always felt compelled to "cheer for the underdog" and help those who need it most. Like the other schools in Lakeside, Scott's has undergone changes in its student demographic composition. In 2006-2007, his school served fifteen students who identified as Hispanic and 6 who identified as African American (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014). During 2013-2014, the school welcomed forty-one students who identified as Hispanic and nineteen who identified as African American.

**Janet.**

Janet began her career in education as a high school math teacher before becoming an assistant principal at Lakeside High School. She served in that role for five years before assuming the principalship at the elementary level, where she has been for the past four years. Janet's school served eight-eight students who identified as Hispanic and fifty-two students who identified as African American during the 2013-2014 school year (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014) as compared to twenty-one students who identified as Hispanic and forty who identified as African American during the 2006-2007 school year.

**Stratton School District**

Stratton School District serves 9725 students in two large comprehensive high schools (9-12), four middle schools (6-8), and eleven elementary schools (4K-5). The

district is located in a city that is adjacent to a large, urban metropolitan area.

The district has seen significant increases, over the past several years, in the numbers of students who identify as either Hispanic or African American. During 2013-14, the district served 2183 students who identified as Hispanic and 1048 students who identified as African American (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014). This data is quite different than the same information collected during the 2006-2007 school year which indicated the district enrolled 482 students who identified as Hispanic and 433 students who identified as African American.

**Russell.**

Russell is the superintendent of Stratton School District. He has a long tenure in the district where he has served as a teacher, curriculum coordinator, assistant principal, principal, and district administrator. Russell also graduated from the district and has been a life-long resident of Stratton. His lived-experiences as a resident, student, teacher and administrator are important in understanding the current context within which he is leading his district through change and challenge.

**Chet.**

Chet is the principal of one of the two Stratton high schools. He has served in this role for the five years. Chet has only held this position in Stratton and had other teaching and administrative experiences in other districts. Chet grew up in a rural community far removed from suburbia or urban settings but chose to work in these contexts when he moved from teaching into administration. Chet's school has seen significant shifts in the demographic composition of the student body. During the 2013-2014 school year, the school served 444 students who identified as Hispanic as compared to 182 students in this

category in 2006-2007. Similarly, the school has seen increases in the number of students who identify as African American from 116 in 2006-2007 to 271 in 2013-2014. (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014).

**Darius.**

Darius leads one of Stratton's four middle schools. He has a long tenure as a school-level administrator, working in a variety of positions in urban or suburban settings at both the middle and high school levels for the past twelve years. He has been the lead principal in his current placement for the past four years. The number of students who identified as Hispanic increased in Darius's school over the past eight years from sixty-one to 110 and the number of students who identified as African American increased from sixteen to thirty-four over the same time period (Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014).

**Tess.**

Tess is an elementary principal in Stratton and has been in her current position for two years. She previously worked in Stratton as a middle school associate principal. Tess's school is one of the most diverse in the district. Of the school's 322 students, 46% are white, resulting in a "minority/majority" context. This has not always been the case at the school. During the 2006-2007 school year, the school welcomed sixty-one students who identified as Hispanic and sixteen students who identified as African American. During the 2013-2014 school year, 110 students who identified as Hispanic and thirty-four students who identified as African American attended the school.

The following chart references information about all study participants.

Table 35

*Participant Description*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Age/Yrs In Position</b>	<b>Current Demographics of School/District</b>
Tom	M	Caucasian	Superintendent	56/6	19.6% Hispanic 4.7% African American
Greg	M	Caucasian	Superintendent	59/13	17.2% Hispanic; 4.4% African American
Rick	M	Caucasian	Superintendent	48/8	10.7% Hispanic; 5.2% African American
Russell	M	Caucasian	Superintendent	57/10	23.5% Hispanic; 10.6% African American
Jennifer	F	Caucasian	High School Principal	40/4	13.6% Hispanic; 5.0% African American
Charles	M	Caucasian	High School Principal	37/4	11% Hispanic; 3.5% African American
Sam	M	Caucasian	High School Principal	34/2	8.4% Hispanic; 3.7% African American
Chet	M	Caucasian	High School Principal	38/5	32% Hispanic; 19.5% African American
Vince	M	Caucasian	Middle School Principal	55/6	29.6% Hispanic; 5.8% African American
Matt	M	Caucasian	Middle School Principal	35/5	18.9% Hispanic; 7.3% African American
Scott	M	Caucasian	Middle School Principal	45/9	8.2% Hispanic; 3.8% African American
Darius	M	African American	Middle School Principal	46/4	39.3% Hispanic; 19.2% African American
Stacy	F	Caucasian	Elementary Principal	37/3	11% Hispanic; 2.0% African American
Nancy	F	Caucasian	Elementary Principal	53/10	15.1% Hispanic; 8.0% African American
Janet	F	Caucasian	Elementary Principal	36/4	25.1% Hispanic; 14.8% African American
Tess	F	Caucasian	Elementary Principal	38/2	34.2% Hispanic; 10.6% African American

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

### **Participant Interviews and Artifact Description**

Participants provided different artifacts as representations of leadership practices and the superintendent-principal interaction and communication. These artifacts served as

a secondary source of data. Documents included meeting e-mail correspondence, meeting agendas, school improvement plans, newsletters, blogs, and literature for professional development. The following chart references the documents that were provided by the study participants.

Table 36

*Archival Document Resources*

<b>Type of Document</b>	<b>Provided by Superintendent</b>	<b>Provided by Principal</b>
Email Correspondence	8	0
Meeting Agendas	4	12
School/District Improvement Plans	3	12
Newsletters	8	24
Blogs	10	3
Literature	0	7
Websites	4	12

*Note.* Data were collected over four months, from June 2014 to September 2014.

**Leadership Context**

When analyzing the participant interviews and related artifacts, it is important to fully describe the leadership context within which these school and district leaders are doing their work. As district-level or school-level administrators, they are all facing unprecedented accountability mandates and measures from the state government. The state of Wisconsin has, within the last three four years, radically changed the laws and regulations governing collective bargaining for school districts, developed and launched a state-wide teacher and principal evaluation system, replaced the statewide assessment system, and adopted the Common Core State Standards as the statewide framework guiding curriculum, instruction, and assessment efforts in the areas of literacy and

mathematics. With each of these significant state-level changes has come associated implementation and accountability mandates.

The most public and perhaps significant accountability measures have been the annual issuance of district and school-specific report cards that rate and rank schools and districts based on results in the areas of student achievement, student growth, closing achievement gaps, and on-track readiness for post-secondary success. The results then place districts in one of five categories: fails to meet expectations, minimally meets expectations, meets expectations, exceeds expectations, and significantly exceed expectations. The results of the state-issued report cards are made public and transparent bringing accountability for performance for schools and districts into discussions held in the board room to the kitchen table.

The burden of these state-level initiatives and mandates weigh heavily on the minds and hearts of superintendents and principals alike. Tom, the superintendent of Northtown School District offered,

There is just so much coming at us from the state right now. All of our heads are spinning. Sometimes I never leave my office during the day because I am fielding phone calls or e-mails from angry or frustrated parents or teachers or principals. I talked to a group of teachers last week and they were really struggling and telling me about the new evaluation system and how much time it takes for them to document everything and collect evidence, and complete all of the forms. It's just too much. I feel bad because I can't control that. Charles, a principal in Millerville, identified the number of competing priorities as a primary concern of his, I think the most challenging right now is...that we lack focus at times due to

the overwhelming number of initiatives and things we are supposed to be doing all at one time.

These external pressures have a direct impact on the leadership activities of principals and district-level administrators, some of which take them away from instructional leadership pursuits. One of Stratton's principals, Tess, conveyed the pressure she feels with the accountability related to initiatives competing with her need and desire to serve students and families,

I have a lot on my plate every day. I have a huge report I am supposed to complete by the end of the day today related to something the district is asking me to do that I'm not going to get to. It bothers me. Today I called Social Services twice. We had a kid whose father was shot. I have kids who don't have money for lunch so I chose to have them eat with me. I bring in food for them. I feel stressed when I'm not getting that stuff done because I am doing kid stuff. We have third grade reading scores here that were not good this year. So the pressure that comes with that adds to the stress. I did not get hired to have a quarter of my kids in third grade read. My job is to make sure they are all proficient in reading.

Vince, a Northtown principal, stated,

There is too much red tape with all of the state initiatives. I am constantly jumping over hurdles that are placed in front of me, trying to manage time, even personal time because everybody wants a piece of your time.

In their efforts to support and guide the work of classroom teachers, principals and superintendents are feeling the ill-effects of these accountability mandates on the overall climate and culture of their learning communities. There is a need to not only

educate and support teachers, but other stakeholder groups that principals interact with on the job. Jenny describes her current leadership context in Northtown.

I'd like to think that I have done a good job of preparing our teachers for increased accountability through the teacher evaluation system in a way that makes them feel knowledgeable, supported and have a clear vision of how to reach their goals. What I am feeling, is an increased pressure as principal with report card scores, standardized testing scores, that my bosses and the state are hyper-focused on and I don't feel that same commitment or buy-in around the testing culture from our parents or students. This worries me and so I think we have to talk critically about coming up with an action plan that educates our parents and students about the importance of this for them and for our school.

State-level mandates have informed and influenced local decisions and actions regarding accountability for results creating a variety of different processes and structures developed at the local level to ensure adherence to regulations. Superintendents and principals alike have faced a significant learning curve, needing to assimilate vital and new information at a rapid pace, making sense of it for themselves in order to lead others through these significant changes in policy and practice. The significance of new learning for these leaders has left some reeling and uncertain.

Vince, a principal from Northtown, reflected,

I just completed my 35<sup>th</sup> year in education and I feel like a new teacher. There is so much new learning for me. It's hard because I want to know this stuff so I can help my teachers feel comfortable and capable, but often times I feel like I'm winging it when I'm with them. It's not a great feeling.

These district administrators and building leaders are searching for the knowledge, skills and dispositions that will adequately equip them to lead their learning communities through unprecedented change marked by serious accountability for academic achievement results for all learners. The educational leaders involved in this research study face additional pressures and challenges as they are not only expected to implement new accountability systems and measures but also lead their districts through swift and significant shifts in student demographics.

### **What Principals Need in Order to Serve All Students**

The primary research question for this study was, “What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles?” To begin to answer this question, an analysis of the leadership dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary to competently and confidently serve all students must be completed.

### **Leadership Dispositions**

Principals working in diverse school contexts must come to the work with a positive orientation towards leading for all students, regardless of ability or disability, race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual-orientation, or language-learning status. A disposition is a person’s inherent quality of mind and character and in an educational leadership position in a suburban school district experiencing increases in the numbers of students identifying in different racial groups, the school principal’s leadership disposition has a direct impact on the climate and culture of the learning community and all stakeholders within it.

All four districts involved in this study have established mission statements and in some cases, further developed vision and belief statements that are meant to guide and ground the work of the system and the beliefs of its leaders. In Northtown, the mission of the district is, “to develop in our students the capacity and skills to be community, college and career ready.” This is followed by a vision statement that reads, “To be a 21st century learning organization dedicated to equity, innovation, human excellence and collaboration.” The district further defines its beliefs by identifying a set of values that are intended to guide the work of the district. These include innovation, rigor, teamwork, communication, high expectations for all, professionalism, shared responsibility, and personalized learning.

In Lakeside, the district mission states, “The mission of [The District], in partnership with family and community, is to promote high achievement and foster continuous growth of the whole child, so that each becomes a creative, contributing citizen in a culturally diverse society, by providing personalized learning opportunities in a safe, nurturing environment.”

This mission is further supported by series of belief statements, eleven in total.

1. Each person has intrinsic value and worth and is a unique individual with different needs and abilities.
2. Parents are a child’s first and most important teacher.
3. High expectations promote academic achievement.
4. Education is a lifelong learning process involving the individual, family, school, and community acknowledging that people need to acquire skills to participate in global relationships.

5. Realize that quality of life is affected by sound emotional, mental and physical health and self-esteem, additionally recognizing that individuals are most productive in a safe, caring, and nurturing environment.
6. Families, schools, and communities empower people to become responsible and accountable citizens.
7. Schools are accountable to the community.
8. The school and community should work collaboratively in providing support regarding all avenues of learning realizing that they share the responsibility for educating their students/citizens.
9. Schools recognize the need for the value of arts and diversity within the classroom, the community, and the world.
10. People can learn the academic, behavioral, and social skills necessary for personal growth. Creativity and imagination should be recognized, respected and nurtured.
11. Integration of technology at all levels of learning allows for further enhancement of creative and organizational skills that nurture the development of technology literate individuals.

Leaders in Stratton communicate their mission, vision, and beliefs on their webpage. Their mission, “to develop inquiry-driven, independent learners through instruction that is personalized and engaging, with a focus on college/career readiness and 21<sup>st</sup> century skill development”, is followed by a vision statement that reads, “[The District] in partnership with family and community, will foster personal excellence and

life-long learning for students.” The district also communicates a series of “belief statements”, ten in total that cover academic, social/emotional, and engagement ideals.

1. All students must achieve personal and academic success to reach their full potential.
2. Learning occurs in different ways and at different rates; therefore, instruction is personalized, relevant, rigorous and data-driven.
3. Learning is the shared responsibility of students, staff, family, and business/community partners.
4. Learning must occur in a safe and secure environment.
5. We must respect, nurture and celebrate diversity to empower all students to succeed.
6. Social/emotional development emphasizing strong, positive relationships and character development at all times are imperative in setting the stage for optimum student learning.
7. Core and elective offerings, fitness and physical development, fine and allied arts offerings, and career and college readiness are all essential components in creating life-long learners and responsible citizens.
8. We must ensure attainment of college and career readiness skills, employability skills, and the ability to solve problems and think critically.
9. Students must acquire information, communication, and technology skills and have 24/7 access to the digital, dynamic, global information essential in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

10. On-going professional development and collaboration by all stakeholders are essential components of success.

Lastly, Millerville School District's mission statements reads, "The mission of [The District] is to equip all students with a foundation of knowledge and skills through quality instruction, opportunities, and a positive learning environment, in an active partnership with family and community, reinforcing values which will inspire them to access the opportunities of this society, strive for excellence in their endeavors and contribute as responsible citizens"

The words expressed in this collection of mission, vision, and belief statements express to each respective learning community the ideals of the organization and the dispositions expected to be upheld by stakeholders. The school leaders involved in this study take their jobs very seriously and express a sincere and heartfelt commitment to uphold these ideals. They recognize what specific dispositions they need to bring to work with them every day in order to uphold the expectations of their respective districts. These sentiments are best described using growth mind-set, service orientation, and grit.

#### **Growth mind-set.**

A "growth mind-set" is defined by Dweck (2006) as, "...an understanding that talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence." A growth mind-set can be applied to the work of leadership and leaders in schools who are constantly faced with new initiatives, new challenges, new learning, and an ever-changing student clientele. Not only do principals need to exhibit a growth-mindset, but they need to help develop the same in their teaching staff and students. Eight of twelve principals involved in this study discussed the need to continuously grown and learn on

the job in order to work competently and effectively create conditions within which all students thrive and succeed. Vince described how recent changes in his school's student clientele has informed the professional development he is organizing for his teaching staff and how this new learning is helping people understand and own the need to change instructional practices so as to be more responsive to student needs.

Over the past six or seven years we have seen real changes in the students we serve here. When I first started in this building, we were nearly 98% white, now, the white students are almost the minority. We realized fairly quickly that more needed to be done and the teachers started to realize that what they were doing wasn't working anymore. The veteran teachers who had been through the shift realized that I can't do things the same way or necessarily treat kids the same way or deal with kids the same way than I have in the past. So it took a little while, but they did recognize that and so therefore building off of that is when we started to look at professional development. So when the teachers went through some of the modules we developed for working with students with second language learning needs, the lights came on and they started to realize that wow these are some of my students and I can't teach the same and can't have necessarily the same strategies that I always used. I need to adjust. I need to adjust my leadership strategies, too. I have to make sure our teachers aren't doing the same old thing every year, every semester, regardless of the students they are working with. It's hard. It's time consuming, but I have to keep learning.

Sam commented on how his teachers' personal backgrounds have shaped their beliefs and instructional practices, making it very difficult for some to learn new methods that are more effective with the students they currently serve in his school.

I would say we have a lot of people that come from small towns who are very middle class that go on to the local state school, really like what they are doing, but I don't think they get an effective education. I don't think that they really open their minds and become more worldly. They change very little, go right back home and try to keep doing those same things. In doing so, what happens is, kind of what we are discussing, we see less experience. I have people who are teaching here that have never left a square 3-4 mile radius in their life. To me getting back to the conversation we are talking about, is when our students are coming from so many different places, I think that causes some friction and some lack of really understanding and openness to things. I just feel that when people are not having those experiences again, they come back teaching in a classroom where a student comes in from somewhere that is very different from them and I think they really struggle, so they out of insecurities, they may do things that are more close-minded reactions versus open minded reactions.

An analysis of archival data reinforces this focus on growth mindset thinking. Painted in the vestibule of the high school in Northtown is a large mural that reads, "Your success is dependent upon the effort you put into it." Jenny, in her weekly blog to staff, wrote about the power and potential of the new teacher evaluation system.

Although, we do not give out scores because of the formative and growth mindset of our visits, we still would like to report out a general pattern of practice.

This allows each of us to be reflective about our practices, it allows us to plan purposeful professional development and just in time support for each of you and hopefully most importantly it allows each of you, as professionals, to engage with your colleagues to help you build stronger practices and feel supported – together.

Darius and Chet, secondary school leaders from Stratton, discussed their efforts to develop a growth mindset in students. Darius described the importance of his work “to give kids a sense of belonging and a sense of worth that no matter where you come from, you can do it if you work hard enough.” Chet discussed a growingly diverse student clientele and academic achievement data going in the wrong direction in his school. He offered, “Some of our students just don’t believe they can do it, that they can take an Advanced Placement class, or do well on the ACT exam, or apply to this college or that university. We spend a lot of time helping them see, hey, if I try hard, if I work hard, if I put myself out there, I can achieve anything I want to achieve.”

**Service orientation.**

“Every Student, Every Day, Everyone, Every Way”, is written in the hallway of Lakeside High School. The work of school leaders is grounded in service to others – to students, their families, and their teaching and support staffs. The principals involved in this study working in increasingly diverse suburban contexts communicate a service-orientation disposition in their work and how it helps them gain satisfaction in their positions. Six of twelve principals discussed the important of service to others in the work they are doing in their districts. Sam, a high school principal from Lakeside, describes his attitudes of service to others.

I feel like growing up in Wisconsin and my experiences, I learned what worked for me as a middle class white kid in a small town was do your homework, keep your grades up so you can play football on Friday night, or it was you need to do this so you can get into college. My culture and group of friends when I get back to my high school friends. We all were very middle class. One mom was a teacher and the other dad worked in the factory and things like that. We all had very similar backgrounds. That was my experience, but what I learned very quickly was that that is not the experience of the majority of people. So having that presence of mind, I thought how can I serve others that don't have that keep your grades up so you can go out for sports. Keep your grades up so you get into a good college. How can I serve those families because to be honest educating me looking back wasn't in my opinion isn't really that difficult because it was easy to push those right buttons? But I really like the challenge of it takes more than just saying keep your grades up. I like the challenge of saying this is someone that has more things going against them. How can what I say and what I do help them do better for themselves and also potentially generationally help them become just more sustainable in their own lives in the higher level of happiness but success in their lives. I guess that is my mission knowing what I know, how can I serve people who didn't have things as well as I did.

Tess, in her elementary principal role in Stratton, relies upon her drive to serve students and their families to model for the staff in her building. She has worked in a few urban districts in her career and feels comfortable leading in diverse contexts. "I feel like my mission is showing people how to do that right, how to serve a diverse student

population well. I need to make sure we value, and that in our city, we value kids just in general.” She describes several leadership actions she employs in her setting that exemplify service, including making home visits, buying lunches for students in need, and picking up parents for parent/teacher conferences. She explained, “I do what I need to do to help anyone that needs it.”

Jenny described a need to constantly assess and organize the resources in her building and that being asked to “cut corners” through budget reduction processes interferes with her ability to serve all students. She stated, “We need to share a mission to serve all students. Not having the resources necessary to do this well really bothers me. So I find myself advocating for what I think my building needs all the time with my bosses.”

### **Grit.**

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, grit is defined as a firmness of character; an indomitable spirit. Others further define it as courage, resilience, conscientiousness, and endurance (Galla & Duckworth, *in press*). Just as was discussed with the leadership disposition of growth mindset thinking is true of grit – it is necessary for school leaders, teachers, and students alike to employ grit in their work. Five of the twelve participants responded to the questions posed through this study with grit at the forefront. All three principals from Stratton spoke eloquently about doing whatever it takes for students in their schools to be successful, often needing to advocate relentlessly to their district office supervisors. Darius explained that he frequently acts and makes decisions that he believes are in the best interest of students, even when he has not been given permission to do so. “I do things and then ask forgiveness later. I know my

students, their families, I know what they need.” Tess described the intensity of her work in Stratton and how the demands of the job take a toll on her emotionally. She talked about the need for her to dig deeply, sometimes on a daily basis, to help all of the students in her care that need her time and attention. Chet talked about how he looks for grit in teaching candidates when he enters into any hiring process at his school.

You are going to get discouraged working in this school. You are going to pour your heart and soul into what we do here. Some kids respond right away, some don't, but we have to keep trying every day to reach every single one. I have people apply to work here because they think, “Hey, this is a nice suburb, I've been teaching in an urban setting, teaching here is going to be a piece of cake.” They quickly find out its not easy at all. I hire at least twenty teachers every single year. We have had huge turnover in the past five years. Lots of retirements, and lately, we've been able to exit people who just don't belong in front of our students.

Jenny, from Northtown, spoke to the importance of grit in her leadership in her building.

I lay awake at night thinking about what we do here at school all the time. Our data isn't where I want it to be. We have too many students coming to our school from other districts and they almost can't read. When we get them we know we have almost four years of ground to make up to get them up to speed so they can be successful in their classes. I'm not sure how we can make up that growth in a four-year time frame with some of the reading levels are coming in with. But we have to figure it out, so we keep thinking, reading, talking, looking

to other schools who are doing it better than we are. Whatever it takes.

Artifact evidence provided by the principals involved in this study, when analyzed for references to growth mind-set, service-orientation, and grit, reveal only a few connections to the interview data. There were messages to teachers communicated through blog entries or e-mail messages about the new teacher evaluation system and individual work with students that mentioned the value of effort, risk-taking, trial and error learning, and perseverance. One principal blogged about the importance of honoring effort in the classroom so as to help students learn that outcomes are a direct result of the work put into the task.

One principal decided to devote a major portion of professional development time for teachers before the start of the school year to understanding and fostering a growth-mindset across his building. He talked about recent conversations with teachers that had indicated to him that many of teachers were coming to work every day with closed-mindset thinking about themselves and about the students they serve. He recounted one powerful conversation he had with a veteran staff member who had been struggling in her classroom for the past few years. She had shared with him that she felt like a new teacher because the students and families she was being asked to serve were so very different than the students and families she had worked with in the past at the school. This particular interaction with a teacher was all the reason the principal needed to prioritize growth-mindset thinking in his work. He began with a shared book study experience with his leadership team at his school and then invited others to do the same with him over the summer months. Since then, in every weekly staff bulletin he mentions something about the importance of growth-mindset thinking in their collective work. A recent staff

bulletin included a list of “significant daily do’s” for educational professionals that included actions like, “Be the hardest worker in our school today”, and “Talk to your students about a recent mistake you made and what you learned from it.” This principal, “If we are to expect students to continuously grow, learn, and change, we, too, must do the same with the new learning we must do in order to better meet the needs of kids.”

### **Leadership Knowledge**

Principals serve as the primary change agents in a school. They are expected to implement district initiatives, adhere to state mandates and district policies, supervise and evaluate staff, develop relationships with a variety of stakeholder groups, and solve the daily problems that are inherent in the position. All of this work is done on behalf of students and helping each and every child succeed.

The principals involved in this study identify several pieces of leadership knowledge necessary to do this work competently and confidently. In this context, leadership knowledge is the theoretical or practical understanding of the components of educational leadership. In the “why, what, and how” sequence of change, knowledge is the “what”. From understanding change management, to the particulars involved in the state-imposed teacher evaluation system, to data literacy, principals are expected to come equipped to the job with a wide array of leadership knowledge. As the study participants reflected on the opportunity of leading others through student demographic changes, these knowledge competencies were identified as critical to the success of their respective schools.

**Change management.**

Understanding the change process and how to both help themselves and those they serve navigate it successfully has become fundamental in the work of school and district leaders working in educational settings today. This is particularly true of suburban educational leaders working in contexts experiencing change on a variety of levels. Charles, a school leader in Millerville, commented that due to the many changes currently being faced by educators in his district, he believes his district “lacks focus at times because of the overwhelming number of initiatives and things we are supposed to be doing all at one time.” Matt, a principal in the same district, stated that he has been most frustrated by a pervasive resistance to change in his school.

I would say with all of the state and federal mandates coming down, trying to work on those, trying to move forward, and trying to keep the masses understanding the importance and reason for the changes we are trying to make is the biggest hurdle for me. I enjoy and seek change. I kind of have a mantra, “Let’s just give this a try and if it doesn’t work or is not working well, we’ll change it.” Unfortunately, many of the teachers I work with don’t share that same mantra.

Sam, from Lakeside School District, concurs with the leaders from Millerville and expressed similar issues in helping navigate change in his setting.

My biggest frustrations come more from adults who refuse to change, even when the information, the data we are showing them clearly identifies a need to do something differently. We aren’t serving all students well. Every data point we look at shows us this. We try to put action plans in place and yet people still refuse to do anything differently. It’s beyond frustrating.

Jennifer from Northtown School District explained how change management is the topic that dominates the vast majority of her administrative team meetings with her assistant principals.

We are overwhelmed by it...by change. It's literally all we talk about. What needs to change, how we are going to change, who's with us, who's against us, who's resistive, who can lead change besides us, how are we managing all of the change. It's like drinking from a fire hose. We talk to our teachers every single day about how our students have changed, how our instruction and approach to kids needs to change. This is really hard for folks who have been teaching here for like, thirty years of more. Thirty years ago, all of our students were white. Now, most of our students aren't white. But some teachers are pulling out lesson plans and classroom management strategies that are literally thirty years old. Guess what, they don't work anymore. They get frustrated, we get frustrated, the kids are beyond frustrated.

Overall, nine of twelve building principals involved in this study discussed the importance of change management in their leadership. Interestingly, when the four superintendents involved in this study were asked to identify the specific ways they see their building leaders struggle, none of the four identified change management in their responses.

When analyzing artifacts from these building leaders, change management pervades the vast majority of evidence submitted for this study. Of all newsletters, blog entries, school improvement plans, and meeting agendas provided by principals, 100% of artifacts submitted directly addressed change management. School improvement plans

used in all four districts require change management information and strategies, from the development of specific school goals to the action plans that delineate the path to reaching those goals. For example, school leaders in Stratton School District are provided a comprehensive and scripted school improvement template that leads principals through the continuous improvement process. Principals in Northtown, on the other hand, are given the expectation to create a school improvement plan, but are not given a district-issued template. Instead, they are expected to create a process and system that works best for local conditions. The school improvement plans provided by Northtown administrators included specific school goals and associated action plans that outline the specific steps needed to impact change. In Lakeside, the district does not expect school improvement planning to occur in a formal way, but instead asks each principal to identify a Student Learning Objective (SLO) as a way to use data to inform leadership and change management. The principals in Lakeside operate individually and in isolation in their efforts to manage change and are given little to no district-level guidance in these pursuits. Nancy, an elementary principal in Millerville, reported that she has been expected to find the best way to develop and implement school goals. “I used the SMART goal process that I learned at a workshop a few years ago. I think it was effective, so I still use it.” Lastly, in Millerville, school leaders are asked to connect to the district’s long-range plan that outlines a four overarching goals in the areas of student achievement, student behavior, resource allocation, and community engagement. Regardless of the strategy for school improvement planning employed by these districts, all schools are required to manage and lead change.

Staff newsletters and blog posts penned by these principals are full of references to change. Jennifer, in a summer blog post, wrote about change and the importance of understanding it as part of their collective to achieve excellence in her school.

The five levers of change they discuss are: structure, sample, standards, strategy and self. Maintaining the status quo in any of these areas, still takes a certain amount of conscious preparation and planning on the part of the school leader. Transactional change is often visible and takes a significant amount of planning, but at the end of the day...if we have engaged in transactional change efforts, but student's do not have significantly different learning experiences/results, we have to ask ourselves if anything has really changed?

Analyzing the minutes from a recent leadership team meeting in Millerville, five different change initiatives were detailed and discussed. These matters comprised more than 80% of the ninety-minute meeting. Vince, a Northtown middle school principal summarized it best by stating, "The pace of change in my life right now is dizzying."

### **Supervision and evaluation.**

A major job responsibility of principals involved in this study is the administration of the state's new teacher evaluation system. This comprehensive framework replaces supervision and evaluation systems that were largely viewed as ineffective and lacking rigor and relevance to both evaluator and teacher alike. With this new evaluation system has come a significant amount of professional learning, including a comprehensive and time-consuming professional development component involving principals and teachers in every district in the state.

The evaluation model clearly defines the specific components of effective teaching and has opened the door to rich and meaningful discussions between classroom teachers and their immediate supervisors about planning and preparation, classroom management, instruction, and professionalism. It has forced, however, principals to devote the vast majority of their time on supervision and evaluation pursuits, requiring expert delegation, prioritization, and time management skills. To adequately administer the state teacher evaluation system, principals must spend approximately 80% of the school day in these activities. Janet, an elementary school principal in Lakeside discussed the positive and negative pressures placed on her due to the new teacher evaluation system.

For the first time, I feel like the evaluation tool we are using is good. I think it gives teachers meaningful information they can actually use to improve what they are doing for kids in our classrooms. This is great. It's really time-consuming though. It's a lot of new learning for me...for my teachers, too. Don't get me wrong, I like the system. I had to give some teachers some difficult feedback about their work last year. Everyone wants to do a good job here. But some teachers haven't evolved. They aren't using best practices in their classrooms. I have to address those issues, which sometimes is easy and sometimes not. It really depends on how open the teacher is to feedback. The tool we are using does help me, though. It depersonalizes the information I have to give. We refer to the rubric and how it describes what high quality instruction looks like so it's not just like me giving my personal opinion.

Stacy, a leader in Northtown, agreed with Janet's comments. She too, sees the value in being present in classrooms and inspecting instruction and classroom management and also views the evaluation system as a "way-in" to difficult conversations about sensitive issues in her school.

Just the other day I was in a classroom doing an observation for a teacher evaluation and noticed...it wasn't the first time I have seen this, but noticed two of our students who are African American together, in the back of the room, working with a teaching assistant. Because I was in the classroom for a long period of time I was able to see how long these kiddos were working all by themselves, really isolated from other students, during reading. Because I was in there, I was able to have a follow up discussion with the teacher, to find out why that was happening.

Artifacts collected from school principals further reveal a uniform focus on teacher evaluation. All meeting agendas and school improvement plans made specific mention to this work in all four districts involved in this study. Some leaders are being more aggressive in their approach to teacher evaluation, using this new accountability system to their advantage in their work. For example, Jennifer, the high school principal from Northtown, includes specific school-wide evaluation data in her weekly blog posts. In an effort to narrowly focus the school's energies on effective instructional strategies, she selects specific classroom observation data to highlight every week. She recently highlighted the number of classrooms she visited during the week within which she observed a proficient level of classroom management practices. The following week she focused on communication with students and use of questioning techniques. Each of

these components of the new teacher evaluation system has allowed her to strategically select opportunities for school-wide focus and improvement.

All four school districts, due to specific teacher evaluation system requirements, are working on the setting of Student Learning Objectives, or SLOs. Every teacher is expected to use classroom data to inform the development of an SLO. These goals are then tracked throughout the year and result in an evaluation rating in spring. All twelve principals involved in this study express hope and promise when talking about SLOs as they believe they will be a high-leverage strategy in helping teachers truly meet the needs of all students. Chet, a high school principal in Stratton shared, “If we get really good at writing SLOs, using data, and really focusing on students who need the most assistance, I think we can help our teachers change their instruction. That’s the goal.”

#### **Data literacy.**

In order to lead and manage change and impact student achievement outcomes for all students, principals need to know and understand their students and use a variety of data to inform decision making in their schools. Janet stated, “We have more data than we know what to do with. Sometimes I’m not even sure what I’m looking at.” As principals are expected to develop and administer school improvement plans and a new teacher evaluation system, they must develop competency in data literacy. Some principals involved in this study seemed to have a solid grasp on data in their setting, easily conversing about achievement, behavior, and demographic specifics. When asked to describe his student clientele, Chet responded, “We are extremely diverse. We are just under 50% white, 30% Hispanic, 20% African American. Our socioeconomic data is about 70% free and reduced price lunch. Our special education population is close to 18-

20%.” Other school leaders, when first approached about participating in this study seemed less versed in their school data. One leader said, when asked to describe the students he serves, “I wasn’t really surprised our district was contacted about this study. I’ve kind of thought for a while that our students were changing. I guess I didn’t realize how much until you showed me our data.”

Stacy and Scott recognized a need to learn how to use data more effectively and efficiently. Stacy offered that she needs time to truly learn about her achievement data and how to leverage it for change. Scott said he knows that his school could be doing better academically, but that his focus has been primarily on improving student behavior, so he has let a focus on academics take a back seat in recent years.

Again, archival data and artifact reviews show the specific mention of data in all school improvement plans, but little specific mention of data, albeit academic, behavioral, or demographic, staff newsletters, blog posts, meeting agendas/minutes, or websites. Jennifer, the high school principal from Northtown, is the only leader of the twelve involved in this study, who included specific data information on the school website, in all blog posts, and in staff newsletters.

### **Leadership Skills**

If knowledge is the “what” of leadership, skills are the “how” of leadership. Principals need to be equipped with a variety of abilities and competencies in order to effectively manage change and lead others through change. The principal participants in this study identified specific skills required for work in the present context and the ways they are working to acquire and develop those skills. The leadership skills most present on the minds of the principals involved in this study were prioritization and delegation,

engaging in difficult conversations and strategies to disrupt systems or processes that marginalize students.

### **Crucial conversations.**

Principals in all four districts described specific scenarios they have identified that involved, or should involve, difficult and significant conversations between them and the teachers they serve. As they strive to support teachers in the work that they do every day for students, these leaders encounter situations and scenarios that go against the beliefs and ideals of the organization and must be confronted and challenged. Preparing for and engaging in these crucial conversations is a skill that participants in this study are concerned about and need assistance in tackling. Many of these conversations involve issues of race. Chet described his team's approach to individual conversations with teachers in his building in matters of student discipline and race.

Over the last couple of years, we had a lot of individual conversations with teachers about sensitive issues involving race, discipline, instruction. When we talk to teachers I will say look, you had 20 referrals this month which is great. That is what we asked you to do. We are tracking what is going on. Did you know that based on your class about 50% of them are white and the other 50% are minority, but 85% of your referrals have all been African American students. Why do you think that is? So those are some pretty interesting conversations and yet I have had people say before, well, I just don't get those kids or that doesn't work. Some of those folks don't work here anymore, especially teachers who aren't open to feedback and open to change. Hey, I'm fine if you tell me that you

don't know how to meet a kid's needs – I'll help you with that. But if you flat out refuse to change, then we have a problem.

Sam discussed his frustrations working in colleagues in his school who do share his service orientation but sees how a willingness to engage in difficult conversations about race can open doors to new thinking.

My biggest frustration comes probably from the adults. Kids, I know what I signed up for. I know the kids come from tough backgrounds. I know the families don't have means and resources and have struggles. I accepted that fully in my opinion when I took this job and decided to become an educator. I get frustrated with adults who have a training and a background and things and act out of emotion and judgment and those are frustrations I have. But I do see how talking about these things are super important. Sometimes people truly don't see how their actions impact students. Recently I made a decision to confront a teacher about her classroom management. I frequently saw black students standing in the hallway outside her classroom door and when I asked them why they were there, they told me they were sent out for being loud in class. This was a pattern. The first conversation with that teacher was hard. It didn't go as well as I wanted it to. But the next conversation went better and now we are working on ways to better support students in her classes.

Sam's district placed a recent focus on the art of "courageous conversations about race" and required all district administrators move through that training in order to develop this skill. He feels this training was crucial for him as a leader in a comprehensive, diverse high school. He recounted a recent conversation he had with a

student who identifies as African American that further solidified in him the need to engage others in difficult discussions on behalf of students.

I was working with a black student who was really struggling with some things. He came in and started working on it and he very quickly got to a point and just said to the student, “What is it like being a black student at this school?” He told me, “I know you get it, but a lot of these teachers don’t. I know the other principals really get it but I am really struggling in these classes and this is what I feel in the hallways – I feel like they don’t even see me there.” When I hear students tell me things like this, it makes me upset. I know I have to confront these issues. It’s part of my job.

Engaging in emotional and difficult discussions with teachers can be emotionally difficult and draining. Three of four elementary principals in this study discussed the emotional toll this work has on them. Stacy said she often doesn’t sleep at night “thinking about and planning for the challenging discussions the next day will bring” while Tess described this part of her positions as “exhausting and draining”. Nancy said she tries to “motivate and help people identify what they can let go” when finding what works best for students.

### **Strategies to disrupt marginalization.**

Five of twelve principals identified specific systems or processes they have identified in their schools that perpetuate the marginalization of students that they have chosen to disrupt and change. Chet and Sam have identified a disproportionality in their students’ participation and performance in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. In both schools, a very small percentage of students who identify as African American are

enrolling in AP courses and an even smaller percentage are taking AP examinations. Jenny has found that students who identify as African American in her school arrive in ninth grade not having science or social studies in middle school because of pull-out intervention systems that preclude them from accessing curriculum in these two content areas during their middle school experiences. Charles has analyzed the academic achievement data for students with disabilities in his school and wishes to change the service delivery model. Janet has found that very few students who identify as Hispanic are identified as gifted and talented in her school and wants to address this opportunity for improvement.

These leaders have identified the opportunities for positive change on behalf of students they wish to address, but they are searching for how to turn these systemic problems into better outcomes for students. The principals report that they are receiving little to no assistance in tackling these systemic maladies from their district-level colleagues. Jenny from Northtown expressed frustration at the palpable lack of urgency she feels in her district to address these problems with expediency and resolve.

Frankly, we haven't done much at all to address the fact that too many students who come to us in ninth grade haven't had social studies or science in three years because they are being put in literacy or math interventions instead of being enrolled in those classes. It's tragic. All we do as a system is talk about it. We are good problem-identifiers, but not good problem-solvers. There has been a lot of talk about the increasingly diverse student population. A lot of talk about the need to definitely be aware and have training on culturally responsive practices. A lot of talk in the past two or three years about minority recruitment in terms of

staffing. But we haven't been able to make the gains we wish to see. I feel a terrific sense of urgency as a leader to do something about these problems. I want to roll up my sleeves and start doing the work, but I need help. I feel like I can barely manage to handle everything here at my high school let alone systems issues like middle-school intervention schedules and minority hiring. I feel right now there is only one person at the entire district office that has the same sense of urgency in this work at times.

Charles, in his work to overhaul the service delivery system for students with disabilities at his school, realized that a science course, "Science for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", was disproportionately enrolled with students who have special education needs and students who identify as African American. He decided, with his school-based leadership team, to eliminate the course and remove it from the course selection student guide. He alerted his district office supervisors of this action and requested assistance in creating alternative approaches to ensuring success in the science curriculum for all students. He wanted to investigate and potentially implemented a new staffing plan that would involve co-teaching of regular and special education teachers. He reported that due to a lack of collaboration with district level administrators, he and his team continue to struggle to find better options for students in his building. "I know there are better options out there for our students, I just need to figure out what will work best here."

Table 37

*Summary of Interview Responses involving Leadership Dispositions, Knowledge, and Skills Necessary for Leading in Diverse Contexts*

<b>Disposition, Skill, or Knowledge</b>	<b>Number of Principals</b>	<b>Percent of Principals</b>
Growth Mindset	8/12	67%
Service Orientation	6/12	50%
Grit	5/12	42%
Change management	12/12	100%
Supervision and evaluation	10/12	83%
Data literacy	9/12	75%
Crucial conversations	11/12	92%
Strategies to disrupt marginalization	5/12	42%

### **Resources Principals Access to Inform their Leadership for All Students**

The twelve principal participants studied identified the leadership dispositions, knowledge, and skills needed to be successful in a suburban school setting navigating student demographic changes. When asked to specifically identify the resources, tools, supports, and relationships that inform the development of these competencies, the responses were varied in some respects, and uniform in a few, meaningful ways.

A few principals named specific professional development experiences and professional organization affiliations that have been helpful to them in learning how to lead a school community through demographic changes. Scott and Nancy mentioned participation in book studies and membership in the statewide association for principals as useful to his work. The principals in Lakeside all mentioned specific training on how to engage in conversations about race as helpful in their day to day interactions with staff, students, and parents. Two leaders from Millerville, currently enrolled in a doctoral

program, cited the learning occurring through coursework at the university as informing and influencing their current leadership practices.

There were three more prevalent themes that emerged from discussions with these principals about what they rely upon most for growth, learning, and leadership for all students: a personal mission, collaboration with peers, and a relationship with a personal mentor.

### **Personal Mission**

All principal participants in this study discussed a personal mission that led them to the principalship and continues to drive them to help others. Six of twelve principals discussed an internal drive or calling to lead in diverse school settings. Tess explained that she wanted to work in a diverse setting and actively sought a principalship in Stratton.

I don't think I would do well in a district with no diversity, or a lot of affluence. That's just not my kind of thing. I've worked in Chicago, I've worked in Madison, Wisconsin. All of my training and experience is in urban settings. I feel like I'm needed here.

Darius, another leader in Stratton, expressed the same passion for working in diverse school settings. In fact, he requested an inter-district transfer from a high-performing middle school that served a more homogeneous population, to his current placement where he and his teachers serve a very diverse student clientele. He approached his superintendent and requested the transfer because he felt as though he could better the situation at the school for students and teachers alike. I told my superintendent, "Hey, let me go do that. Let me go try and make a positive difference."

Darius has served in his current role for the past four years. Pete offered perspective on why he chose to work in Lakeside.

I think my mission probably is to serve especially our underprivileged and underrepresented. I feel like growing up in Wisconsin and my experiences, I learned what worked for me as a middle class white kid in a small town was do your homework, keep your grades up so you can play football on Friday night, or it was you need to do this so you can get into college. My culture and group of friends when I get back to my high school friends. We all were very middle class. One mom was a teacher and the other dad worked in the factory and things like that. We all had very similar backgrounds. That was my experience, but what I learned very quickly was that that is not the experience of the majority of people. So having that presence of mind, I thought how can I serve others? How can I serve those families because, to be honest, educating me looking back wasn't in my opinion, really that difficult because it was easy to push those right buttons? But I really like the challenge of my position. I like the challenge of saying, "This is someone that has more things going against them. How can what I say and what I do help them do better for themselves and also potentially generationally help them become just more sustainable in their own lives in the higher level of happiness but success in their lives." I guess that is my mission, knowing what I know, how can I serve people who didn't have things as well as I did.

### **Peer Collaboration**

Deep and meaningful professional relationships with close colleagues as a primary source of ideas, resources, and inspiration was noted by all principals involved in

this study. For secondary administrators in particular, working as part of a leadership team comprised of assistant principals, was a consistent and important system of support. Elementary principals, the lone building administrator in all four districts, developed close relationships with job-alike colleagues in other schools.

Chet, a high school principal, discussed the importance of his leadership team and how disconnected they felt with the district office administration.

The admin team that I have here in the building is pretty tight and we really help each other with a lot of things and I. I typically have a couple people in the district that I talk to but typically not at the central office. I think there is a large disconnect with our district office staff. They don't understand the challenges of the building because they are not here. And they often make decisions without asking questions about what is going on with that work. So there is very little input that way. Quite honestly, I don't really trust the judgment or the experience that the majority of the people have in the central office. So because their experiences are completely different and they don't ask questions, then they don't get what we are going through. Our team here in the building is on the same page. I can ask my assistant principals anything and they will tell me a truthful answer. We support each other in everything we do.

Charles, a high school principal from Millerville, has similar experiences with his leadership team in his building and spends time outside of work with his team so that they can freely reflect and converse about their work while building close relationships. Stacy, Nancy, and Tess mentioned the importance of collaboration with other professionals in their schools. Specifically, they identified collegial relationships with

social workers, psychologists, and guidance counselors as professional informative in their work. Stacy commented, “I am the only administrator in my building which can be kind of scary sometimes. I need to check my thinking sometimes, like right in the moment, and because there is no other principal here like there is at the middle or high school levels, I need to rely on my psychologist or social worker for advice.”

Darius, a middle school principal in Stratton, and Tess, an elementary principal in the same district, described the importance of peer relationships within their district but also identified a clear division between those leaders working in the most diverse school settings in their district and those working in settings that are more homogeneous. Darius called it the “east side/west side” divide. He explained the schools situated on the Eastern side of the school district boundary are more racially diverse than schools situated nearer the Western border of the district boundary. He and Tess both stated that due to the vast differences in student clientele served in “east side” or “west side” schools, it was almost like the leaders spoke different leadership languages. “They just don’t understand what we deal with in east side schools, so I chose to communicate with other east side principals.” Darius commented. Tess concurred, stating that when she attends all-district principal meetings she always gravitates towards her “east side” colleagues because she doesn’t see a benefit in collaborating with other principals who do not work in a similar leadership context. Regardless of the level, elementary, middle, and high school principals involved in this study identified the importance of peer collaboration in their work.

## **Mentors**

Several study participants described personal relationships with a mentor as important in their ongoing professional learning and support. Interestingly, none of the participants who discussed mentorship as valuable and important were connected to formal mentors within their school systems. All of the mentor relationships described were informal; relationships that had been cultivated outside of their current leadership context. Some of these mentor/mentee relationships were professional and some were personal, but all were long-lived and valuable to the individual principal.

Stacy talked about her father and his past and current influence on her work ethic and perseverance in her professional life. “Honestly”, she said, “I talk more to him about my professional life than anyone I work with.” Chet identified a superintendent from another school district with whom he had worked in a previous position as a primary source of guidance and motivation. Janet explained that she relies heavily on an elementary principal colleague of hers in Lakeside and that she goes to him frequently for advice, information, and specific strategies. She has been focusing on improving state test scores for students in her school that identify as African American, Hispanic, and socioeconomically disadvantaged, and her colleague has been helping her make sense of achievement data and action plan for improvement. “Sometimes I meet with him weekly which is really helpful and reassuring because I am all alone here. I’m the only administrator with a lot of responsibilities and many issues to sort through and tackle.”

None of the principals interviewed identified their district administrator or any other district office colleague as serving in a mentor role for them. When specifically asked if district office administrators provided meaningful direction and support to

principals, especially in matters of leading for the success of all students, only two of the study participants provided a positive response. Both of the leaders work in Millerville and identified two different district office administrators whom they rely on for direction and guidance. Sam, the high school principal in this district discussed the support and guidance he receives from the Director of Community Relations as this individual is responsible for developing cultural competence throughout the district.

She is helping me help people in my school who have never left a three square-mile radius in their entire life. We have teachers who are visibly uncomfortable saying the words, “African American”. How can I help that person, even starting with terms and vocabulary? These are simple pieces that people can gain more confidence in and that is how I believe you open the door to richer conversations is to start talking about those things and have those conversations. She helps us learn how to prepare for and then actually carry out those discussions.

Scott, a leader at the middle school level in Lakeside, identified the Director of Curriculum as someone he frequently seeks out for help, resources, and strategies. Scott mentioned that the two of them have an aligned philosophy and belief system that helps him collaborate easily with her.

Ten of twelve participants, when asked to identify a district office administrator who provides mentorship, guidance, and support to them responded negatively. Chet provided perhaps the most firm response by saying, “I would never go to my superintendent or anyone else at the district office. They are never around, they have no idea what’s actually happening in schools, how could they possibly help me do my job?” Jenny expressed a similar sentiment about her district office supervisors and explained

that during the course of the last school year, she never saw her direct supervisors in her school. Frustrated by this lack of personal contact, she has found support and guidance in others.

It's actually a joke. I often feel like, "hello over there, do you have any idea what I'm dealing with here?" It's tough. We are asked to do so much and yet we receive so little support. They really appear clueless much of the time. And I'm supposed to speak highly of them to my teaching staff. That's really a challenge for me because if I don't respect my bosses, how am I to expect my teachers will?

The school leaders involved in this study did mention a few, miscellaneous resources that they draw upon for guidance and inspiration. However, most discussed in greater depth and detail their reliance upon a personal mission, their colleagues and peers, and personal mentors for true assistance in their work in schools.

Table 38

*Summary of Interview Responses Involving the Resources Principals Access to Inform their Leadership for All Students*

	Resource	# of Principals	% of Principals
1.	Personal mission	12/12	100%
2.	Peer collaboration	8/12	67%
3.	Personal mentor	5/12	42%

### **What Suburban School Leaders Need from Their Superintendents**

The second research question in this study was, "What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully deliver on the promise of creating school environments within which all students succeed?" Understanding the dynamics involved in the principal/superintendent relationship can help illuminate the

characteristics that create supportive and productive work environments for suburban principals working in leadership contexts that involve changing student demographics. While these principals could clearly identify what they need from their superintendents that would help them do better work at the local level, most of these school leaders also discussed a real and troubling disconnect between them and their supervisors.

### **Shared Vision and Mission**

While principals could articulate their vision and mission for their work in their schools, they had difficulty articulating the vision and mission of their superintendents. Additionally, these school leaders expressed a desire to not only understand how their supervisors are approaching their work but to share a common philosophical approach to their shared leadership experiences. None of the twelve principals, when asked to articulate their superintendent's mission and vision for his work could provide a specific response. Jenny described most conversations she has with her superintendent as "casual" and that they occur sporadically throughout the school year. She shared that there has been no "purposeful attempt to actually sit down and discuss my or his educational philosophy or approach to our work." She further described the relationship she has with her superintendent as "trusting" and "congenial" but added, "My relationship with him just isn't that whole. It's not a relationship I maybe necessarily need in my work to be successful." Similarly, when Vince was asked how he discusses mission and vision with his superintendent, he shared, "I really don't interact with him very much. I can't say that I really know that much about him, at least, I don't know how he feels about his work, our work...that's a good question. I guess I should talk with him more about why we are

doing what we are doing.” Stacy, also a leader in Northtown, concurred with her colleagues and shared that she has “never been asked to share these kinds of thoughts with the superintendent.” All three Northtown leaders, however, expressed a desire to have a shared and strong mission and vision across all leaders in the district as they believe this is vital to truly meeting the needs of all students in their care. Jenny captured this sentiment when she stated, “I sometimes feel like an island out here. If I really knew we all believed in the same things and were working towards the same goals for kids, it would give me more motivation for the work.”

The principals from Millerville shared a feeling that the political pressures being felt by their superintendent were the reason for his lack of visibility in schools. This lack of visibility has created a distance in his relationship with building leaders. Therefore, Millerville principals were not able to articulate their understanding of their district administrator’s mission and vision for the district or his individual work. Matt said that he used to see his superintendent at least a few times a year in his building, but over the past three years, he rarely has the opportunity to converse with him about issues most pressing in his individual work at his school. Lynn, an elementary building leader, shared her thoughts on the importance of shared mission and vision across the leaders in her district.

I know he is busy and I think he trusts me to do a good job, but the superintendent should have a good pulse on what’s happening in buildings. I need him to be an advocate for my school and my students. If I am going to make a difference with my students and my staff, I need to be on the same page with my superintendent. Right now, I’m not sure what page he is on. I trust him, I like him and I think he

trusts me, but I don't really know what he stands for so I'm unsure of how far I can press, how much I could take on for kids. Will he have my back?

The absence of a shared mission and vision for student success appeared to be present on the minds of building leaders in Stratton as well, but not necessarily between principals and their superintendent, but between principals and the superintendent's district office team. Principals described a strong connection to their superintendent in this regard, but specifically described frustration and growing animosity with the superintendent because of a disconnect in this regard between them and leaders in the teaching and learning department of central office. These principals believed the superintendent should be responsible for leading and managing district office personnel, therefore his credibility and effectiveness in their eyes was tarnished. Chet described these complexities as a major frustration for him in his work at the high school level.

I have a solid relationship with the superintendent and I know where he stands. I believe we share the same philosophy about students. He is responsive and gets right back to me. I see him often in my building. He's not the problem. The people in charge of the educational services department in our district are my biggest problem. They have no idea of what's going on. They are never around. I feel like they just want to tell me what to do without any context or understanding of what our student and teachers need. Based on their actions, that's all I can really go on right now because they never come to my school, they never ask for my opinions or perspectives, I can tell you that our mission and vision for student success is not aligned. It's completely disconnected. Honestly, the superintendent is responsible for this. It just seems like he is not leading the district office.

Jenny, an elementary leader in Stratton, said she “thinks” that she and her superintendent share the same educational philosophy because she was hired to work in a diverse school context suited to her passions and experiences. When she described a few resources that have been put into place for students and families in her building, she explained, though she could not say who was responsible for these actions, that her superintendent “must” share the same mission and vision for student and family success. When Darius, Jenny and Chet’s middle school colleague, was asked if he had ever discussed mission and vision with his superintendent, he provided a straightforward, “No”. He further explained that he assumed that because he is a male who identifies as African American, that his superintendent, who is white, must just trust him to know what to do with a diverse student clientele.

This perceived lack of a known, shared, and cultivated mission and vision for student success shared by principals as they reflected on their relationship with their superintendent was confounded by a lack of performance feedback provided to them by their district administrator.

### **Performance Feedback**

These principals expressed a sincere need for feedback about their performance. As they face new initiatives, new demands, and constant change, they frequently wonder if their leadership is having an impact. As the student clientele being served becomes more and more diverse, they are requesting guidance and specific suggestions on how they can improve the learning conditions and academic outcomes for all students. For all twelve principals in this study, their superintendent served in the role of primary evaluator. The supervision and evaluation process played out differently in each district,

but one constant appeared in the interview transcript data – the process lacked useful feedback for principals.

The state of Wisconsin has imposed a uniform evaluation process for all public school principals. The evaluation tool that is to be used in all school districts beginning with the 2014-15 school year. The principal evaluation process is aligned to Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards and prescribes the specific leadership actions and dispositions needed to effectively lead in Wisconsin public schools. The tool involves a descriptive rubric and requires evidence collection, frequent observations of principals on the job, and periodic, face-to-face meetings between the principal and his/her immediate supervisor throughout the course of the school year. Conversations with the twelve principals involved in this study indicated this newly imposed evaluation system will be a welcome departure from current supervision and evaluation practices occurring in Northtown, Millerville, Stratton, and Lakeside school districts. Twelve of twelve principals reported getting little to no descriptive, formative, or useful performance feedback from their superintendents. Lakeside school leaders reported a desire for this to change in their district. Scott reported that he receives an annual performance evaluation summary once a year but that he has “heard through the grapevine that if you’re not doing a good job, you get more frequent opportunities to talk to the superintendent about your performance.” Scott shared that his relationship with the superintendent is very formal and serious and that he would assume if there were additional requests from him to meet or discuss his performance, it would not be a positive commentary on his work.

Charles, a high school principal in Millerville, said bluntly when asked how the superintendent provides performance feedback, “He leaves us alone and stays out of our way, which I interpret as a blessing and stamp of approval of what we are doing in our school.” He continued, “If I need feedback, it’s up to me to reach out. I’m trying to do that more, but sometimes I think it’s just not worth the effort. I don’t think he really understands what we’re doing anyway, so what could he help me with.” Chet, also a high school principal, shared that in the past five years in his role at Stratton, he has never had one discussion with his superintendent about his performance. Jenny in Northtown described a very similar experience in her role in the district in that over the past five years, she has never had one conversation with her superintendent about her performance.

One principal, Jenny, articulated the differing expectations she is feeling about supervision and evaluation expectations of principals and superintendents and how it has made her feel about the importance of feedback.

It’s ironic. I’m expected to evaluate thirty teachers this year. I have to use a very comprehensive evaluation tool, I need to conduct walkthroughs and observations throughout the year, I need to give prescriptive and helpful feedback. I take that part of my job really seriously. I feel like I am here to support and guide teachers. My kids here deserve a fantastic teacher in every single classroom in my school. That’s my responsibility. I need to make sure the right instructional practices are happening, that people are using data to inform instruction that we’re doing what we’re supposed to do. Weird that my superintendent doesn’t take that part of his job as seriously as I do. It’s sad.

## **Autonomy**

While many principals reported the desire for ongoing performance feedback from their superintendents, all study participants identified an equally strong desire for autonomy in their role as building-level leader. All twelve principals identified autonomy in their role as vital to their success in meeting the needs of students in their care. Darius described the close relationships he shares with teachers, students, and their families and how he the person best suited to make decisions about how to move his building forward.

I'm the one making home-visits. I'm the one sitting in my office with kids, listening to the things they are dealing with. I'm the one observing teachers, helping them do the things they need to do for kids. I need the authority from the people at central office to do what we need to do here, for our kids here.

He further explained that due to vast differences in student demographics between buildings in his district that all principals need to have the autonomy to make decisions at the local level because "one-size-fits-all" initiatives won't work in all schools. This is important for Darius when he enters a hiring process. He explained the desire for autonomy in determining who to hire for teaching positions in his school.

I will tell my supervisors, hey, everybody can't work here. I'm okay with that. You can't come work here and expect that the kids are going to look like me. If you have a problem with Hispanic kids that really can't speak English, or Black kids, or parents who don't come to parent/teacher conferences, well then, you can't work here. Those teachers might be successful in other schools in my district, but not here. Our teachers have to accept the kids who are in front of you.

Sam communicated the need to have the independence to “pick and choose” amongst district initiatives so as to find focus in the work he does with teachers in his school. He struggles with prioritization and being a “buffer” between district office and his teaching staff. His building has placed a recent emphasis on the work of Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton and understanding how to engage in crucial conversations about race. He sees a need to deepen this work in his school but is struggling with how to find time to do that while also managing a variety of other district-imposed mandates and pressures.

Too many times we lose focus on important work and I don't want to lose this focus because the overall thing about education for me is not only working with cultural competencies with students...those conversations I and others are learning to have with black kids...they help me with every kid that I worked with. They help me with every parent that I work with. Keeping that focus will make us better in all areas. It's a really important thing we need to keep working on. Racial issues in suburban schools are becoming over simplified with poverty...I find people are more comfortable talking about poverty than issues dealing with race. But look across the state of Wisconsin, our students of color are identifying as more middle class, they are scoring below their white counterparts as well. I don't mean to be defensive because I know that the message has to be delivered and I wouldn't be defensive but I often feel like I have to defend my position and help people move away from a conversation about poverty. It's a different thing. This isn't solely about poverty. It's just probably safer for people to talk about.

Matt described his long-tenure in Millerville and the autonomy provided to him throughout his career. In the past few years, as a result of leadership change-over at the district office, he is feeling a concerted effort at alignment and consistency in leadership practices that weren't there in the past. He described his first several years in his position as a middle school principal during which time every building functioned as unique and individual "kingdom". He said that the district would provide occasional guidance, but that every building principal did "whatever they wanted" regardless of the district-provided direction. Matt relished the ability to control his school but now welcomes the opportunity to meaningfully collaborate with other leaders because there is an expectation of common focus on a few, key goals and initiatives. "I think there is probably a really nice balance we can strike between individual autonomy and the need for consistency."

### **Trust**

Ten of twelve principals discussed the importance of trust in the work that they do in their schools. Trust within the relationship between principals and their respective superintendent was cited as perhaps the most crucial element. Chet shared when describing the relationship he has with his superintendent said, "I know that he trusts me." When pressed to elaborate on how he knows this to be true, Chet added, "He has told me so, on more than one occasion. I need to know that he trusts me to do the things I think need to happen in my school."

While trust was identified as present in the relationships principals have with their superintendents, seeking an understanding of the development of that trust was difficult to ascertain. Vince shared that he believes his superintendent has confidence in the work

he is doing in his school in Northtown and that “he thinks the kids are being taken of. He trusts us to do good work.” When asked to elaborate on how he came to that conclusion, Vince said, “Well, I just think that’s the case. I don’t hear much from him, so I assume he doesn’t have any concerns and that he trusts us here. It’s just important.” Stacy shared a similar sentiment and said, “My superintendent trusts me. It’s kind of like, if you don’t hear much from him, you just assume the trust is there.” Darius, also, said that his superintendent trusts him to help his teachers learn how to meet the needs of all students in his school. “The superintendent trusts that I know what needs to be done.” When asked to further explain how he knew that to be true, he shared, “I just know.” He further described the importance of trust in the relationships he has with his teaching staff.

I am so busy, I have to trust my teachers. I’m not the guy who is going to stand on your neck all of the time. I have too much to do. I have to trust you. I am going to trust you as much as I can and I think that is the most respectful thing you can tell a teacher, like listen, I trust you to do your job. If you don’t do it, that is something else. But I am going to give you that initial trust.

Trust was a theme present in archival data provided by a few principals. Charles, Jenny, Vince, Tess, and Nancy in their “back to school” letter to staff, wrote about the importance of trust in the work they were doing with teachers. Jenny described the importance of trust within the stakeholder relationships in her school in her letter to teachers.

You have put structures in place in your classrooms to support the shift of transformational learning paradigms for personalization that meet each unique

student and their individual needs. You do this because you care, because you are smart, because you are a team, and because you trust one another. You trust that if you take risks with students best interests in mind, that even if you fail at your first attempt, you will be supported. You trust that if you don't know how to do something that your colleague next door will help you out. You trust that you will enforce high expectations for all students because your colleague down the hall is not backing down from that same expectation. I value the culture of learning that you have started to establish during these first two weeks of school and most importantly I value and trust each of you

Tess, in her opening letter to parents to start the new school year, talked about the importance of trust in the relationships parents have with the teachers of their children and how her staff would be committed to cultivating that trust.

Table 39

*Summary of Interview Responses involving What Principals Need from Their Superintendents in Order to Serve All Students*

	Identified Need	Number of Principals Who Identified this Need	Percent of Principals Who Identified this Need
1.	Shared mission and vision	9/12	75%
2.	Performance feedback	10/12	83%
3.	Autonomy	12/12	100%
4.	Trust	10/12	83%

### **How Superintendents Provide Support to Their Principals**

The third research question in this study was, “How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies and supporting principals in proactively leading through racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized

such groups of students?” Finding answers to this question was perhaps the most troubling aspect of this study. Superintendents appear to be overwhelmed by political pressures associated with their position. These district leaders have pulled away from a focus on instructional leadership so much so that principals report little to no connection to their superintendent.

In fact, all twelve principals involved in this study reported rarely seeing their superintendent during the course of the school year. When asked specific questions about the type and frequency of performance feedback they received from their superintendents, principals had difficulty responding, often providing cordial, yet curt responses that expressed respect and deference, but lacked depth and relationship. Darius described his relationship with his superintendent as “trusting” but was unable to expand upon why he felt it was so. Stacy said, “I really don’t know what my superintendent thinks of me. We never talk about that. I also never really talk to him.” Charles was candid in his descriptions of the relationship he has with his superintendent and said he felt “peculiar” discussing that aspect of his professional life. He explained that he felt fortunate that his district leader “kind of has left us alone”. When asked how often issues of equity are discussed during administrative meetings with the superintendent, Charles said, “I don’t think we’ve ever had that conversation.”

Two superintendents, when asked how cultural competency plays a role in the leadership thinking and doing within their district did not understand the question and said they were not familiar with the term. One superintendent said, “I don’t know what that term means.” Another district leader responded, “Can I come back to that. I need to think about how I want to answer.” When the topic resurfaced, he described the overall

climate and culture in the district but did not offer anything connected to the question about cultural competency.

The superintendents studied appeared to come to these conversations about educational equity for their students with widely varying levels of acknowledgment of the opportunities to build capacity in their principals, experiences, beliefs, and leadership actions. However, all four district leaders identified and discussed the challenges related to helping the larger community recognize and value a changing student body.

### **Helping Principals Lead for All Students**

Superintendents themselves, when asked specific questions about the increases in the number of students who identify as Hispanic and African American in their school systems and how they are working to build capacity and competency in their school leaders provided responses that differed significantly with respect to depth and complexity. Two superintendents could only speak in generalities about the strategies and supports being provided to principals to help them lead through student demographic change. Greg, the superintendent in Millerville, when asked to speak specifically about how he is helping his principals build capacity in their schools to serve all students provided a disconnected and vague response.

That is something we need to work on...when it comes to bilingual. We are lacking in that quite frankly. We do a pretty good job when it comes to our administrative staff. We have gone over it again and again. We have great social workers. I guess this is better than nothing.

Similarly, Tom, the district administrator in Northtown, when asked to articulate the specific resources and supports he is providing to principals to help them lead through

significant shifts in student demographic change, provided information about specific personnel in his district who are responsible for “dealing with minority issues”, but was unable to articulate a district mission or approach to building capacity in the district.

One thing we have done, especially for our Hispanic population, is have a director of bilingual services who works directly with principals. We have other folks assigned to go and make sure principals are dealing appropriately with some of the issues of the minority schools. Our principals are dealing with some serious parental issues with minorities. I sometimes need to get involved or get our legal counsel involved. We don't want to be in a situation where someone is viewing us as racist or not respecting different cultures.

Russell, the superintendent in Stratton, the district in the state of Wisconsin experiencing the greatest increases in the numbers of students who identify as African American or Hispanic, provided more specific responses to questions regarding how he is providing support to principals in their work to lead for all students. He was able to articulate the changes occurring in his community as he has been an educator in Stratton for his entire thirty-year career.

We see our district transitioning. We are a district located very close to a large urban center and our demographics are really shifting. Therefore, we need to look at a district approach with the work we have been doing with diversity. We have a strong belief that all students can learn and we know that what they bring to the table is very different than in other districts or even in parts of our district where there is a higher socioeconomic status.

He continued to add specificity to how his district is trying to equip building principals with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students be successful.

We try to provide professional development in diversity, understanding students of color, understanding how to work with students of lower socioeconomic status. We do this district wide because we know that's where we are going. We have done book studies; we have built collaborative time into our daily schedules for teachers to be able to work together. We have brought in speakers and hired consultants to help our principals and teachers.

Russell further explained how the district's hiring practices have been influenced by a changing student clientele.

We are working on our hiring practices, trying to hire more teachers and administrators of color. We want our staff to be reflective of our current student body. We need teachers and principals who want to work in an urban setting. It is a struggle when you have educators who are basically white, middle class. It is a challenge because as we learn in our professional development about poor children, about certain cultures and the values of certain cultures, we need to change what we are doing. For some, change is just too hard.

Rick, the district administrator in Lakeside, communicated that his district has been prioritizing the need to build understanding and capacity in his teaching and administrative staffs due to changing student demographics for the past several years. Lakeside had been reprimanded by the state for disproportionately suspending students of color who were also identified as having a disability. Therefore, the district was

mandated to participate in a statewide initiative aimed at helping districts with this problem affect positive change. Their involvement in this statewide initiative lead to the hiring of a “coordinator of community education” charged with shepherding this work in the district. The woman hired for this role, a woman who identifies as African American, has been with the district for the past five years. Sam, the high school principal in Lakeside, communicated that she is the only employee who is African American in the district. Rick explained his hopes for the district’s ongoing focus on cultural competency.

This is very heavy lifting for us, a district of all white administrators. We really see the work as important. We have continued to infuse professional development into our administrator meetings. We aren’t quite there, but are working to help administrators have a solid understanding of cultural competency and understanding the needs of our various backgrounds in the district. This year, one of our district goals is to look at a sub-group of students, which in many cases is going to be a racial group that isn’t achieving. Like most districts, the darker the color of the skin, they more marginalized the population in terms of their achievement. I think our principals are having some courageous conversations with people of color which is making a difference.

When asked to describe how their principals struggle and what they need from the district office in order to better meet the needs of students, the answers these superintendents provided varied widely. Greg mentioned that his principals are being asked to administer too many initiatives so they struggle with prioritization and time management. Rick mentioned curricular leadership as the primary struggle for his

building leaders in Lakeside and mentioned how the Common Core State Standards have influenced their work at the school level. Tom expressed that his principals in Northtown are struggling with an increase in the number of students and parents struggling with “mental health issues”. Only Russell offered a perspective of how a change in student demographics has directly impacted his building principals.

There are just so many needs with our children. The lower socioeconomic status transcends cultural diversity...The majority of our staff are not part of a minority group. They are not poor. Trying to help our staff gain an understanding and empathy is a challenge. We have tried to add administrative staff to every building so the lead principal has time to deal more directly with issues of race and poverty. Our administrators are trying hard to embrace that, but the challenge of it is considerable.

In Russell’s district, there are two, large comprehensive high schools. District residents are afforded the opportunity to enroll in either high school as enrollment is not driven by specific boundaries or feeder patterns. Russell explains that over time, this has led to disproportionality across the two schools in the demographic composition of the student body.

Chet’s school is much more racially diverse than the other high school. The district serves a student body within which 10.8% of students identify as African American and 22.4% identify as Hispanic. Chet’s school serves a student body within which 19.5% of students identify as African American and 32% of students identify as Hispanic. This is in stark contrast to the same demographic data at Stratton’s other high school that serves a student body within which 7.1% of students identify as African

American and 15.8% of students identify as Hispanic. As student achievement results have become increasingly publicized and transparent, tensions between the two school communities have heightened. Student achievement data across Stratton's two high schools told a story of systemic marginalization of students.

Examining any large-scale student achievement metric, whether it be achievement on the ACT examination or on Advanced Placement (AP) examinations, students who identify as African American or Hispanic achieve at levels below their white counterparts. The overall ACT composite score for students at Chet's school in 2012-2013 was 19.7, while students at the other high school achieved a composite score of 19.7. Students who identify as African American achieved an ACT composite of 17.1 at Chet's school, while students who identify as Hispanic achieved an ACT composite of 18.3. There were not enough students who identify as African American at the other high school to be included in the state-level ACT data, while students who identified as Hispanic at that school achieved an ACT composite of 21.3.

Analysis of Advanced Placement results in Stratton were even more troubling. At Chet's school, during the 2012-2013 school year, a total of 229 AP exams were taken, compared to a total of 577 examinations at the other Stratton high school. Of the 229 AP examinations at Chet's school, 20% of them were taken by students who identify as African American or Hispanic, compared to only 11% at the other high school. Only 33% of students who identified as African American and 25% of students who identified as Hispanic achieved a score of "3" or higher, a level considered proficient, compared to 53.9 percent of white students achieving at this level. At the other high school, 22.2% of students who identified as African American and 61.5% of students who identified as

Hispanic received a proficient score on AP examinations in 2012-2013, compared to 65.1% of their white counterparts. Comparing these results to the overall demographic composition of Stratton's two high schools illuminates a discrepancy in achievement on AP examinations, both within each school and across schools.

Table 40

*Student Demographics in Stratton's Two High Schools*

	Total Enrollment	% White	% Hispanic	% African American
High School A (Chet's School)	1343	47%	30%	17%
High School B	1636	74%	14%	6%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

Table 41

*Summary of Advanced Placement (AP) Performance in Stratton in 2012-2013*

	Total # Exams	% Taken/ Proficient: White	% Taken/ Proficient: Hispanic	% Taken/ Proficient: African American
HS A	229	73%/53.9%	17%/25.0%	6.5%/33.3%
HS B	577	84%/65.1%	9%/61.5%	1.6%/22.2%

*Note.* Source: Wisconsin Information System for Education, 2014

Despite these obvious discrepancies in enrollment and academic achievement across the two high schools in Stratton, Russell expressed a hesitancy to disrupt these systemic inequities.

When I stand on the stage at graduation at both schools, you would think you were in two different school districts. One school has a hugely diverse student body and quite frankly, a very exciting mix of students. Then I go to the other side of town and basically, the student body looks the same, pretty much all white, just like how it was when I graduated from here in 1970. But there is no difference in

the course offerings at both schools. We are monitoring this. We perpetuate some of our own problems. I know this. We are monitoring.

Russell identified the pressures of open-enrollment as the primary reason for his reluctance to disrupt this systemic inequity. He described a worry that because parents are afforded the ability to request enrollment for their children in surrounding districts that they would exercise this option if Stratton decided to change its in-district high school choice policy.

I don't want to drive people out of our district. I have told our school board that if we go to boundaries for high school enrollment, people will apply for open-enrollment because of the racism in our community. That still exists here, so we will cut off our nose to spite our face. Parents have said to me, "Now wait a minute, according to state law and open-enrollment, I can pick a high school outside of our district, but I can't make a choice here?"

Russell continued to explain how this disproportionality in the diversity of the student body at Stratton's two high schools impacts principals.

I tell my principals that it is their responsibility to promote their school. Diversity doesn't mean, "unsafe". Poor doesn't mean "unsafe". We need to show that learning is at a high level. [School A] is far superior athletically and has won more state championships. I know that [School A] is not achieving as well as [School B] but there are other really great things happening.

Rick discussed the challenge of allocating resources to schools in a manner that is appropriate and targeted.

I want my principals to advocate for their schools and what they need, but they also need to understand the big picture. We do have predominantly white schools that have very little diversity and very little free and reduced rates. They have significantly fewer resources than the schools where those two pieces are significant. I am not tying those pieces together, but in our case, they are very similar. There is a difference in resource allocation. I think while my principals understand it, they struggle in schools where there is less diversity or less poverty from the standpoint that they don't have the extra support or lower class sizes due to our involvement in the SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education) program. Our parents don't get this either. They don't understand why class sizes are small in four schools, but larger in the other five.

Tom offered a similar perspective on resource allocation and how he expects building principals to handle advocacy for more at the school level.

Our enrollment is going down by 100 students every year, but my principals still want more staffing. I can't go to the board with declining enrollment and ask for more teaching position, so my principals have to figure it out. When there is a battle for resources, we bring the principals in and tell them, "Hey, you have to just figure it out." And you know what? They usually do.

Discussing issues of poverty appeared to be a more comfortable space within which to have discussions with these four district leaders. Whether it was involvement in the SAGE program or engaging in specific professional development aimed at helping educators understand poverty, these superintendents could provide more specific information on this topic than when describing issues dealing with race.

### **The Need to Educate the Community**

Three of the four district leaders studied described their struggle to help the members of the larger community within which they serve understand and value the current student clientele being served in their schools. Russell, having lived and worked in Stratton his entire life, has seen a progressive change.

We have gone from a “blue collar” school district to one that is over 60% free and reduced price lunch, so a very definite shift from many of our schools here in the 70s, 80s, and even 90s. But yet we still have the suburban flavor with our tendencies. We have a touch of each. The challenge in the broader community is identifying and accepting that demographic change. That is the most significant disconnect. Even though your neighbor may be culturally diverse, or your neighbor may live in a rental property and have socioeconomic concerns, as a city, as a community, people are not recognizing that. That has caused a very interesting set of dynamics.

He continued with a reflection on how the community’s perceptions put a constraint on his leadership.

I would share that I am challenged by a community that doesn’t realize or recognize the changing of the demographic. At times, we can’t be as transparent as we’d like to be. In supporting principals, sometimes that challenge is knowing what the work should be and figuring out how to do it so that the greater community accepts it. Too many of our community members see a Hispanic student or a black student and they assume that they are students who open-enroll here. These students are not open-enrolled. They are our students. They live here.

When asked to provide artifacts that demonstrated how he was helping the community come to grips with their current reality, Russell was unable to provide any specific artifact, but explained that he attempts to teach community members through individual conversations in the community.

Greg, Millerville's district administrator, shared a similar perspective on his community.

Twenty years ago, we were about a 19-20% free or reduced-price lunch district. Now we are over 50%. If you would ask a typical community member here, they wouldn't say that. We have had a long-standing Hmong population that has successfully assimilated into our community. I guess we assimilated to them, too. We have a recreation department in our district and it's good to see Hmong kids now participating in the programming we provide.

Greg continued to describe how shifts in student demographics in his district are perceived within the community.

We try to send things out in our electronic e-mails and newsletters but it's hard because things have become tighter financially. We're not saying, "Hey, the sky is falling and we're not meeting the needs of kids." I'm not sharing achievement information with the community. I don't want to send the wrong message. We lost 100 teachers last year and I don't want people saying, "Wow, that district is going down the tubes." It's tricky because I want people to understand what we're dealing with, but I don't want people to be worried about the quality of the education we're providing here.

When asked to share samples of the written communication to parents used in the effort to educate the community, Greg was not able to provide anything.

Rick expressed a positive perspective on the changes in student demographics in Lakeside.

I think the increase in diversity is actually a blessing for us. It is changing our community. It is changing our schools and all for the better. So it is just a matter of helping our city as a whole welcoming diversity as it should. That is why I think our schools can be a big piece of helping the community transform in a more meaningful way. We take that seriously and I think we have to work like any district does, but I am proud of the efforts we have taken and I think we have a way that we can continue to do that work in the future.

When asked to provide any written documentation of information shared with parents or the larger community in an effort to educate and “transform”, Rick was not able to provide anything.

While three superintendents involved in this study identified the need and desire to educate the community on the changing student demographics, none of them were able to provide specific examples as to how this is occurring. Of the archival data provided by superintendents, none of the artifacts included this kind of information from the district perspective.

### **Poverty over Race**

Throughout the interactions with the four superintendents, it appeared that these district leaders were more comfortable discussing the topic of poverty as opposed to the topic of race and its relationship to student achievement. Russell, when asked to describe

what his principals need to be successful in their leadership for all students, focused on poverty as the most pressing issue in his district.

I think while I believe all of our principals believe all children can learn and believe that we have to address the demographic changes that are currently in our district with respect to race, I think the lower socioeconomic status of our kids, something that transcends cultural diversity and other components, is the real challenge. It doesn't mean we don't value poor students, it is just a different frame that we are trying to use on a broader level. We are trying to hold the same high expectations for poor students and poor families.

Greg agreed that poverty is the main issue his district is facing in Millerville. Our issue is not with ethnicity. It really has to do with poverty. This has been a huge "aha" for us. The old Anglo middle-class way of calling a meeting and expecting parents to come doesn't work anymore. I am trying to help my principals see that if parents don't come to meetings it doesn't mean they don't care. We have to go to them. We found more and more that if we provide food...we are going to have dinner and your kids are going to perform and by the way we are also going to give you some parent pointers. We are slowly making shifts in how we get busy and socioeconomically challenged parents involved.

When asked to speak more specifically to changes in racial diversity in his school district and his level of satisfaction with the academic achievement of all students, Greg again answered through the lens of poverty.

Sadly, the biggest change in our district has been not a change in ethnic backgrounds but a change in the poverty level. We all consider ourselves

“middle-class”. What does that mean? What is our mindset around poverty? That is probably the biggest cultural shift here have to get used to. Not good or bad, just a fact and deal with it. Some of these shifts has made a huge difference in us and our middle-class teaching staff honing in and understanding where our kids in poverty are coming from.

When pressed to describe in more specific detail how students are achieving academically, both students living in poverty and those who identify as African American or Hispanic, he simply responded, “We are flat.”

Tom also described poverty as the major issue facing his school principals and talked about the differences in schools comprised of mostly “wealthy” students compared to schools serving a more socioeconomically diverse clientele. Even when pressed to respond more specifically to the achievement of students who identify in different racial groups, this superintendent responded through a lens of poverty saying, “We are really most concerned with poverty as an overriding contributor to deficiencies in academics.”

### **Superintendent Learning**

District level leaders working in suburban school districts experiencing changes in student demographics are faced with the need to engage in personal learning in order for them to know how to equip others in their system with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to meet the needs of all students in their care. The four superintendents studied brought varying opinions, perspectives, and experiences to this aspect of the conversation.

Tom shared that he faced “a big learning curve” when it came to understanding how to equip his district to truly help all students achieve at high levels.

By and large the vast majority of our teaching staff is white. The vast majority of our principals are white. We are now serving a very diverse student clientele. I am white. I don't have an understanding of other races, other cultures. I've never lived in poverty so it's difficult to really understand that. I watch my principals try to deal with these issues and I just don't know.

When asked to identify specific ways he is working to build his own understanding and skills, Tom was not able to respond, only naming other professionals in his district who are given responsibilities to work with certain groups of students.

I rely on our bilingual coordinator. I work with some people in the community who have connections to families. We have some organizations who provide resources to some of our neediest schools, so I meet with those people. We have wonderful psychologists and social workers that I rely tremendously on to help out with these problems.

Greg has been more proactive in his work to inform his leadership for all students. He relies on colleagues both within and outside of his district for strategies, inspiration, and camaraderie.

I have taken advantage of the wisdom and experience of superintendents around me. We have a group of district leaders that meets frequently to share, offer and seek advice. My biggest source of new learning is probably my own colleagues here in my district. I have gone to national conferences where I know topics related to issues of race and poverty will be covered. I have built professional reading time into our monthly administrative team meetings here. I use Twitter, which has been an amazing resource.

When asked to expound further on the specific resources he has relied upon for information and strategies used to build his capacity to achieve equity and access for all students, Rick was unable to provide that information.

### **Summary of Results**

This chapter presented the findings from the study. This study aimed to understand how suburban school principals leading in increasingly diverse contexts learn in order to meet the needs of their students. Additionally, this study aimed to understand the importance and relevance of the principal/superintendent relationship in this effort to follow through on the promise to help all student achieve equity and excellence regardless of race or ethnicity. Lastly, an understanding of how district administrators in these contexts are working to support principals in their work all students was sought.

### **Conclusions from Research Question One**

The primary research question for this study asked: What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles? Based on the data generated by the conversations with twelve suburban school principals and associated archival data provided by these school leaders, leadership dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for these administrators were identified. The following table displays these leadership dispositions, knowledge, skills, and resources discussed by the principals studied.

Table 42

*Leadership Dispositions, Knowledge, Skills, and Resources Identified as Vital in the Work of Suburban School Principals Leading in Schools Experiencing Shifts in Student Demographics*

<b>Leadership Dispositions</b>	<b>Leadership Knowledge</b>	<b>Leadership Skills</b>	<b>Resources</b>
Growth mindset	Change management	Crucial conversations	Personal mission
Service orientation	Supervision and evaluation	Strategies to disrupt marginalization	Peer collaboration
Grit	Data literacy		Mentors

### **Conclusions from Research Question Two**

The second research question asked: What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully deliver on the promise of creating school environments within which all students succeed? The twelve principals studied identified specific aspects of the principal/superintendent relationship necessary for them to feel supported, connected to the goals and work of the district as a whole, and competent in the work they do every day for their students and their teaching staff. These included a shared vision and mission for student success, performance feedback, autonomy in their work, and a belief that the superintendent trusts them to do their work effectively.

### **Conclusions from Research Question Three**

The third research question asked: How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies and supporting principals in proactively leading through racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized such groups of students? The superintendents studied discussed their intent to help principals lead through changes in student demographics but how other responsibilities impeded these

efforts including a need to educate the community at large about a changing student clientele. The four superintendents involved in this research conversed more readily about the topic of poverty as compared to discussing the topic of race and its intersection with student achievement in their districts. Lastly, superintendents discussed the resources they rely upon for their own learning which included internal and external colleagues in educational administration.

Chapter Five will present a summary of the findings related to the research purpose and reviewed literature. Conclusions and implications of this study on the practice of educational administration and the potential for future research will also be discussed.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand what suburban school principals leading in increasingly diverse contexts need in order to meet the needs of their students. Additionally, this study aimed to understand the importance and relevance of the principal/superintendent relationship in their collective work to follow through on the promise to help all student achieve equity and excellence regardless of race or ethnicity. Lastly, an understanding of how district administrators in these contexts are working to support principals in their work all students was sought.

A qualitative approach was employed to capture the lived experiences of twelve suburban school principals and their four superintendents. Four districts in Wisconsin with significant increases in the numbers of students who identified as African American or Hispanic were identified for participant selection. In addition to four superintendents, a total of twelve school principals – four elementary principals, four middle school principals, and four high school principals participated in the study. Through a series of unstructured interviews and an analysis of archival data provided by each study participant, answers to the three research questions were sought. The primary research questions in this study were:

1. What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles?

2. What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully deliver on the promise of creating school environments within which all students succeed?
3. How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies and supporting principals in proactively leading through racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized such groups of students?

Chapter one introduced the research through a description of the background, purpose, approach, significance, limitations, and vocabulary of the study. Chapter Two included a review of literature about the theory and research related to the study in the areas of the historical perspective of accountability in public education, the evolving roles of both the superintendent and principal, the leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of the contemporary principal, the changing demographics of the United States and their schools, the challenges faced by principals working in demographically diverse contexts, the superintendent/principal relationship, and how superintendents can support and retain principals. Chapter Three detailed the research questions addressed in this study as well as the study's methodology and research design. Chapter Three also provided detailed information about site and participant selection, and data collection and analysis techniques. Chapter Four included a presentation and summary of the data generated by the study design in alignment with each of the three research questions. This final chapter will include a summary and discussion of the findings related to the three research questions and the related reviewed literature. Conclusions and implications of this study related to professional practice and further

research will also be included. The findings are first discussed as themes aligned to each of the three research questions and then within the context of each of the four districts involved in this study.

### **Discussion and Analysis of the Findings**

#### **Question #1**

What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles?

Twelve suburban school principals were studied: four elementary principals, four middle school principals, and four high school principals. These leaders were selected because they work in suburban school districts that have experienced significant increases in the numbers of students who identify as either African American or Hispanic. Upon initial contact with each potential principal research subject, it was curious to reflect on their reactions to the invitation to participate in the study. The school leaders in Stratton and Northtown were not surprised and could immediately connect their current leadership context with the goals and aims of the research. However, the principals in Millerville and Lakeside shared the same initial reaction - one of initial surprise but then eventual acknowledgement of the appropriateness of their participation in the study. Nancy from Millerville said during the first conversation with this researcher, "This is so interesting. I have been thinking about your study and at first, I didn't understand why you wanted to talk to me, but now, you are right, our student demographics have really changed." Scott, the middle school principal from Lakeside

was also surprised at the invitation to participate and said, “Have our demographics changed that much? Yeah, I guess they have, haven’t they?” This brought about questions regarding the frequency and depth of in-district conversations about demographic change and if principals in these two districts were asked to reflect on how to grow as a leader in order to meet the needs of all students and staff in their care.

Through the face-to-face interviews with these twelve principals and a review of archival data presented by each, a greater understanding of their current leadership context, particularly related to a changing student demographic, and what resources they were relying upon to inform their leadership for all students was sought. What emerged in the data were both “in-leader” and external resources. The “in-leader” resources are best described as leadership dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for thrive in the current context of suburban school district experiencing significant student demographic change. In addition, these leaders described their reliance on a personal mission to help all students succeed regardless of race, ethnicity, or other distinguishing characteristic. The external resources described as necessary and valuable in the work of these twelve principals were peer collaboration and access to mentors.

### **Leadership dispositions.**

The principals studied described a set of leadership dispositions they rely upon to lead with competence and confidence through increasing accountability pressures related to state-level mandates and changes in student demographics in their schools. The dispositions identified in the analysis of interview and archival data connect to previous literature that describes competencies necessary for success in the principalship in the present-day context but also suggest an evolving mindset necessary for school leaders

working in increasingly diverse suburban contexts. Previously considered an idyllic locale for educational leaders seeking positions characterized by high levels of student achievement and a focus on managerial competence, suburban school districts are now in need of courageous, thoughtful, resilient leaders who come to the position equipped with a specific set of leadership skills previously only thought relevant for the urban school principal.

***Growth mindset.***

A theme identified in the transcript and archival data was that of a growth mindset – an approach to the position of suburban school principal leading in an increasingly diverse school context that is characterized by an openness to change, new learning, effort, and development of self and others. As Fullan (2001) described, these leaders are asked to “lead in a culture of change” which involves understanding and embracing change, building knowledge, and making sense of competing initiatives and priorities while encouraging teachers and students to adapt, learn, unlearn, and relearn. Goleman’s (1995) theory of emotional intelligence and its relevance in the work of school leaders applies here as he contends that in order to be a successful leader, one must possess self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Motivation was the most salient aspect related to the responses of the principals studied and their discussions of growth mindset thinking in their work.

Kotter’s (2002) eight-step change model and the need to empower others to act, take risks, and focus on continuous improvements in the collective work of school leaders and teachers to help all students achieve at high levels regardless of race or ethnicity was reinforced by the twelve school leaders who participated in this study. Previous research

details the effort, focus, courage, and persistence necessary to truly transform schools into learning environments within which all students are valued and succeed (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Evans, 2007; Cooper, 2009, 2013; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). A growth mindset disposition is vital to the success of principals working in complex suburban school settings, allowing them to accept and embrace responsibility, change, complexity and ambiguity, and conflict.

*Service orientation.*

Analysis of the data collected from the twelve suburban school principals studied revealed a theme of service orientation – an approach to one’s work that is thoughtful, helpful, caring, and empathic. This theme connects again to the work of Goleman (1995) and the theory of emotional intelligence as a necessary tenant of effective leadership. As these suburban school leaders strategize change and create a shared vision for the ownership in actualizing success for all students, modeling and cultivating a service orientation towards the work in suburban schools was discussed as important and necessary in their efforts. This connects to the work of Marzano and Waters (2005) and their meta-analysis of the twenty-one leadership responsibilities of school principals that are most impactful. Fostering a shared belief system and a sense of community and demonstrating an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff were cited by these researchers as key leadership actions for school principals and have relevance to the data collected in this study. Madsen and Mabokela (2013) warned that a group leader has a powerful role in the intensification of intergroup conflict. The personal modeling of a service orientation and the cultivation of such in others can minimize and manage conflict so that energies can be focused on the work of teaching and learning.

***Grit.***

Grit, a strength of will and character, was discussed by these suburban school principals in their descriptions of their current work as they lead through shifts in student demographics. The work of school principals today is challenging, multi-faceted, emotional, and demanding. This work is dynamic, interpersonal, and messy and requires perseverance, tenacity, strategy, and resolve (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Marzano and Waters (2007) extrapolated twenty-one distinct, powerful, and effective leadership actions of school leaders. In addition to those responsibilities identified by these researchers, those who study leadership in diverse contexts describe additional responsibilities that require a strength of will and character. These include a courage to confront discriminatory practices and an ability to deploy strategies to disrupt the marginalization of particular groups of students (Evans, 2007; Welton, Diem, & Holme, 2013; Cooper, 2009). To face these daily responsibilities and opportunities for meaningful change, suburban school leaders must have strength of will and character, moral purpose (Fullan, 2003), and a strong sense of what is just and unjust (Theoharis, 2008).

**Leadership knowledge.**

The twelve principals studied discussed the specific leadership knowledge they identify as necessary and valuable in the work they do in suburban schools experiencing changes and shifts in student demographics. Understanding the processes of change and how to plan for and execute a change agenda, how to effectively supervise and evaluate staff, and how to strategically use data to inform decisions and guide leadership actions emerged as themes in the transcript and artifact data analyzed.

### *Change management.*

Understanding how to lead and manage change is substantiated in the literature as necessary for leaders in schools (Fullan 2001; Goleman, 1995; Kotter, 2002; Northouse, 2004; Marzano & Waters, 2005). Principals leading in suburban schools within which a mismatch or disconnect between the norms and values of teachers and those of the students they serve may face additional challenges when trying to affect change (Tozner, Senese, & Violas, 2009). Complex issues of race, power, and relationships create a need for leaders who are equipped with the knowledge, strategies, support, and courage to make curriculum, instruction, family partnerships, and student engagement decisions that will positively impact all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic or language status, ethnicity, or disability (Cooper, 2009). Change in these suburban school settings experiencing shifts in student demographics becomes increasingly complex, requiring strategy, reflection, distributed leadership, and vision. The principals studied discussed difficulties navigating change as they face competing initiatives and priorities in their schools and districts.

### *Supervision and evaluation.*

School leaders in Wisconsin have been tasked to implement and administer a state-wide teacher evaluation system. This robust and rigorous protocol requires a thorough knowledge-base in order to effectively and fairly supervise and evaluate teachers. The suburban school principals studied identified this system as an entry-way into important and sometimes difficult conversations with teachers about ineffective pedagogical approaches, inadequacies in planning and preparation or classroom management, and overall professionalism. A few of these leaders articulated specific

issues they have tackled, through the supervision and evaluation process, directly related to equity and access for all students. In order to effectively impact ineffective or immoral pedagogical approaches or systemic structures, principals must be well-versed in effective approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Marzano and Waters (2005) identify this as a vital competency of principals. In order to create a shared vision and hold others accountable to that vision, principals must ensure the vision includes a clear description of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices that are designed with the success of all learners in mind (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Frattura & Capper, 2007). This can be discussed, debated, and ensured through an effective and targeted approach to supervision and evaluation.

*Data literacy.*

A need to understand data and use it effectively to inform and carry out a change agenda was identified as a theme in the transcript and artifact analysis. The school leaders studied described difficulty using the various student data they have access to in a way that is focused and aligned to district and school goals. As these school principals work to create an urgency for change and a compelling “why” to substantiate a need to change, effective utilization of data is crucial in this effort (Sinek, 2011). In order to plan for resistance, measure success, provide feedback for mid-course corrections, prioritize and focus, and connect new information with existing schema, suburban school leaders must effectively leverage data to inform current and future thinking and doing (Fullan, 2001; Goleman, 1995; Kotter, 2002; Marzano and Waters, 2005).

**Leadership skills.**

If knowledge is the “what” of leadership, skills are the “how” of leadership. Principals need to be equipped with a variety of abilities and competencies in order to effectively manage change and lead others through change. Through the discussions had with twelve suburban school principals leading in increasingly diverse contexts about their current role, the challenges they face, and the skills they need in order to follow through on the promise of helping all students achieve at high levels, a willingness to engage in crucial conversations and being equipped with strategies to disrupt systems that marginalize students were themes worthy of analysis.

As these leaders identify opportunities to engage in difficult, sometimes emotionally charged conversations with those they serve (teachers, parents, students, supervisors, community members) about issues related to race, they also identify a need to develop a skillset that helps them do so effectively and confidently. A “courage to confront” and the associated skills necessary in order to help advance a change agenda grounded in equity and access for all students is directly connected to the previous findings of Nkomo and Cox (1996) and Thomas (2008). Shannon and Bylsma (2007) identified a willingness to confront ineffective teaching practices in an effort to forward inclusive and integrative practices as one of nine leadership actions present in high-achieving schools. Madsen and Mabokela (2013) explained in great detail the variety of conflicts experienced by school leaders working in diverse contexts due to competing goals, competition for resources, cultural differences, and power differences. While the conversations with these leaders seemed to only superficially address these issues, it was clear that these conflicts, or the potential for them to occur, was in their consciousness.

***Resources suburban school principals rely upon as they lead through demographic change.***

In addition to the leadership dispositions, knowledge, and skills identified by twelve suburban school principals leading through demographic change, a few specific resources they rely upon in their work for all students emerged through transcript and artifact analysis. These were a reliance upon a personal mission, the need for collaboration with peers, and the value of mentorship in the principalship.

***Personal mission.***

Fullan (2001) discussed the importance of “moral purpose” in the work of school leaders. Marzano and Waters identified the importance of a school leader to communicate their ideals and beliefs about education in their work. Shannon and Bylsma (2007) suggested the development of mission, vision, values, and goals as a leadership action related to high-achieving schools. This work must be grounded in the mission of the individual school leader so as to communicate authenticity, alignment of mental models, and integrity in the work (Frattura & Capper, 2007). Some of the twelve school leaders studied described their reliance upon a mission for student success regardless of race or other distinguishing characteristics. Some described this as a “calling” to lead in a diverse school setting because the individual’s perception of gifts and skills being a “match”.

***Peer collaboration.***

While the principals studied did not describe a connection to or reliance upon their superintendent for inspiration, guidance, motivation, or direction, the principals studied did describe a strong connection to and reliance upon their peers – other principals working primarily in the same district or in surrounding districts. The four

elementary principals expressed the most consistent and resounding connection to peers as they discussed the isolation they feel in the role of elementary principal and how they frequently reach out to colleagues for direction and advice. These findings are connected to research previously conducted that illuminated the importance of collaboration in the work of school and district leaders (Gano-Phillips et al., 2011; Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011). Leone, Warnimont, and Zimmerman (2009), Noeverman and Koene (2012), Peus et al., (2012), and Vie (2012) described work environments characterized by strong relationships, trust, and confidence. The principals studied reached out to colleagues instead of to supervisors to create this kind of environment.

### ***Mentors.***

Principal preparation programs often fail to adequately prepare new school leaders for their posts (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hull, 2012; Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Stratton, 2003), therefore, superintendents must provide immediate and ongoing professional support and learning to ensure principals can carry out all of their responsibilities in a successful way. Grissom and Loeb (2011) suggest that both new and veteran principals need ongoing training and support in both instructional leadership and traditional management skills. Many principals report feeling unprepared for the enormity of the job and very few are afforded a mentor for support and assistance (Shoho & Barnett, 2011; Stratton, 2003). Most principals are left to discover on their own, the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of the position (Spillane & Hunt, 2010). A few of the leaders studied specifically mentioned a positive experience with a

mentor and how this personal resource provided beneficial support, guidance, inspiration, and direction in the role of suburban school principal.

Robust professional development structures and opportunities that begin with a focus on “meaningful induction” (Shoho & Barnett, 2011, p. 587) and include a continuous focus on instructional leadership (Lashway, 2002) are necessary for successful principals. Superintendents can build strong learning communities through an unrelenting focus on professional learning for principals. Through coaching and ongoing performance feedback, principals should be allowed to put new learning into practice, be afforded an opportunity to reflect on and refine their skills, and build competence and capacity overtime. Fullan (2002) refers to this as learning in context and views this as a critical aspect of principal development and principal support. This can only be accomplished if appropriate systems of support are provided (Fink & Resnick, 2001). These findings from previous research connect to the lived-experiences of some of the study participants – those who have been afforded or independently sought out a mentor relationship.

### **Question #2**

What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully deliver on the promise of creating school environments within which all students succeed?

Seeking to understand the relevance of the principal/superintendent relationship in the work of twelve suburban school principals as they learn to lead through significant shifts in student demographics in their schools, revealed a concerning disconnect. While the principals studied could readily articulate what they desire from their superintendents

and what their district administrators could provide that would make a meaningful difference in their daily work, none of the twelve principals described a deep or impactful relationship with their superintendent. In fact, all principals studied reported rarely seeing their superintendents in their buildings. When asked to articulate what they knew about their superintendent's mission and vision for the work of the district, none of these principals were able to provide a specific response.

The principals studied did identify the following when asked to describe what they need from their superintendents to face their work with competence and confidence: shared vision and mission for student success, useful and meaningful performance feedback, autonomy in their work, and a belief that the superintendent trusts them to do their work effectively.

#### **Shared mission and vision.**

Theoharis (2010) describes the ideal shared approach to educational leadership that could be shared by superintendent and principals working in suburban school districts experiencing significant changes in student demographics. Since principal preparation programs often fail to adequately prepare new school leaders for their posts (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hull, 2012; Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Stratton, 2003), superintendents must provide immediate and ongoing professional support and learning, to ensure principals can carry out all of their responsibilities in a successful way. Grissom and Loeb (2011) suggest that both new and veteran principals need ongoing training and support in both instructional leadership and traditional management skills. Many principals report feeling unprepared for the enormity of the job and very few are afforded a mentor for support and assistance (Shoho & Barnett, 2011;

Stratton, 2003). Most principals are left to discover on their own, the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of the position (Spillane & Hunt, 2010).

Robust professional development structures and opportunities that begin with a focus on “meaningful induction” (Shoho & Barnett, 2011, p. 587) and include a continuous focus on instructional leadership (Lashway, 2002) are necessary for successful principals. Superintendents can build strong learning communities through an unrelenting focus on professional learning for principals. Through coaching and ongoing performance feedback, principals should be allowed to put new learning into practice, be afforded an opportunity to reflect on and refine their skills, and build competence and capacity overtime. Fullan (2002) refers to this as learning in context and views this as a critical aspect of principal development and principal support. This can only be accomplished if appropriate systems of support are provided (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

### **Performance feedback.**

A strong, consistent theme present in the transcript data gathered from the twelve principals studied was that of a desire for meaningful feedback about their performance. These leaders felt sometimes like “a stranger in a strange land” navigating a course with no map nor guidebook. They expressed a need for ongoing performance appraisal to inform their thinking, strategy, and execution. Hess and Kelly (2005) state that “today, principals are asked to lead in a new world marked by unprecedented responsibilities and challenges...” (p. 244). Over the past ten years in public schools in Wisconsin, these challenges seemed to compound annually in the face of increasing mandates, tightened accountability structures, and an omnipresent political noise that is both a distractor and wet blanket placed on the education sector. In order to face these challenges every day

with gusto, enthusiasm, and confidence, principals require direction, guidance, and coaching. While these school principals serving in increasingly diverse suburban contexts expressed a desire and need for robust performance appraisal approaches from their superintendent, none of them reported this reality in their current setting. In fact, none of the twelve principals described the current supervisory relationship with their superintendent as valuable or necessary to their daily work with students, teachers, or families.

Existing research substantiates the power and impact of a healthy supervisory relationship grounded in trust and its correlation to increased productivity and job satisfaction. Zheng, Zhang, and Li (2012) explain that the ability to collaborate with subordinates, keenly observe their behaviors, and give them honest and useful feedback, are critical skills of performance appraisal that need to be used by supervisors. The appraisal process will only be effective if clear standards of performance have been set and well-communicated (Eller & Carlson, 2009). The principals studied did not report receiving clear, consistent, connected, or useful feedback about their performance from their superintendents nor did the superintendents studied describe a focus on or importance of the supervisory relationship they had with their principals.

The supervisory process then, has to allow for support and guidance in order for subordinates to meet the expectations of those standards. Derrington and Sanders (2011) suggest that supervisors must demonstrate that the supervisory relationship is intended to help and support, not punish or demean. Ongoing feedback, high visibility of the supervisor in the work environment of the subordinate, frequent checks for understanding and progress, and praise of minor and major accomplishments are vital to a successful

appraisal process (Vie, 2012; Noeverman & Koene, 2012). These twelve school leaders expressed a feeling of wandering through the dark searching for the light in their efforts to learn how to truly lead to serve all students regardless of race and were not experiencing a systematic, articulated, district-level approach to supervision and evaluation.

The research is clear in that the development of principal expertise occurs through the provision of support, assistance, quality training, professional learning, and opportunities for networking and collaboration (Fullan, 2001, 2008a, 2008b; Leithwood, Lewis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Reeves, 2009; Whitaker, 2003). The principals studied expressed a need to learn in order to serve their students and their families. Some described “feeling like a first year administrator” when discussing their efforts to help all students succeed at high levels in their schools.

### **Autonomy and trust.**

While the principals studied seek feedback, guidance, and direction, they also expressed a desire for autonomy in their work and the understanding that their superintendent trusts them to do their work well. Trust is the bedrock of the superintendent-principal relationship, the importance of which is clearly substantiated in the literature. Mutual trust is essential for the organization to successfully meet challenges and achieve the organization’s strategic objectives and mission (Tarter & Hoy, 1988). Covey and Merrill (2008) believe a leader’s “ability to establish, grow, extend, and restore trust with all stakeholders is the critical leadership competency” (p. 323). An attribute of a high-trust environment is inspiring others to work hard, and Sinek (2011) explains that, “to inspire employees the leaders of the company must gain the trust of

those who work under them” (p. 53). Followers will buy into the work of the organization and the organization’s leadership if trust has been firmly established (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). These are interesting findings when compared to the experiences and opinions of the twelve principals involved in this study. Some principals would say, “I think my superintendent trusts me”, but then not be able to explain specifically why that belief was held. Some of the principals studied when asked, “How important is your relationship with your superintendent?” would respond, “Very important”, but then would not be able to explain the relevance of the relationship to their daily work.

Supervisors and subordinates must build and develop relationships based on confidence and trust (Saban & Wolfe, 2002; Covey & Merrill, 2008). When trust is established between supervisors and subordinates, loyalty and confidence in their work grows. Vie (2012) suggests that supervisors can demonstrate trust by giving their subordinates autonomy in their job. This connects directly to the professional preferences of these suburban school principals and is substantiated by the work of Gupta and Singh (2013) who posit that supervisors should empower their employees in order to gain buy-in and trust (p. 82). Leroy, Palanski, and Simons (2012) state that, “leader integrity drives follower performance” (p. 255). Sinek (2011) adds that “without trust, the buy-in is not there, and a common goal is not present” (p. 53). Though detailed questions about the importance and impact of trust were not included in the conversations held with principals, it would be informative to probe more deeply in this area and investigate the intersections of trust, buy-in, and common goals because through the interviews with these school leaders, the strength of all three could be questioned.

Peus et al. (2012) suggest that the open sharing of information and transparent communication build trust. According to Fullan (2002), when relationships improve, schools improve. Hoy & Miskel (2012) state quite plainly that leaders cannot transform their organizations without influence, which is built on trust. High-trust environments, as outlined by West and Derrington (2009), are characterized by the following: team members are allowed to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions without fear; cooperation is evident across teams; subordinates feel listened to and valued; communication is frequent and honest, promises are kept; and finally, teammates look for ways to help one another. Principals who work in high-trust environments are more invested and willing to work harder towards the goals of the district (Kowalski, 2005).

It is clear that trust matters in the work of educational leaders and was most certainly expressed as a key value by the principals studied. That said, the actual presence of trust and autonomy in the daily work of these suburban school leaders was not deeply investigated but could provide additional insights into how to best nurture and support their work. Several principals described a lack of information and transparency from their superintendents and a disconnected, sometimes at best, superficial relationship with their supervisor. The negative impact of these factors on trust in the workplace is a topic of future study

### **Question #3**

How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies and supporting principals in proactively leading through racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized such groups of students?

Of the three research questions, seeking answers to this particular question was the most difficult and troubling. The four superintendents studied provided a wide range of responses to questions about how they are working to support their building leaders in their work for all students and how they themselves are learning in order to move their entire districts forward. Two of the four superintendents studied were able to meaningfully engage in discussions about the students they serve and how they are working to support their principals while the other two district administrators provided more superficial responses that suggested a lack of awareness and knowledge base and a disconnect to the work of their building leaders.

The superintendents studied discussed their intent to help principals lead through changes in student demographics but how other responsibilities impeded these efforts including a need to educate the community at large about a changing student clientele. The four superintendents involved in this research conversed more readily about the topic of poverty as compared to discussing the topic of race and its intersection with student achievement in their districts. Lastly, superintendents discussed the resources they rely upon for their own learning which included internal and external colleagues in educational administration.

### **Providing support to principals.**

The superintendent has the responsibility for the moral and intellectual focus of a school district (Schlechty, 2009). Eller and Carlson (2009) explain that principals are looking for the following from their superintendent: clear and reasonable expectations of performance, an emotionally safe workplace, an absence of micro-management, honest and open communication, a clear vision and direction for the district, a visible and

ongoing supervisory process, feedback about performance, and support and guidance without the fear of reprisal.

The development of common beliefs, traditions, and values are also cited as effective in bringing a team together (Schlechty, 2009). Houston (2004) explains that the work of a superintendent is people work and that superintendents must be the source of possibility in the organization. When asked to specifically describe strategies, systems, or resources they have provided to principals intended to help them lead for equity and success for all learners, the responses provided by the superintendents studied were largely non-descript, characterized by incidental conversations, not thoughtful, systemic approaches to continuous improvement.

Previous research findings paint an aspirational scenario that did not connect to the lived experiences of the four suburban school superintendents studied. These district administrators described days filled with meetings driven by political agendas, public relations engagements, interactions with the business community and other stakeholder groups, but little time spent on the work of teaching and learning. Confirmed by their principals, these four district leaders described very little time spent in schools, focusing on the core mission of their districts. The principals studied expressed a feeling of being trusted, yet left to their own devices in the leadership of their respective schools.

### **Educating the larger community.**

Each of the four principals studied detailed their efforts in helping their communities understand and value diversity in their schools. Diversity is not a new concept in education, but the focus on the issue, due to a focus on standardized test scores, accountability, achievement gaps, special education, and discipline data as metrics

analyzed and made transparent like never before, has intensified significantly.

Over the last two decades, suburbs have become the location of residential development, attracting more and more residents and becoming the epi-center of racial, ethnic, and political change in America (Orfield & Luce, 2012).

Racially diverse suburbs are growing at a faster rate than their predominantly white counterparts. By 2010, just 28 percent of residents living in metropolitan areas (47 million people) lived in traditional suburbs, or predominantly white communities. This is considerably lower than in 2000 when 35 percent, or 54 million people, lived in these kinds of communities. Stated differently, in just 10 years, the percentage of suburban residents living in suburbs of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century stereotype fell from more than half (51 percent), to just 39 percent. Diverse suburban neighborhoods now outnumber those in central, urban cities by more than two to one (Tavernise, 2012). Over half of all members of racial minority groups in large metropolitan areas, including blacks, now live in the suburbs (Frey, 2011). Forty-four percent of suburban residents in the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States live in racially integrated communities, which are defined as places whose inhabitants are between 20 and 60 percent non-white (Tavernise, 2012). In 2011, a majority of the children born in the United States and nearly half of students attending public school in the U.S. were non-white, and by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the United States will have no racial majority (Tavernise, 2012). These shifts in demographics were at the forefront of the minds of the four superintendents studied as they described a typical community members as someone who believes the schools and the students they serve look the same as they did thirty years ago. As student achievement results get communicated in a very public way, the realities of an illusion of a once

homogeneous, high-achieving suburban community come into question, causing concern and unrest. These superintendents explained a difficulty in working with district residents, many of them graduates of the local school system who expect the same educational experience for their own children. Evans (2007) discussed issues of efficacy and agency, school identity, power, and politics in schools working to forward integrative practices in suburban districts experiencing changes in student demographic composition. These issues are certainly being faced by the four suburban district administrators who participated in this study.

### **Poverty over race.**

When discussing the leadership opportunities and challenges faced by four superintendents serving in increasingly diverse suburban contexts, it was striking the frequency with which they changed the conversation from one of race to that of poverty. Existing literature provides a complete description of challenges faced by suburban principals working in these settings which includes the need to foster a positive work environment created as teachers and leaders adjust to working with students of color (Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2009). These researchers caution practitioners to recognize changing demographics or they will not be able to effectively and proactively address teachers' concerns and disputes. If suburban school superintendents wish to avoid a downturn in organizational climate, turnover, absenteeism, and failed recruitment efforts, they must address issues of race forthrightly and courageously. It was seemingly uncomfortable and difficult for the superintendents studied to freely and honestly discuss issues related to race. The four superintendents, all white men, provided lengthy and

detailed information about the impact of poverty on their districts and their leadership, but danced around a thorough conversation about race.

### **How superintendents learn.**

The superintendents involved in this study are all leading in school districts experiencing change on several fronts. They are faced with the need to constantly learn in order to inform their thinking and change leadership strategy. When asked to describe the resources and sources of professional learning employed during this significant time of change, these four district administrators did not provide detailed responses. So preoccupied by the rigors and demands of the position, the four superintendents studied have not prioritized their own learning but instead have devoted the vast majority of the time and energy on day to day tasks. It calls into question the potential impact of this disconnect between the realities of the teachers and principals these superintendents serve and their need to continually learn and grow and the fact that they themselves are not placing a priority on personal professional development.

If suburban school superintendents must take action to ensure inclusive practices and equity and give voice to social justice values and advance this kind of change within their school districts, they must gain the dispositions, knowledge, and skills to make it happen (Welton, Diem, & Holme, 2013; Cooper, 2009). Evans (2007) found in her study of racially changing schools that even though the leaders were well-intentioned and focused on inclusive practices, their efforts were undermined by parents and teachers who wanted to protect the status quo. In order to effectively enter into productive dialogue with parents and teachers about issues of race, superintendents must employ a variety of strategies. These strategies can be learned through collaboration with others

leading in similar contexts, through an examination of the research literature, and through personal reflection. None of these four superintendents appeared to prioritize any of these activities in their work leading suburban districts through significant shifts in student demographics.

### **Summary of Archival Data**

One component of the design methodology for this study was the use of archival data as a way to verify and triangulate information obtained from the sixteen educational leaders who participated. The twelve principals and four superintendents were asked to provide a variety of written materials – materials they themselves had created – that would substantiate and corroborate the information that was gathered during the face-to-face interviews. Several requests for archival data were made to each of the study participants. In total, 107 pieces of archival data were collected. These included e-mail correspondence, meeting agendas, school/district improvement plans, newsletters, blog entries, websites, and literature used in connection to the goals of the school or district.

The principals studied were much more forthcoming with this data than the superintendents. There was a strong connection between interview and archival data for only two of the principals studied, however, with only one of these two leaders seeming to place a high priority on written communication to forward a transformative change agenda in her school. For the other ten principals, there was little to no linkage between the descriptions that were provided that detailed the goals and aims of the school and the challenges, concerns, and opportunities currently faced in leadership. It is clear that the archival data provided by principals was not a complete set of all of the written materials used by these school leaders, but if it was a representative sampling of written

correspondence that could corroborate the information shared during the interviews, it suggests that the principals studied are not yet addressing the opportunity to tackle issues of marginalization in their schools.

The archival data provided by the four suburban school superintendents provided an overview of each district's goals but did not describe the personal philosophy or mission of the author. A review of each district's webpage, school board agendas and meeting minutes, and community newsletters, did not provide further insight nor a connection to the information obtained during the interviews. Again, while the archival data provided was certainly not a complete set of written communication for each district administrator, if considered a representative sampling and evidence of the current goals and priorities of each district, like the principals studied, these superintendents are not yet seizing the opportunity to tackle issues of marginalization in their districts.

The themes that emerged through the analysis of data related to the three primary research questions that guided this study come together in unique and often-time troubling ways within the context of each of the four districts studied. Considering the perspectives and opinions of principals in combination with those of their superintendents paint a concerning picture for the future, not only in Northtown, Stratton, Lakeside, and Millerville, but also across the country as our nation becomes more racially diverse. Perhaps lessons learned through this introspection of the four districts involved in this study can illuminate future directions and cautions for other educational administrators as they work to lead through student demographic change and actualize success and opportunity for all they serve.

### **Putting the Pieces Together: District Vignettes**

## **Northtown**

Northtown is a large, suburban school district serving a diverse student clientele in several elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. The superintendent of Northtown, Tom, serving in his sixth year as district administrator, though seemingly well intentioned, is obviously very disconnected from the daily work of his principals who report rarely seeing him in their buildings. Most concerned with the political and fiscal aspects of his position, Tom is unable to articulate his philosophical or ethical beliefs about his work or that of the principals he is charged to lead. Leading a district that is growing increasingly diverse from every perspective, including racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically, this district administrator was not able to intelligently respond to questions about cultural competence because he was unfamiliar with the term.

Tom claims to want to support his building leaders and says that he trusts them to do good work, but there is no evidence of any formal or informal performance appraisal or feedback system in place within which he could provide meaningful guidance or direction. Northtown's principals involved in this study express a strong desire to engage in a trusting, deep, and meaningful relationship with Tom as they are seeking a shared vision for student success that will pave the way for their leadership and the greater work of the district as a whole, however, none of the four school leaders describe this kind of relationship with their superintendent.

Stacy, the elementary principal from Northtown, spoke straightforwardly about the quality of her interactions with Tom and how the infrequency with which they occur and the shallowness of the content when they do happen have left her feeling isolated and left to her own devices as she leads in a school experiencing significant demographic

shifts. Vince, the middle school principal from Northtown involved in this study described a similar experience in his relationship with Tom, describing a superficial, cordial interaction style when the two did have the opportunity to interact. Vince detailed his recent efforts to help his teaching staff embrace and value the current student body at his school and change their instructional approaches to better meet the needs of all students. He commented, “I think I know what I’m doing, but sometimes I would like to hear it from him (Tom), that we are moving in the right direction.”

Perhaps the most eloquent, poignant, and inspiring interactions this researcher had the opportunity to engage in during the course of the study occurred with Jennifer, the high school principal subject from Northtown. She spoke unabashedly and courageously about her work as a leader for equity and excellence in her school. In fact, it was her idea to have three words painted prominently in the school’s main entrance:

Equity...Excellence...Expectations. Her remarks about her relationship with her superintendent teetered on the edge of anger as she described mixed messages and differing sets of expectations – the one she lives by and the one her superintendent applies to his work in the district. She described the expectation that she meaningfully and thoughtfully evaluate her teaching staff while she has yet to receive a proper evaluation from her superintendent. Jennifer detailed her shock and awe at her incoming students’ faltering literacy skills and how she wished those with whom she worked at the district office would share her frustration and urgency for change. When asked to describe the resources she relies upon to inform and influence her leadership, Jennifer struggled to identify any in-district colleagues or supervisors who shared her passion, commitment, or vision for student success.

Though a deep and thorough analysis of student achievement data was not part of this study, a cursory review of student success at Jennifer's school seems to indicate a positive, upward trend, whereas the trajectory of student success as a whole in Northtown does not look as promising. "I'm sometimes out here on a limb, working my hardest to make an impact for our kids. I just don't know if my bosses take their job as seriously as I take mine." This comment captures the sentiments from the three Northtown principals involved in this study.

Not all of the schools in Northtown have experienced noticeable changes in student demographics...yet. A few elementary schools and one of the district's three comprehensive high schools continue to serve a relatively homogeneous clientele. In the absence of a unifying and clear, strong and widely communicated shared vision for student success in Northtown, the district's ability to close gaps in achievement and help all students achieve college and career readiness will be in peril. The principals currently working in the district who are having a positive impact on student achievement but are feeling a lack of support and direction from district office leaders will be tempted to seek positions elsewhere, potentially leading to additional problems related to leadership turnover.

### **Stratton**

Of the four districts studied, Stratton has seen the most significant change in the demographic composition of its student body over the past ten years. Like Northtown however, this shift has been very significant in some schools and less so in others. The three principals involved in this study serve in schools that have seen a more significant increase in the number of students who identify as Hispanic or African American. Just as

was expressed by the principals in Northtown, these three leaders are struggling to create learning communities within which all students succeed regardless of race. Like the principals in Northtown, these three receive very little assistance or guidance from their superintendent and have been left largely alone to work in complex leadership scenarios.

Stratton's district administrator, a lifelong resident who has spent his entire professional career working in the district, is deeply committed and devoted to Stratton. Russell, now in his tenth year as superintendent, seems to be suffering from a knowledge and skills gap. While he could provide in depth and specific descriptions of how he is working to support principals and continuously engage in his own learning so as to better serve his district, his principals described a very different reality. Focusing many of his comments on poverty as the main challenge faced by the district even when asked specific questions about leading through increases in racial diversity, Russell offered long and winding descriptions of how he and his district office team work to guide and support the work of principals. Paradoxically, Tess, Darius, and Chet describe a district office completely disconnected and removed from the work of schools, a situation that has resulted in resentment, frustration, and isolation.

The three Stratton principals who participated in this study uniformly described a divide in the district that is cut along racial and socioeconomic lines that has created an "east side/west side" paradigm. Principals leading in "east side" schools, those schools with the most racial and socioeconomic diversity, communicate mostly with other "east side" principals as they believe their colleagues working on the other side of town aren't experiencing the same challenges and issues and therefore could not possibly provide

salient advice or guidance. Chet, Darius, and Tess all work in “east side” schools and have created their own community of practice inclusive only of others leading in similar contexts. The district is seemingly unaware of or not concerned about this division within the district. As is the case in Northtown, this appears to be an opportunity lost because in time, all schools in Stratton will be given the opportunity to create inclusive learning communities that honor and value the racial and ethnic backgrounds of all students.

The Stratton principals each described the importance of self-reliance and an internal mission to serve as very important on their work. In addition, they each mentioned feeling alone and isolated in their work. Getting to know the leadership landscape in Stratton it is easy to understand why these principals expressed these sentiments. If the district office is largely absent from the daily work of principals and is not actively working to create communities of practice that allow school leaders to learn from one another, perhaps most importantly across the racial and socioeconomic divide through the city, the result is isolation and a need to rely on oneself for inspiration and direction. While autonomy in their work was mentioned by each of the Stratton principals studied, they also identified a desire for a deep and trusting relationship with their superintendent as a necessary, yet albeit elusive component to district success.

### **Lakeside**

The current leadership context in Lakeside is different than those in Northtown or Stratton. Changes in student demographics are a more recent development for educators working in this community. The principals from Lakeside involved in this study each described recent challenges they are working through that involve helping teachers

embrace the need to make pedagogical and philosophical shifts in their classrooms as they face student achievement data that highlights serious gaps in achievement in their schools that run across racial lines. Sam, a high school principal in Lakeside, expertly described how the fact that the vast majority of educators working in the district grew up within a thirty mile radius of the city and lack a larger perspective that could help inform and influence their instructional approaches, is hampering his efforts to create a learning community within which all students are successful.

Just as the principals from Northtown and Stratton described, principals from Lakeside expressed a desire to work more intimately with their superintendent, wanting more consistent and meaningful performance feedback and direction. Janet, an elementary principal in her first years working at that level, talked about a constant searching for “the right thing to do for our kids.” She detailed her struggle to make sense of the plethora of data she is provided that continues to show that her staff is not meeting the needs of all of their students, particularly students who Hispanic or African American. As the other elementary principals studied communicated during the interview process, Janet feels exceptionally isolated in her role and therefore relies upon herself, her mission, and her grit and perseverance to serve her students and their families.

Rick, Lakeside’s district administrator who is experiencing a long tenure in this role, could articulate the discrepancies in achievement cut along racial lines that his district is creating, but was unable to clearly describe the strategies, the methods he was employing to affect positive change in Lakeside’s schools. Unlike the superintendents from Northtown and Stratton who talked extensively about their efforts to educate the

larger community about the shifts in student demographics, Rick did not mention this as part of his most important work in Lakeside. Again, this district administrator's comments and perspectives seem oddly removed from the day to day realities of his building leaders. While Janet, Scott, and Sam spoke with intensity and frustration, describing their efforts to seek and employ any strategy that could possible make a positive impact on student success in their buildings, Rick spoke more about initiative fatigue and the political climate in the state as the primary pressures being placed on the Lakeside system.

### **Millerville**

The most significant chasm between a superintendent and a district's building principals was evident through the interactions with the leaders studied from Millerville. The superintendent, Greg, struggled significantly to answer questions about recent shifts in student demographics in his district and his principals were undaunted in expressing their anger about his lack of leadership, visibility, and connection to their work. While the principals studied from Millerville were respectful in their comments about their relationships with the superintendent, each of them blamed political pressures of the position and an inability to focus the work of the district on a climate and culture that is, in their words, characterized by discontinuity, false starts, and disconnected work that is not helping them do their jobs at the school level with competence or confidence.

Charles, a high school principal in the district was the most vocal and straightforward in his comments about the work he is trying to do in his school and how the superintendent has been of little to no assistance to him in his efforts. In fact, Charles explained that the district's lack of focus and propensity to "hop from one thing to the

next” has hampered his effectiveness as a principal. Nancy, an elementary principal in Millerville, who had the opportunity to leave the district for a number of years and then return to assume her current principalship, was able to articulate how significant the changes in student demographic composition have been over the past few years and how the district’s teachers and principals are not well-equipped to adequately serve their current student clientele – something she is very concerned and worried about. Similar to comments heard during interviews with leaders from Lakeside, Nancy described a teaching staff that is largely white, from the area, and lacking cultural awareness. Ironically, Greg, the superintendent, when asked to explain how he is equipping himself and his district with cultural competency, he was not able to answer because he said he didn’t know what the term meant.

Instead of detailing a specific and courageous vision for the success of all students in the district, when asked about efforts to build capacity and understanding in his district and ownership for the student success, Greg stuttered and rambled about certain people in who are seemingly responsible for students who identify as Hispanic or African American. He talked about social workers or teachers who work with students who are bilingual. These questions clearly made Greg nervous as he was not able to complete many sentences or string together a series of thoughts that were connected and made sense. Learning from Greg about his scattered thoughts about his responsibility as district superintendent to equip his system and himself with the dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary to help all students succeed regardless of race helped this researcher empathize with the principals studied and their frustrations working in a system devoid of a shared vision or mission.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

While the findings and conclusions from this study were specific to the twelve principals and four superintendents who participated and cannot be generalized, they did provide important insights into the lived experiences of practicing school and district leaders currently serving in increasingly diverse suburban settings. These insights can inform the work of educational leaders, both at the school and district levels serving in similar leadership contexts. Additionally, the information gained through this study can be used to inform the content of principal preparation programs as the next generation of school leader step into these very important roles.

#### **Targeted Supports for Suburban School Principals Leading in Increasingly Diverse Contexts**

The twelve principals studied identified the importance of collaboration with peers and access to mentors as potentially helpful in their work leading in increasingly diverse suburban school settings. Superintendents and other district leaders, through the systematic prioritization of collaboration and mentorship, could help equip principals with the leadership dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary to serve in these roles with confidence and competence.

Professional development for principals serving in these contexts should be a priority and an ongoing topic of collective reflection and refinement. The leaders studied identified the need to learn about change management, data literacy, and skills and methods to confront and disrupt the marginalization of specific students or student

groups. Because the principals studied discussed the importance of autonomy in their work, superintendents, through strong relationships with their principals, would be well served to allow principals the flexibility to identify relevant professional learning and methods and resources to engage in that learning.

### **Crisis in Superintendent Leadership?**

While the findings from this study of four districts that involved four superintendents and twelve building principals cannot be generalized, they do provide insights into both the present day leadership context in suburban school districts in Wisconsin but more importantly, to the future leadership contexts in suburban school districts across the country. As the country continues to become more and more diverse and all schools are expected to prepare every student to be college and career ready, the need for forward-thinking, courageous district leadership has never been more warranted.

Students attending our schools rely upon an entire system of professionals who must work in concert with one another, aligned through a shared vision for student success. Beginning with the superintendent who must craft, communicate, and live by an unrelenting mission to serve students and do whatever it takes to help them succeed, all professionals who work in a school system, following the lead of the district administrator, contribute to the climate and culture of the learning community. In the absence of a strong, clear, and unrelenting vision that requires every educator to work tirelessly to meet the needs of every student, every time, all of the time, students fall through the cracks, schools may veer in opposing directions, and results are not achieved.

The need for exceptional, transformational leadership in the superintendency has never been more pressing. As our communities and schools become increasingly diverse,

leadership must light the way forward to inclusive learning communities characterized by high expectations for student achievement and high levels of support for students and educators alike. The very fate of our nation depends on it.

**A call to action for superintendents.**

The most surprising and potentially concerning finding from this study was the consistent disconnect principals in all four districts studied reported from their superintendents and the lack of relevance they found in their relationship with their superintendent. For all of the twelve school leaders studied, they reported feeling isolated, sometime yearning for a deep and trusting relationship with their superintendent, but left to their own devices as they work to lead through shifts in student demographics.

The principals did identify some specific leadership actions they desired from their superintendent in their collective work for success for all students. They reported that if their superintendents were to craft and consistently communicate a clear and powerful vision for student success – one that provided direction and guidance for the school leaders charged with the actualization of that vision, their work would be more focused and clear. With so many competing priorities impacting emotions, time, and resource allocation, a clear and powerful vision from the district administrator would provide relief and solace for principals.

Superintendents, in their work to support principals, must strike a beautiful balance among autonomy, trust, and accountability, according the school leaders studied. While principals desire a robust performance appraisal system characterized by ongoing and useful feedback, they also expressed a need for autonomy in their work. Knowing their superintendent trusted them to do good work was cited by most principals involved.

However, most principals studied reported rarely interacting with their superintendent around important and relevant issues and a strong desire for that to change.

As superintendents working in diverse suburban districts have the opportunity to hire principals, the findings from this study may prove helpful. The leadership dispositions, knowledge, and skills identified through the transcript and document analysis yielded consistent themes that could be used to inform hiring practices in these settings. Developing hiring protocols and practices that identify dispositions: a growth mindset, a service orientation, and grit; knowledge: change management, data literacy, and a deep understanding of supervision and evaluation systems; and skills: strategies to confront and disrupt the marginalization of students; could lead to the successful selection of principal candidates.

**Principal preparation: Implications for training the next generation of school leaders.**

As the suburban landscape in public education continues to evolve and change, so must the leadership actions of the professionals charged with administration at both the school and district levels. The principals studied reported feeling like they were new to the field despite decades of service in the role in some cases. Even those relatively new to the role and at the start of their administrative careers expressed a feeling of uncertainty, vulnerability, and ineffectiveness as they work to understand and advocate for the changing needs of their student clientele and their families.

Principal preparation programs who currently cater to aspiring school leaders working in suburban school contexts must ensure a deep and meaningful connection to

and understanding of the actual daily work of these leaders as opposed to an adherence to and reliance upon the practices of suburban school leadership that were perceived as effective in the past. The complexity and intensity of the work of current suburban school principals cannot be understated and the need for relevant principal preparation programs committed to authentic learning experiences for aspiring suburban school leaders cannot be ignored. According to the school leaders studied, course content should include change management and change leadership, approaches to supervision and evaluation of staff, data literacy in continuous improvement efforts, opportunities to practice and be coached through difficult and emotional conversations about issues related to race, and strategies to effectively confront and disrupt ineffective teaching strategies and systemic structures that marginalize students. Principal preparation programs should also ensure aspiring administrators understand the importance of a strong and unrelenting vision for student success, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, ability or disability, gender, second-language learning status, or other identifying group characteristic and the role of the principal in crafting, communicating, and leading by that vision. Lastly, helping students learn how to foster a trusting and mutually beneficial relationship with their superintendent through self-advocacy, strong written and verbal communication skills, and a tight focus on school-specific needs and priorities, will assist new leaders when they enter the profession, according to the data obtained from the twelve principals involved in this study.

### **In search of transformational leadership.**

The principals selected for this study share at least two things in common: they all worked in increasingly diverse suburban school settings and were being asked to manage

complex change. Creating educational environments within which all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, ability or disability, gender, ethnicity, or language learning needs, demands transformational educational leadership. Characterized by shared goals, trust, empowerment, vision, and autonomy, transformational leadership, at both the district and school levels, can lead to real and lasting change in schools – change that could benefit everyone Geijsel et al, 1999; Stewart, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood et al., 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Yu, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Ambrose's (1987) Model of Complex Change provides insight into the daily struggles of the principals and superintendents studied as they work to learn, change, manage, and lead for the success of all students. While the importance or relevance of incentives in the work of these leaders did not emerge through the analysis of transcript or archival data, all other components involved in this model did surface.

For the principals studied, they expressed a need for a shared vision, the absence of which has led to confusion about the direction and priorities of the district. A lack of consensus around district goals and their connection to the work of individual schools has led to a feeling of disconnect between principals and superintendents. Principals leading in increasingly diverse contexts are faced with new learning and the need to acquire new leadership skills, leaving some anxious and nervous about their effectiveness and efficacy. As principals identify needs and opportunities for change and improvement in their buildings, they require additional or different resources. When those are not available or provided, frustration can result. The leaders studied reported a lack of a clear

plan of action or strategy aligned to meeting the needs of all learners, which has led to a feeling of searching, or false starts.

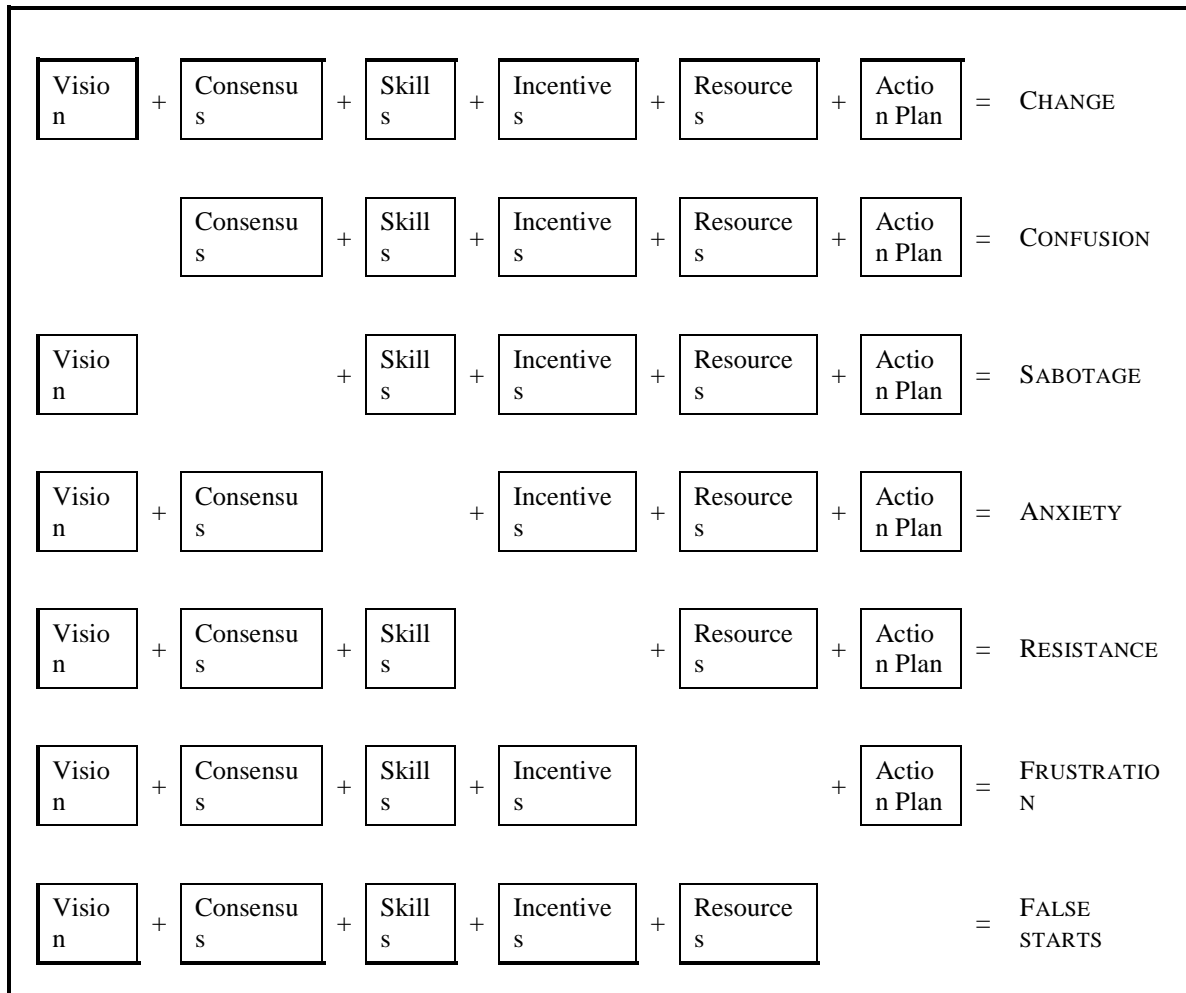
The superintendents studied are also navigating complex change in the face of a changing student clientele, state-imposed mandates, and increased accountability. Ambrose's Model of Managing Complex Change helps describe the complexity of their roles as well. In response and reaction to ever-changing political winds, superintendents are attempting to understand the state's vision for public education, which has led to confusion about what priorities should be prioritized at the local level and how resources should be allocated. Due to a significant lack of consensus present at the state level with respect to the public education agenda, school district superintendents, on some occasions, decide to ignore guidance or mandates from the state, sabotaging efforts to create consistency and continuity, albeit misguided and misinformed at times. Just as is true for the principals they hire and are expected to nurture, develop, and guide, these superintendents are facing a steep learning curve as they learn to understand, value, and empower an increasingly diverse student body, leaving some anxious and concerned about their effectiveness in the role. As battles and policy changes ensue over a state school funding model, local districts continue to struggle with finances and the administration of resources within their local districts, a process rife with frustration for all parties involved. Because a clear, state-wide plan of action has yet to emerge, district administrators experience the same sense of repeated false starts as the principals they employ.

As Ambrose suggests, when the vision is clear, consensus has been achieved, skills within leaders have been developed, resources are adequately and thoughtfully

deployed, appropriate incentives are put into place, and an action plan is developed that is grounded in a shared mission and vision and distributed leadership, lasting change can happen. When examining the current educational outcomes for students in the state of Wisconsin, a state suffering the largest racial achievement gap in the country, outcomes that are readily predicted by the color of a student's skin, Ambrose's Model of Managing Complex Change could be powerfully applied.

Transformational leadership does not currently exist in all places and spaces in the educational landscape in Wisconsin. Developing and communicating a courageous vision for student success, reaching consensus amongst stakeholders on that vision, allocating resources aligned to the vision, providing training and professional learning opportunities for all involved in actualizing the vision, ensuring appropriate incentives for those working successfully toward the vision, and crafting a thoughtful plan of action to ensure delivery on the vision is daunting, exhausting, emotional work. Do our students deserve anything less?

Figure 4

*Managing Complex Change Matrix*

Note. Ambrose, D. (1987). *Managing complex change*. Pittsburg, PA: The Enterprise Group.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study can only be attributed to the twelve suburban school principals and four suburban school superintendents who participated and cannot be generalized to the entirety of the field of educational administration. However, the findings illuminate the need for further study in a variety of areas, all of which could inform and influence current practice in the field.

## **The Outlier: Learning from a High School Principal Committed to Equity and Excellence**

Twelve school principals participated in this study: four elementary principals, four middle school principals, and four high school principals. Each school leader was engaged in three face-to-face interviews with the researcher. The researcher, through these various interactions with study participants, a review of archival data submitted by each, and the subsequent analysis of interview transcripts, was able to gain insights and form opinions about each individual school leader. The data collected from one individual study participant was qualitatively different than that collected from the other eleven study participants.

“Equity, Expectations, Excellence” – three words prominently painted in the entry vestibule at Jennifer’s high school in Northtown, something she insisted be done when she stepped into that role a few years ago. Her weekly blog entries are full of references to the importance of trust, the need for collaboration, specific data used to inform decisions and instructional practices. Jennifer does not shy away from difficult subjects in her written or verbal communication. The quality of the interview and archival data obtained through the three interactions with Jennifer set her apart from the other eleven principals studied. She comfortably conversed about her daily leadership opportunities and challenges, her vision for the success of all students, how she advocates for equity in her building, and the seriousness with which she takes her role. The language she chose to use when answering questions about the changing student demographics in her building and the responsibility she assumes to ensure all students in her care succeed at

the very highest levels, was specific, direct, and unapologetic. An excerpt from one of Jennifer's blog entries to her teaching staff was illustrative of her communication style:

You have put structures in place in your classrooms to support the shift of transformational learning paradigms for personalization that meet each unique student and their individual needs. You do this because you care, because you are smart, because you are a team, and because you trust one another.

You trust that if you take risks with students best interests in mind, that even if you fail at your first attempt, you will be supported. You trust that if you don't know how to do something that your colleague next door will help you out. You trust that you will enforce high expectations for all students because your colleague down the hall is not backing down from that same expectation. I value the culture of learning that you have started to establish during these first two weeks of school and most importantly I value and trust each of you.

Getting to know Jennifer through this study provided a glimpse of what transformational leadership at the school level looks like and suggests the potential for further research into the work of a principal truly committed to the success of all students. The potential to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and leadership actions and reactions of a seemingly transformational leader at the high school level, working in an increasingly diverse suburban school setting is significant. Conducting interviews with all stakeholder groups – students, teachers, parents, district leaders in an attempt to qualitatively capture the impact of one leader's influence and actions in a

diverse suburban school could illuminate relevant and useful information that could inform and influence the field of educational administration.

### **Fair Doesn't Mean Equal: District Leadership in Diverse Suburban Contexts and the Challenge of Resource Provision and Differentiated Support for Principals**

The principals and superintendents studied discussed the challenge of resource allocation and advocacy in suburban school districts experiencing changes in student demographics. In each of the four districts involved in this study, an apparent competition for resources was described, pitting schools serving a more diverse student clientele against those with a more homogeneous study body. One principal from Stratton described a “tale of two districts” because “schools on the East side look very different than schools on the West side” when it came to racial and socioeconomic diversity.

Superintendents must navigate these differences as they work to ensure a vision for the success of all students is directly tied to resource allocation that takes the form of staffing, instructional materials, and discretionary monies given to schools with more significant needs. The study of the interpersonal dynamics created by these challenges and the important roles both superintendents and principals play with respect to advocacy, collaboration, autonomy, and accountability for results tied to resources could provide important insights to leaders currently facing these challenges and opportunities in their districts and schools.

### **The Lone Ranger: Leading for Equity as an Elementary Principal**

Four elementary principals participated in this study. Each described a feeling of isolation in their position. Unlike their secondary school colleagues, elementary principals are typically the only administrators in the school, shouldering the

responsibility of continuous improvement, supervision and evaluation of staff, communicating with stakeholder groups, and navigating change. The four elementary principals studied described the need to reach out to other elementary school principal colleagues for assistance, advice, and camaraderie, things that are readily available for secondary level principals who serve on a team of administrators. Learning how to better support elementary school principals who lead in increasingly diverse suburban school settings could help superintendents provide the appropriate resources and supports.

**They don't know what they don't know.**

The four superintendents studied, when asked to detail their efforts in building the capacity within themselves and their school districts to confront and disrupt the marginalization of underserved students, their understanding of student achievement data and its implications on their current and future leadership practices, and the challenges faced by their principals as they work to lead through significant shifts in student demographics in their schools, had difficulty providing thorough, specific responses. Three of the four seemed uncomfortable or unable to readily and openly discuss issues related to race.

The data collected for this study, through interviews and an analysis of a variety of archival information, was completed over a relatively short period of time. In two of the districts studied, it appeared as though the superintendents, when presented with questions regarding an increasingly diverse student clientele, were caught unaware or surprised by their current situation. It seemed as though they didn't know what they didn't know when it came to discrepancies in achievement in their student population and the leadership struggles and opportunities reported by their building principals. A

longitudinal study of suburban school superintendents and their leadership actions in response to shifts in student demographics, as they navigate a statewide accountability system within which student achievement results and other success indicators are made public, could prove highly informative and beneficial to the field of educational administration and those serving in similar contexts.

The results of this study are also important for school board members to consider as they are charged with attracting, hiring, and retaining district level leadership. Perhaps the interactions with these four suburban school leaders are indicative of the larger societal issues currently plaguing our country. If we are to move forward, together, as a nation committed to the provision of high quality educational experiences for all of our youth, we must not consider changes in demographics as a barrier, obstacle, or challenge, but as an opportunity, a benefit, and a gift.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study are limited to an examination of principals and district administrators in four suburban school districts in Wisconsin. While each participant met the requirements of this study, the conclusions drawn are not meant to be generalized beyond this small sample with any degree of certainty. However, the findings of this study can serve as a foundation for additional inquiry.

The study focused on the experiences and perspectives of principals and superintendents working in suburban districts that have experienced a significant shift in student demographics, specifically, a marked increase in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic. While the researcher made every effort to

articulate the thoughts and experiences of the participants clearly and accurately, in the end, the interpretation of the data is that of the researcher.

### **Summary**

Suburban school districts across the country are becoming increasingly diverse. As the student clientele in suburban districts changes, so must the leadership actions of district and school leaders. This study, through an analysis of interview and archival data obtained from twelve principals and four superintendents serving in four suburban school districts in Wisconsin facing swift and significant increases in the number of students who identify as either Hispanic or African American, aimed to answer three primary research questions:

1. What resources, supports and strategies are employed by principals in suburban school districts experiencing significant demographic changes related specifically to increases in the number of students who identify as African American or Hispanic that helped them be successful in their roles?
2. What do these school leaders need from their superintendents in order to successfully deliver on the promise of creating school environments within which all students succeed?
3. How are superintendents in these suburban contexts increasing their competencies and supporting principals in proactively leading through racial demographic shifts in a society that has typically marginalized such groups of students?

The principals studied identified specific leadership dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for competence and confidence in their positions: a growth mindset, a service orientation, grit, knowledge of data literacy, the supervision and evaluation process, and change management, the courage to confront ineffective practices and strategies to disrupt the marginalization of students. These school leaders reported a reliance on peers and access to mentors as key supports in their roles. While the principals could identify factors and resources that assist them in their daily efforts to lead for the success of all students in their care, they also reported the lack of a trusting, deep, and beneficial relationship with their superintendents. Data analysis did reveal what suburban school principals leading through significant shifts in student demographics need from their superintendents. The principals studied indicated a desire for a shared vision for student success, ongoing and useful performance feedback, and a balance between autonomy in their jobs and trust from their supervisors that they are performing well in their work. These findings can be used to inform the work of principals and district leaders currently serving in changing suburban school contexts.

The four superintendents studied, preoccupied by the political and managerial pressures of their positions, communicated a desire to support their principals but could not provide detailed or thorough responses to study questions about their efforts to build capacity and competency within their districts to serve all students. These district leaders explained a constant need to educate the greater community regarding the demographic changes occurring in their districts and seemed to more readily converse about issues related to socioeconomics than issues dealing with race.

Results from this study can also be used to illuminate the potential for future research. A more comprehensive and thorough analysis of one, transformative high school principal could provide a more complete understanding, from the vantage point of all stakeholders, of leadership in response to changing student demographics. The challenge of resource allocation in diverse suburban settings is a topic needing further inquiry and study. Understanding how superintendents and principals in these contexts advocate for and administer resources aligned to a vision for the success of all students could provide meaningful guidance to practitioners challenged by this aspect of their work. The elementary principals studied, reporting a feeling of isolation in their work, could be more deeply studied to inform the work of superintendents in their efforts to provide appropriate supports and resources to this specific group of school leaders.

The work of school and district leaders leading through significant student demographic change is complex, emotional, and challenging. It is also important and powerful. The research is clear on the impact on student achievement of both principals and superintendents. Their work, their leadership, their efforts truly matter in the lives of their students. While transformational leadership theory was the lens through which this study was designed, a grasp on the manifestation of it in increasingly diverse suburban school contexts remains elusive. It is the hope of this researcher that the results of this study can inform the work of those charged with creating learning environments within which all students, regardless of race, prosper.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Interview Protocol

#### **Interview One: Early Personal and Professional Experiences**

Superintendent:

- Why did you decide to go into education?
- What positions have you held in the education?
- How long were you a principal?
- How would you describe your early impressions of school leadership?
- What was your favorite part of the position?
- What was the hardest part of the position?
- What led you to decide to step into a superintendent position?
- How would you describe your early impressions of district leadership?
- What is your favorite part of your position?
- What is the hardest part of your position?
- What has been most surprising aspect of your position?
- How would you describe your philosophy and beliefs about principal leadership?
  - Follow up: You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ when talking about the \_\_\_\_\_. Can you tell me more about how that experience influenced your leadership style?

Principal:

- Why did you decide to go into education?
- What positions have you held and in what districts did you work?
- How long have you been a principal?
- What made you decide to pursue a principalship?
- How would you describe your early impressions of school leadership?
- What is your favorite part of your position?
- What has been the most surprising aspect of your position?
- What is the hardest part of the position?
  - Follow up: You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ when talking about the \_\_\_\_\_. Can you tell me more about how that experience influenced your leadership style?

## **Interview Two: Present Lived Experience**

Superintendent:

- How would you describe your leadership style?
- I'm thinking about your comments about \_\_\_\_\_. What practical applications does that have within your position? What are some examples of how it is realistically applied?
- In what ways have you found yourself shifting or changing your leadership style over time? How does this feel for you?
- What are key relationships that impact your leadership decisions? What are key relationships that you impact through your leadership?
- What leadership strategies have you utilized that have positively impacted the building administrators? What leadership strategies have you utilized that have negatively impacted building administrators?
- What is the role of vision in your leadership? What is the role of empowerment in your leadership? What is the role of trust in your leadership? What is the role of charisma in your leadership?
- How do you share your beliefs of leadership with the principals?
- How important is the superintendent/principal relationship? Why?
- How do you know what your principals need in order to be successful in their roles?
- How do you define success in the principalship?
- How do you provide principals feedback on their performance?
- How do principals provide you feedback on your leadership practices?
- How do you believe the principals perceive your leadership practices?
- How would you characterize student success in your district?
- What do your students need from their superintendent?

Principal:

- How would you describe your leadership style?
- I'm thinking about your comments about \_\_\_\_\_. What practical applications does that have within your position? What are some examples of how it is realistically applied?
- In what ways have you found yourself shifting or changing your leadership style over time? How does this feel for you?
- You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Can you describe a time when your leadership preferences were supported or challenged?
- What are the attributes of an effective leader? What are the jobs or tasks that are specific to an effective leader?
- What are key relationships that impact your leadership decisions? What are key relationships that you impact through your leadership?

- What leadership strategies have you utilized that have positively impacted teachers? What leadership strategies have you utilized that have negatively impacted teachers?
- What leadership strategies have you utilized that have positive impacted students? What leadership strategies have you utilized that have negatively impacted students?
- What is the role of vision in your leadership? What is the role of empowerment in your leadership? What is the role of trust in your leadership? What is the role of charisma in your leadership?
- Have you identified systems, processes or structures in your district that perpetuate marginalization of students? If yes, What are you doing to disrupt them?
- How do you share your beliefs of leadership with the superintendent?
- How important is the superintendent/principal relationship?
- In what ways does the superintendent provide you feedback on your leadership practices?
- How do you believe the superintendent perceives your leadership practices?
- How would you characterize student success in your district?
- What do your students need from their principal?

### **Interview Three: Reflection**

Superintendent:

- What was your overall impression of the data from interview one and interview two?
- What parts were most important to you during the conversation and were included in the vignette?
- What parts were important to you during the conversation and were missing from the vignette?
- What else would you like to tell me about leadership?
- What else would you like to tell me about the superintendent-principal relationship?

Principal:

- What was your overall impression of the data from interview one and interview two?
- What parts were most important to you during the conversation and were included in the vignette?
- What parts were important to you during the conversation and were missing from the vignette?
- What else would you like to tell me about leadership?
- What else would you like to tell me about the superintendent-principal relationship?

**Dana E. Monogue**

Curriculum Vitae

**Professional Purpose**

To serve students, staff and the community in a collective effort to transform public education.

**Education and Licensure**

2015, Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

2006, Master of Science, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

1994, Master of Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison

1991, Bachelor of Science, Purdue University

*Professional Licensure, Wisconsin*

#51, Principal

#10, Director of Instruction

# 3, District Administrator

**Positions Held**

**July 2012 to Present, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning**

*School District of Elmbrook, Brookfield, WI*

I am currently responsible for the administration of our K-12 instructional program. I directly supervise Directors of Instruction and Student Services and all building principals. I oversee several district-level budgets in excess of \$2million. Current projects include a comprehensive K-12 literacy alignment, the establishment of a common instructional framework, and the development of a comprehensive Response to Intervention (RtI) plan. We are additionally working to spur innovative thought and instructional “next practices” in order to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies in our students through a coordinated systemic plan.

**2008 to June 2012, Deputy Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer**

*School District of Waukesha, Waukesha, WI*

Responsible for the development and implementation of the instructional program, grades 4K—12, in a district of nearly 14,000 students. Directly supervised building principals, Directors of Instruction and curriculum coordinators and held responsibility for the administration of several budgets in excess of \$4million. Facilitated a variety of short and long-term projects, including the development and launching of the state’s largest charter school, the Waukesha STEM Academy, the transformation of our middle schools from a 7/8 structure to a 6/8 structure, the implementation of 4-year old kindergarten, the development of a new high school schedule, personalization of teaching and learning through advancements in assessment and grading, and the development of a 5-year strategic plan.

**2006-2008, Principal, Horning Middle School***School District of Waukesha, Waukesha, WI*

I served in a building with 700 students in grades 7 and 8. I directly supervised 70 professional staff members and served on a variety of building and district committees.

**2000—2006, Department Chairperson, Special Education***School District of Waukesha, Waukesha, WI*

I supported the work of special education teachers and paraprofessionals in nine elementary schools, serving students in cross-categorical programs. I provided professional development in the areas of program planning, assistive technology, non-violent crisis intervention training, strategies for working with students with autism and emotional/behavioral disabilities, and transition planning.

**1994-2000, Speech and Language Pathologist***Stoughton Area School District, Stoughton, WI*

I served as a speech and language pathologist at the elementary level, serving students with a variety of communication disorders. I also served as the summer school coordinator/administrator.

**University Teaching Experience**

2009 to Present, Adjunct Faculty

*Carroll University, Waukesha, WI*

I have co-facilitated a learning community graduate school program within the School of Education for students seeking a master's degree in education. At present, I co-facilitate the Carroll University School Leadership Program for aspiring principals and directors of instruction, a program that I also co-wrote.

2003—2009, Adjunct Faculty

*Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee WI*

I have taught a variety of courses including: *Instructional Strategies, Differentiation of Instruction, Concept-Based Learning, Teacher Leadership, Action Research, Individualized Education Plans in a Standards-Based Format, Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners in the Secondary Classroom*

**Professional Organizations/Community Involvement**

Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA)

Wisconsin Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (WAWSA)

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)

United Way of Waukesha County, Member, Board of Directors

Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Performing Arts, Member, Board of Directors

**Professional Facilitation**

*Co-facilitator, Southeast Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Consortium (SWEEC), 2008 - 2013*

The SWTEC was comprised of several districts in the CESA 1 region working collaboratively to bring the state-level framework for Educator Effectiveness to life. Through consistent face-to face meetings and virtual communications, representatives from our consortium worked on state-level design teams aligned to the priorities set forth in the framework. This consortium represented unprecedented collaboration in our region of the state and promises to continue to shape policy and practice for years to come. I held responsibility for coordinating the work of the Operations and Oversight committees as well as for providing written updates to consortium members on a weekly basis.

**Presentations**

Institute at CESA 1 Annual Convening Conference, *Achieving Alignment from the Board Room to the Classroom; Personalized Learning Everywhere; Fall 2013, Fall 2014*

Wisconsin Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, *Scaling Innovation SLATE Conference, Personalized Learning Everywhere, Fall 2014*

Wisconsin School Boards Association, *Making Learning Personal, One School District's Journey, Winter 2015*