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EXAMINING THE LEADERSHIP AND LITERACY PRACTICES IN EFFECTIVE TITLE 1 SCHOOLS: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF SCHOOLS THAT FOSTER EFFICACY SO ALL CAN LEARN

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EXAMINING THE LEADERSHIP AND LITERACY PRACTICES IN EFFECTIVE
TITLE 1 SCHOOLS: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF SCHOOLS THAT FOSTER
EFFICACY SO ALL CAN LEARN

BY

WENDY K. AMELOTTE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

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RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

2021

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RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

2021

ABSTRACT

Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law of 2001, professional learning activities and curricula, particularly in the area of literacy, were limited by the definition of reading put forth by the 2000 report of the National Reading Panel (see Duke & Carlisle, 2011). When NCLB was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states and districts were allowed more freedom to redefine student achievement and school success, with hopes that a more “holistic approach” would allow for equitable learning opportunities for all children. Yet, today’s school leaders continue to grapple with how to bring research-based practices to life in schools and classrooms. Despite decades of research on effective schools, family demographics are still the most predictive measure of student achievement (Hill, 2017; Reardon, 2011). A great deal of research exists on *what* works in schools, yet much less is known about *how* successful schools enact practices that foster student achievement. This multiple case study uses qualitative methods to examine how educators and administrators in four effective Title 1 schools design learning environments that foster student success at the classroom and school level. Within-case and cross-case analytical frameworks aligned with five practices of effective schools based on the research of successful literacy reform (Taylor et al., 2011) and successful school reform (Bryk et al., 2010, Klugman et al., 2015), eight dimensions of school culture (Ritchhart, 2015) and three levels of efficacy (Bandura, 1993) revealed common and successful school-wide practices in all four schools. By using schools, which represent principals and teachers, as well as their interactions with students and families, as the unit of analysis, findings provide a window into the culture of each school to reveal particular indicators of school-wide practices designed to promote student

achievement on state reading assessments. Further, this study puts forth a new hypothetical model to capture the complex nature of how self-efficacy can grow among students, teachers, and the collective group in each school community as Title 1 educators make decisions and interact with each other to promote a culture of student success. Implications for practitioners, school leaders, and policymakers are discussed.

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DEDICATION

To my parents for their unwavering belief and support for my work. From visiting my first classroom 1600 miles away to helping me stuff envelopes my first year as a principal, thank you for always being willing to help me accomplish my dreams.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Overview of the Study

In 1966, the Coleman Report on Equality and Educational Opportunity highlighted the importance of family demographics on student achievement, implying that “schools don’t make a difference.” This report created an outcry from many schools, which launched the Effective Schools Movement (Lezotte, 2001, p.1). The timing of this report is also important to note, as The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) had just passed. ESEA marked the first federal educational policy intended to close achievement gaps between low-income students and their more affluent peers, by providing compensatory educational programs aimed at increasing student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2015). Political focus increased pressure to ensure that students demonstrated success on measures of accountability, increasing the importance of creating effective schools, defined primarily by measures of student achievement. The increased pressure to ensure student achievement brought forth decades of policies intended to improve school-based practices. Many of these efforts were aimed at improving student reading achievement. In 2001, ESEA was reauthorized as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), marking the most prescriptive federal policy to date, as it limited curricula selection, professional learning activities, and educational research funding (Coburn et al., 2011; Duke & Carlisle, 2011).

In an attempt to ensure accountability, the federal government specified appropriate instructional practices in reading and, for the first time, teacher evaluations were linked to student outcomes (McDaniel et al., 2001). This pressure to increase reading achievement drove the instruction of comprehension strategies in isolation,

with little to no consideration of purposeful content or research on reading motivation and engagement (Afflerbach, 2016; McKeown et al., 2009). Because of these specified practices, many of today's students have limited access to lessons that foster their curiosity to learn or their ability to engage in meaningful inquiry (see Fullan et al., 2018). As a result, students in schools across the United States have disengaged from learning (Fredericks et al., 2011) and they struggle to apply their knowledge to solve complex problems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

While research that informs efforts to foster student achievement through reading engagement and knowledge application is powerful and has been well documented at the classroom level (Guthrie et al., 2013; Ko & Sammons, 2012; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004), student achievement outcomes suggest the transfer of this research to a school level presents challenges (Timperley & Parr, 2007). An example of a reform effort that did not increase student achievement is Comprehensive School Reform (CSR). While CSR initiatives were focused on large-scale improvements and targeted many areas of change, including school curriculum and professional development, sizable gains in student achievement did not occur. These reform efforts failed to empower educators; rather they became top-down attempts to change systems without understanding the unique context of schools (Taylor et al., 2011).

Underscoring this situation was that students from families with little economic means have less exposure to teaching that blends engaging content learning with purposeful opportunities to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts (Kucan & Palincsar, 2011; Oakes, 2005; Reardon, 2011). This is often the case even though

research suggests that these students typically benefit most from engaging and empowering learning, which is often referred to as deep learning (Fullan et al., 2018; Hammerberg, 2004). However, acceptance of low achievement among students from low-income families does not have to be a reality. Students empowered to read, write, create, and communicate for a meaningful purpose can achieve at high levels (Luke et al., 2011; Moje, 2007).

There has been a growing body of research on effective schools, focusing less on prescriptive measures and more on successful literacy intervention reform (Taylor et al., 2011) and successful school reform (Bryk et al., 2010, Klugman et al., 2015). Based on these two bodies of research, the following practices have been identified as indicators of effective schools: (1) they operate from a shared vision of high-expectations, (2) they are guided by intentionally supportive leaders, (3) they engage educators in collaborative community building and professional learning, (4) they use data to drive instruction, and (5) they support a student-centered learning climate. The similarities of effective schools are well documented, yet the achievement gap exists and is growing (Reardon, 2011). Consequently, more research is needed to better understand not only *what* these effective practices are but *how* they come to life in different school contexts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to learn how administrators and teachers in four effective Title 1 schools make decisions designed to support student achievement on the state assessment for English Language Arts (ELA). Furthermore,

this study examined how instructional practices were designed to foster student achievement in these four effective schools.

A qualitative case study design was chosen to provide a rich and detailed description of how these schools, as organizations, committed to advancing achievement for all students. While all schools have a unique context, a cross-case analysis was also conducted to provide a deeper understanding of how these four Title 1 schools enacted a culture of effective schools.

Significance of Study

This study is significant because when NCLB was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), new opportunities for educational practices, professional learning, assessment, and accountability measures were created. ESSA provided more freedom for states and districts to redefine school success, with hopes that a more “holistic approach” would allow for equitable learning opportunities for all children (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016, p. 1). Most important was that ESSA required states to go beyond the criterion of student achievement to include measures of school quality in accountability reporting. Under NCLB, school accountability was linked only to student achievement; this policy drove instructional practices that did not support deep learning (Afflerbach, 2016; Forte, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2015). ESSA allowed states to expand the definition of effective schools beyond achievement, which in turn provided educators with an opportunity to reflect on both students’ knowledge acquisition as well as their development of non-cognitive skills such as communication and collaboration. Researchers such as Coiro et al. (2019), Fullan et al. (2020), Hammond (2020), and Noguera (2018) have argued that deep

learning experiences increase students' engagement and sense of agency as well as their achievement. It is essential that state policymakers and educators actualize the new opportunities under ESSA to redesign schools to be equitable learning environments for all children, regardless of their families' income.

However, under NCLB, professional learning activities and curricula, particularly in the area of literacy, were limited by the definition of reading put forth by the National Reading Panel (NRP). Without more understanding of how educators in effective schools' design equitable learning environments, the old practices under NCLB will remain. Educators continue to grapple with bringing what has been proven as effective (Hattie, 2009) to life in schools and classrooms. Despite decades of research on effective schools, family demographics are still the most predictive measure of student achievement (Hill, 2017; Reardon, 2011). Findings from this study will offer insights into how educators and administrators in effective Title 1 schools design learning environments that foster student success at the classroom and school level. This study will provide needed data for educators working on designing systems of schooling that ensure that all students, no matter their family's economic status, have access to engaging and equitable learning experiences.

Research Questions

Two main questions guided this study of the ways in which educators designed systems of schooling:

1. How do administrators and teachers in four effective Title 1 schools make decisions that are designed to foster student achievement on state reading assessments?

2. How do administrators and teachers in effective Title 1 schools design instructional practices to foster student achievement?

Role of Researcher

As a researcher and practitioner, my own experiences and beliefs played a role in the design and analysis of data in this study. While many steps were taken to ensure that the study's findings are credible and trustworthy, it is important to recognize why I selected to design a study in which achievement on state assessments was a critical criterion. Under NCLB, I was a reading coach and a principal; student achievement was important, but its link to school accountability was secondary for me. As a leader, I strived to create supportive learning environments for students, teachers, staff, and families. As a practitioner, I recognize that state assessments continue to become more robust, requiring students to demonstrate high-level skills to achieve proficiency, and many researchers also share this perspective (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). I am thankful that I have always worked in a state where a student's individual performance on the assessment was not linked to their promotion to the next grade or graduation, compared to many high-stakes policies under NCLB that linked proficiency to promotion and graduation for children. Information from state assessments has afforded me valuable information about how the schools I worked in taught ELA and math, in efforts to increase students' proficiency. With this lens, I designed the study utilizing ELA proficiency on the state reading assessment as a selection criterion

because I believe that high levels of proficiency are a strong indicator that many positive practices are happening within the school.

Definition of Key Terms

“Achievement”- referring to the knowledge and skills that students demonstrate on assessments and in their daily activities, in and outside of school.

“Climate”- relating to the general behaviors and feelings of the school and how those perceptions influence students and educator relationships (Haynes et al., 1997; MacNeil et al., 2009).

“Culture”- represents the collective beliefs, values, and assumptions of the school and serves as the foundation for how decisions are made and how practices come to life in a school (MacNeil et al., 2009; Ritchhart, 2015).

“Effective Schools”- schools in which students learn and achieve more than expected, given their demographic background (Lezotte, 1991; Lezotte, 2001; Loeb et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 1999)

“Efficacy”- referring to the belief in one’s capacity to successfully accomplish a goal (Badura, 1977; Bandura, 1993; Donohoo et al., 2018; Federici & Skaalvik, 2010).

“English Language Arts”- referring to the instruction in reading, writing, speaking, and listening aligning to current literacy standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021).

“Engagement”- recognizes the interaction between a learner and their learning environment and is the learner’s actual involvement in the learning

activity (Barbra & Klauda, 2020; Guthrie et al., 2004; Guthrie et al; 2006; NASEM, 2018).

“Growth mindset”- referring to a mindset in which learners connect effort and strategy to results, recognizing that struggle does not mean failure but may require new learning that leads to growth (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Paunesku et al., 2015).

“Instructional leadership”- referring to the leadership practices of a leader who is focused, knowledgeable, and supportive of the teaching and learning practices of the school. An instructional leader develops the instructional leadership capacity in other educators as well, fostering reflective practices to improve students’ learning (Leithwood et al. 2008; Leithwood et al. 2020; Lezotte, 1991; Marzano et al., 2001).

“Motivation”- referring to a condition, with internal and external influences, that sustains a learner to persist towards a goal (Barbra & Klauda, 2020; Guthrie et al., 2004; Guthrie et al; 2006; NASEM, 2018).

“Professional Development”- referring to a passive or inconsistent activity in which the identified target audience or learner had little say in the decision to participate (Stewart, 2014).

“Professional Learning”- referring to the collaborative activities, from book studies to lesson studies, that learners engage in to increase their professional capacity. Professional learning assumes that the learner has some degree of influence over the topic and bridge to practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2016; Stewart, 2014; Tucker, 2019).

“Reading” referring to the “active and complex process that involves: understanding written text, developing and interpreting meaning, [and] using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation” (National Assessment Governing Board, 2019, p. x)

“Schools”- While schools are physical buildings, the word schools in this study refers to the people and practices that are a part of the school. The interactions and daily practices that happen both within the physical structure of the building as well as the interactions and practices that happen in the name of the school and extend beyond the physical structure of the building collectively become the school.

“Shared or Distributed Leadership”- referring to the leadership practices of a leader that fosters decision making of educators, which increases the commitment and feeling of shared accountability to accomplish goals (Elmore, 2000; Spillane et al., 2001)

“Student-centered Learning Climate”- referring to a school climate that values the diverse personal knowledge of each student while providing all students access to a rigorous curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2015; NAESM, 2018).

“Title 1”- A program established by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, providing financial assistance to school districts and schools with a high percentage of children from low-economic families (United States Department of Education, 2021).

“Title 1 Schools”- referring to schools that serve at least 40 percent of students that are eligible for free or reduced meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program, or have received a waiver because of local circumstances. This term refers to the physical as well as social disadvantages that occur as a result of minimal financial means (United States Department of Education, 2016).

“Vision”- referring to the set of beliefs, stated or acted upon, that describe the school community and expectations for students in the school (Leithwood, 2008; Leithwood, 2020; Padilla et al., 2020; Reeves, 2020).

Overview of Research Design

This qualitative multiple-case study with cross-case analysis (Yin, 2018) examined how principals and teachers made decisions and designed instructional practices to support student achievement in Title 1 schools. This project purposefully focused on schools that achieved above the state average on the state ELA assessment because they are likely to be “information-rich” (Patton, 2015, p. 264) in ways that bring important stories and successful practices to life. By using an embedded design, this study sought to bring to life the uniqueness of each case or school (Yin, 2018) while considering the extent to which the practices in each school aligned with common characteristics of effective schools found in the literature. This design also allowed educators a window into schools that have beaten the odds, which contributes to practical knowledge in the field (Patton, 2015). The synthesis of my findings reveals how effective schools enacted a culture that increased student achievement and

increased the efficacy for student learning, teachers' efficacy as practitioners, and the school's collective efficacy.

Methods and Procedures

Participants

Four public, non-charter, elementary schools from a pool of 159 schools from one state in northeastern United States were selected to participate in the case study. The unit of analysis was schools, which included principals, teachers, as well as their interactions with students and families. Schools were selected based on two criteria.

First, the school needed to be the recipient of school-wide Title 1 funds, which meant that at least 40% of their students received free and -reduced lunch (FRL). Performance data on the state English Language Arts [ELA] assessment, administered to students in the state beginning in third grade, were used as the second criterion to identify effective schools. The four highest-ranking Title 1 schools in the state on the ELA assessment were selected and invited to participate in the study. Additionally, the state's accountability report card, which included more holistic measures of successful schools as well as achievement, was referenced to ensure that all four schools were at or above the most frequently occurring rating of three stars in the state. This methodology ensured that the schools would be information-rich, as these schools demonstrated strong achievement and school accountability, matching the definition of effective schools found in the literature.

Data Sources

Multiple sources of data were collected between March 2020 and June 2020 to capture the dynamic practices and interactions between individuals in each school

context. One interview (approximately 45-90 minutes) was conducted with each principal (n=4) using a semi-structured interview protocol of 30 open-ended questions developed in line with relevant themes in the literature. The questions were designed to yield in-depth responses from each principal and their different perspectives in relation to school leadership practices (Patton, 2015).

Next, teacher focus groups, involving teachers from all grade levels (K-5) and areas of specialization such as reading interventionists, librarians, and school social workers, were conducted at each of the four schools by employing a second set of standardized, open-ended questions designed to guide the conversation within each group. Nineteen teachers engaged in one of eight focus group sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. The focus groups allowed teachers from each school to build on each other's responses with more nuanced descriptions of their own impressions of the examples shared (Patton, 2015).

A third data source, state accountability report cards, represented both achievement and school quality measures, and served to strengthen the selection criteria' credibility and provide contextual information about each school. The fourth source of data included documents provided by the principal as well as materials found on district and school websites; each document offered a deeper understanding of the context surrounding the practices in each school. Student SurveyWorks data, with questions regarding the school's climate and culture, provided a fifth source of information about the schools from the students' perspective; these data served to increase the credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis

The case study data analysis included five phases: (1) transcription and memoing, (2) paper coding, (3) coding in qualitative data analysis software, (4) chunking of data, and (5) creating an analytic framework to write each case study narrative. For the cross-case analysis, phases 3-5 were repeated across the corpus of data from all four schools.

During the first phase of analysis, I transcribed all of the interviews and teacher focus groups. A video platform was used to conduct all of the teacher focus groups, allowing me to return to the recording to watch the interactions between group members as I was transcribing, which strengthened each narrative. All data was read and listened to multiple times to ensure that critical information was not disregarded and to better understand the nuanced practices of each successful school. Because I wanted to create a holistic and connected narrative, after I completed each transcription, I wrote a research memo for each school before starting the transcriptions from the next school. As recommended in Tesch's (1990) *Eight Steps to Coding*, a first reading of all of the data provided me with a sense of the whole. I was able to return to these memos throughout subsequent phases of analysis.

The second phase of analysis involved paper coding on four randomly selected transcripts. Data analysis began with a deductive approach utilizing a set of five a priori codes derived from the literature on effective schools; these codes included *leadership, vision, collaborative school community and professional learning, data-driven instruction, and student-centered learning environment*. Beginning with a priori codes from the literature provided me with an initial starting point of expected data (Creswell, 2014).

During the third phase of coding, all transcripts were uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) NVivo 11.4 for MacBook, which allowed me to examine and organize my data more efficiently (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). During this phase, I initially expanded codes to understand the intricacies of each school. Coding was an iterative process involving a combination of different methods, as I frequently returned back to the initial recordings with new insights gleaned from carefully reviewing portions of data examined previously. Then I realized that I needed to reduce and reorder my themes to maintain the holistic nature of each school.

The fourth phase of coding involved chunking my data into meaningful segments to ensure that I was able to understand the holistic case of the school, instead of simply a comparison of micro-elements (Yin, 2018). I organized my findings to realize the assertions of the study. To organize my thinking, I coded each school and wrote a short set-up and commentary to each coded chunk of data. I highlighted similar chunks of data, which enabled me to recognize units of analysis while simultaneously gaining a better sense of the whole case.

During the fifth phase of analysis, I compared the emerging school cases from phase four to create an analytical framework. Using the framework, I pattern matched the embedded sub-units of analysis of the cases, while staying cognizant of the holistic features of the individual cases, i.e. schools (Yin, 2018). As these cases were purposefully selected to predict similar results, this framework allowed me the ability to compare the schools for common patterns, strengthening the analytic generalizability (Yin, 2018).

In the final phase of analysis, I synthesized my findings and wrote the case study for each school, organizing each case as a descriptive narrative highlighting critical incidents for the reader (Patton, 2015). This detailed narrative provided a synthesis for each case and across the different cases, or schools (Creswell, 2014).

During my analysis of data from each school, an emerging code of *collective efficacy* became apparent (Creswell, 2014). This prompted me to return to the literature to be able to contextualize the use and meaning of this code. To do this, I conducted four additional phases of analysis for the cross-case analysis. Using a framework to better understand how the decisions of principals and teachers influence the forces of culture (Ritchhart, 2015), I first recoded all of the transcripts for evidence of eight cultural forces. Findings from this sixth phase were then coded for indicators of student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and the collective efficacy of school stakeholders. In the seventh phase, I further analyzed each level of efficacy according to Bandura's (1993) four sources of efficacy to better understand how dimensions of school culture contribute to efficacy in the school community.

To increase the methodological rigor of the study, in the eighth and final phase of analysis, I compared the findings from the cross-case analysis to student perception data as a form of triangulation. Overall, in the cross-case analysis, I sought to highlight similarities and differences across the schools to more precisely illuminate my findings of how school leaders, both principals and teachers, influenced their school's culture in ways that appeared to support student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and the collective efficacy of school stakeholders.

Throughout the design and analysis of my research I took steps to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of my interpretations. During the design, I detailed interview and focus group questions, sampling criteria, and letters of introduction. These steps paired with the research-based analytical framework were designed to increase the reliability of my findings as they served as a case study protocol, allowing for replication of this study.

During analysis, I used a research notebook to document and capture my reflections, which increased my reflexivity (Patton, 2015). My research notebook also served as a space for me to model how these emerging codes connected (Guba, 1978). Additionally, I created a research memo after the completion of each meeting's transcript. I returned to these memos throughout the coding process, as they allowed me to delve deeply into small pieces of data without the fear of being too far removed. While I was coding, analyzing, and writing, I returned to the transcripts and video recordings multiple times to ensure accuracy and reveal important data (Patton, 2015). Throughout the comparative analysis, I was cognizant of the degree of convergence in the data and shared data that was not replicated in the analysis framework as well as data that converged (Patton, 1999). The quantitative data from student surveys, the state ELA assessment, and the accountability report cards allowed me to reconcile the qualitative data obtained from the teachers and principals (Patton, 1999). Following Creswell's (2014) recommendations, I also conducted member checking to elicit feedback, strengthen my findings, and increase trustworthiness.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the problem and provides an overview of the research, including the purpose and significance of the study, and a general overview of the methods and procedures used in the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature pertaining to the theoretical frameworks of the study and relevant research in the areas of effective schools. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 presents the rich narrative descriptions of these four effective schools. Chapter 5 presents the results of the cross-case analysis that provides a deeper understanding of how these schools enacted a culture that was effective for supporting student achievement and developing efficacy in students, educators, and families. Chapter 6 presents a discussion of the findings, limitations, implications, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

Review of The Literature

This chapter begins with an overview of the history of policy and school accountability measures that created a narrow definition of successful schools and limited reading instruction, particularly for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Then I discuss three theoretical perspectives of learning in which this study was grounded, namely sociocultural theory, expert/novice theory, and deep learning for equity. Finally, I discuss relevant literature on effective schools.

Since its inception, educational federal policy was not designed to support rigorous and equitable learning environments for all learners (Jeffery, 1978; Kantor, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2015; Thomas & Brady, 2005). As will be detailed next, compensatory federal policy known as The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) introduced educational accountability measures that linked reading achievement with school reform. In 1994, ESEA was reauthorized as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), with policies to follow in 2001 that narrowed the definition of reading instruction and increased federal control by influencing decision making and funding at the local level; this greatly impacted Title 1 schools (Jeffery, 1978; Kantor, 1991; Thomas & Brady, 2005).

In particular, federal accountability expectations and sanctions against schools linked to the No Child Left Behind era (NCLB Law of 2001) negatively impacted daily practices in schools (Almasi et al., 2006). In 2015, the reauthorization of federal educational policy known as the Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA] brought with it new opportunities to reset decades of top-down reform practices (Darling-Hammond

et al., 2016). However, it also left many schools challenged with leveraging the billions of Title 1 dollars allocated to create more equitable learning opportunities. Ladson-Billings (2015) posited that policymakers must better understand the role that culture plays in education for compensatory dollars to support more equitable education opportunities for students. The ills of past federal policy combined with new opportunities have now converged to suggest that the practices involved in designing effective school cultures for all learners is an important area for research. Before laying out the research in effective school practices, the section below first describes the challenges presented by each change in educational policy between 1965 and 2015.

Introduction of Compensatory Education: The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act

In 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson launched the “War on Poverty” and positioned that the role of education was the solution to poverty; this position implied that there was a “culture of poverty” that education should fix (Kantor, 1991, p. 53). In 1965, the Johnson administration passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was the largest single source of funding for school. To appeal to resistance that there would be federal control of education, which had historically been one of local control, funding was linked to the economic backgrounds of families rather than to schools or districts directly (Thomas & Brady, 2005). However, from the inception of ESEA funds, there has been significant rebuke as critics believed that these funds did not address the racial and socio-economic injustices in the country (Jeffery, 1978). ESEA required schools and districts that received funding to demonstrate students’

academic improvement in the areas of reading and math; thus increasing federal control of local practices (Thomas & Brady, 2005). In order to follow funded mandates that positioned schools, students, and families as being “less than” because of their financial status, schools that received funds for compensatory education under Title 1 were often pushed further from what works in education.

Increased Interest in Educational Reform and Accountability

With the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the U.S was launched into an era of educational reform centering on policy to drive change (Edmondson, 2004; Coburn et al., 2011; McDaniel et al., 2001). In April of 1991, President Bush presented his National Education Strategy, *America 2000*, arguing that “education determines not just which students will succeed, but also which nations will thrive in a world united in pursuit of freedom in enterprise” (p. 5). Pressure around the need for change increased in 1994 when data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that 40% of American fourth-graders did not meet a basic level of proficiency in reading, which further fueled the call for reform (Coburn et al., 2011; McDaniel et al., 2001). In 1994, ESEA was reauthorized as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), and for the first time, districts were mandated to identify schools that did not meet expected student achievement goals or Adequate Yearly Progress [AYP] (Thomas & Brady, 2005). All students in grades 3-8 were expected to take yearly assessments to demonstrate their AYP achievement. This reauthorization increased compensatory funding and the federal government’s influence on local educational decisions.

The trend to increase federal control over education reform continued under the next administration, with an increased focus on reading achievement. In 1997, after campaigning for the national goal that all children would be able to read well by third grade, President Clinton proposed America Reads, a volunteer tutoring program and a voluntary national test; this initiative spurred a counter effort from stakeholders who felt the propagated crisis in literacy could not be solved by volunteers alone but, rather, it needed to be centered around knowledgeable educators further fueling the need for school reform (Edmondson, 2004; McDaniel et al., 2001)

Shifting Expectations in Public Policy

The notion of reading achievement as critical for American success in a global economy caught the attention of a number of different stakeholders from outside the traditional educational realm; in turn, these different groups increasingly leveraged various strategies to influence public policy (McDaniel et al., 2001) and began to shift the trend in expectations around what constituted high-quality research (Colburn, 2004; Edmondson, 2004; McDaniel et al., 2001). As the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) took on an increasingly influential role in determining policies around reading instruction, policymakers and many members of the public began insisting that all educational programs were “scientifically tested and research-based” (McDaniel et al., 2011, p.111).

National Reading Panel: Limiting the Definition of Reading

NICHD’s increased emphasis on quantitative research methods affected the position put forth by the National Reading Panel (NRP), which formed in 1997 as a request from Congress (NRP, 2000). The decisions of this panel heavily influenced

federal and local funding and classroom instruction (Almasi et al., 2006). By creating a definition of “scientifically-based reading research” that required data analysis to “test stated hypotheses,” the panel formed a limited view of reading that was criticized by many reading researchers (Afflerbach, 2016; Almasi et al., 2006). Subsequently, the NRP limited its review of research to studies that strictly employed experimental or quasi-experimental design methodologies; as a result, many reading scholars firmly believed that important information about how readers develop was omitted from the report (Afflerbach, 2016; Almasi et al., 2006). Two of the most notable oversights from the report were teaching to support students’ motivation to read and teaching to develop their self-efficacy as readers (Afflerbach, 2016). Overall, the NRP’s definition of scientifically-based reading research [SBRR] limited accessible knowledge around effective practices for teaching students how to read and included no research or best practices in the area of writing.

No Child Left Behind and The Reading First Initiative: Increasing Control

To adhere to NRP’s limited definition of reading, policymakers narrowed the use of federal and local funds. The Reading First Initiative, a mandate from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Law of 2001, required federal and state funds, which are allocated through Title 1, to be spent only on SBRR programs to improve K-3 reading achievement. A SBRR program was one that focused instruction on five core areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (Edmondson, 2004; NRP, 2000). As a result, policies associated with NCLB became highly prescriptive in ways that limited the purchase of instructional

materials and professional learning experiences for teachers to those that emphasized those five core areas of reading (Edmondson, 2004).

This type of whole-school reform through curriculum implementation became well known as Comprehensive School Reform (CSR). CSR focused on large-scale improvements and targeted many areas of change, including the school's curriculum and professional development (Taylor et al., 2011). CSR represented one of the broadest attempts to link principles of whole-school reform specifically to improvement in reading curriculum (Taylor et al., 2011). While outside partnerships can support positive change, the 1.6 billion federal dollars distributed to schools under CSR reform efforts failed to increase student achievement or to build capacity and efficacy amongst the educators in the schools (Gross et al., 2009). Most problematic was that CSR efforts attempted to change the system without understanding how the unique context of each school influenced how policies were put into practice.

Assessment and Sanctions: Implications for Practice

In addition to limiting the scope of reading instruction in elementary school, NCLB policies also aimed to increase school accountability measures. NCLB eliminated options of having different levels of achievement for diverse populations of students, which was allowable under IASA, the previous authorization of ESEA. However, NCLB strictly focused on achievement in content standards of reading, math, and science. The policy's narrow focus on standardized test achievement as the only indicator of school accountability failed to consider the rate of achievement growth or measures of school quality as indicators of schools' effectiveness. This narrow focus increased sanctions against schools, often targeting schools that serviced

students at-risk for school failure because of their demographics (Forte, 2010). These sanctions were not only a form of shaming for schools with low achievement scores, but they also held financial implications; at times, Title 1 dollars were diverted away from sanctioned schools and toward private schools under policies linked to school choice (Forte, 2010). Under NCLB, states were allowed to design their own accountability assessments for determining reading proficiency in Grades 3-8. Having no universal accountability measures coupled with a fear of funding, state developed assessments varied significantly in outcome expectations for students (Forte, 2010; Thomas & Brady, 2005).

While school accountability increased under NCLB, so too did the expectations of school principals, which in turn caused a higher turnover rate among principals in schools that were sanctioned because of low performance. The stress of these increased expectations had the unintended consequence of principals choosing to leave Title 1 schools to work in schools that were less likely to be sanctioned because they had fewer students considered at-risk (Mitani, 2019).

Every Student Succeeds Act: New Opportunities

Almost fifteen years after NCLB, the 1965 ESEA was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. ESSA provided a new opportunity for states and districts to redefine school success. The government no longer sanctioned schools for achievement measures, and state assessments moved away from merely assessing low-level skills and toward assessments of higher-order thinking; this included the initiation of a performance-based portfolio assessment system in seven states (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

The shift in assessment practices to better align with instruction increased the need for instructional practices that focused on developing students' academic knowledge and strategies to demonstrate their thinking. Another positive change under ESSA was that accountability was no longer narrowed to achievement on state assessments. Instead, states were required to select criteria of school quality, which expanded the definition of successful schools. Further, ESSA afforded educators opportunities to strengthen the quality of assessments, and the addition of school quality measures made it more difficult for schools with poor practices, such as repetitive test-preparation, to receive high levels of accountability. While ESSA offered schools flexibility, it also introduced the challenge of ensuring that this flexibility resulted in an increase in the types of reading practices and professional learning opportunities that were deemed effective.

Standards-based reform ushered in a new focus and urgency on student reading achievement levels, which served as a proxy for schools to be deemed effective (Coburn et al., 2011; Edmondson, 2004; McDaniel et al., 2001). Funding allocations tightly tied Title 1 schools to federal policy initiatives, yet despite the billions of dollars and increased accountability, student achievement from families with economic challenges still significantly lags behind that of their middle-class peers (Au et al., 2008; Reardon, 2011). This study attempts to address the gap between successful practices indicated by research and the underwhelming results of previous school reform measures, particularly those measures intended to increase student's reading achievement. This study sought to examine *how* educators in effective Title 1

schools made decisions and designed instructional practices to support the ELA achievement for all of their students.

Theoretical Frameworks

The proposed study was informed by three theories of learning: social and sociocultural theories of learning, expert/novice learning theory, and deep learning for equity. These theoretical perspectives are discussed in the following sections. All three learning theories explain how the motivation to learn is internally and externally influenced and developed. While the unit of analysis in this study was schools, which included principals and teachers, as well as their interactions with students and families, these theoretical perspectives suggest that students, teachers, principals, and families are all learners within the school community.

Social and Sociocultural Theory

In this section, I will explore the social and social-cultural theories of learning informed by the work of Vygotsky (1978), Bandura (1977, 1993), and Bruner (1977). These learning theories posit that social relationships, learning tasks, beliefs, and cultural elements support learning and development.

Social Relationships Support Learning and Development

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory assumes a continuous and reciprocal relationship between learning and development. Throughout a child's life, learning happens in ways that support internal development, and research has confirmed this theory. Learning from interactions with others fosters brain development, which in turn, allows for future learning and increased development (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Math [NASEM], 2018). As Vygotsky explained, "learning

awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (p. 90). It is this dynamic interaction that makes education so powerful and complex. Vygotsky did not believe that a child’s ability was innate; he thought others could positively influence a child’s learning and development through social interactions and tools of the culture. Because learning develops through language exchange, learning environments informed by research and theory are naturally replete with opportunities for communication and collaboration between learners (children and adults).

Vygotsky’s (1978) comments about a learner’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) are beautifully simple; “what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (p. 87). He believed that a learner working with someone providing support would facilitate the learner’s independence sooner than if left unsupported. Over 100 years ago, Vygotsky emphasized the need for caring, thoughtful support of learners. Unfortunately, educational institutions have not fully capitalized on the profound simplicity and power of understanding ZPD, for students or educators. Vygotsky defined ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Exploring Vygotsky’s link between learning and development and understanding the influence that society and culture have on this relationship underscores the importance of all students having motivating learning experiences in and out of school. A learner’s motivation is influenced by the

external task itself, and whether a learner, either child or adult, views the task as something within their ZPD and presented in a supportive environment.

Importance of Task Selection

Vygotsky's (1978) paradox of play further underscores the importance of designing motivating learning opportunities. While play may appear on the surface as unstructured, a child's play is complete with rules. Play connects with pleasure, but "a child's greatest self-control occurs in play" (p. 99). Vygotsky parallels the motivating desires of play to the support students get from others. When educators design motivational learning experiences, students' learning and development increase. Educators who intentionally plan to increase students' motivation and success in learning understand how the intentional selection of interesting and rigorous tasks and the opportunity to collaborate with others generates a ZPD that fosters learning and development.

Afflerbach (2016) underscores the importance of understanding a learner's ZPD in connection to their reading development. To know what a child can do independently and what they can do with assistance, a teacher must have information about the reader. Afflerbach highlights the need for educators to formatively assess students as a part of literacy instruction. Information about both a student's motivation to read and their skill development allows teachers to design learning opportunities to increase a students' achievement and efficacy as a reader. Consistent with principles of sociocultural theory, effective schools aim to provide all students with opportunities to collaborate and develop their thinking in a supportive environment (Francois, 2014; McKeown et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2003).

Beliefs Influence Learning

Johnston and Costello (2005) remind us that “literacy development is constructed” (p. 261), and these progressions of learning are determined as much as by what our society values as by a natural progression of skills. Therefore, becoming literate involves “being apprenticed into ways of living with people as much as with symbols” (p. 256). A literate learner is developing the skills needed to decode text and make meaning from text, which is a complex process influenced by both the learner and their environment.

A school’s beliefs about what is important to learn determines their values, and those values then influence learners’ efficacy. Bandura (1977, 1993) introduced the idea of self-efficacy and a learner’s belief that they will be successful in a task and leads to successful accomplishment of the task. Bandura (1977, 1993) described four ways to strengthen efficacy. The first way to influence efficacy is to provide opportunities for *performance accomplishments*. When people have experiences that they have mastered, they feel successful and believe that they will most likely be successful again. Related to Vygotsky’s ZPD, a learner’s motivation is impacted by the task itself as well as their belief that the task is within their ability to be successful. *Vicarious experiences*, or sharing success through others, are the second influence of efficacy. When people (in this case, students and teachers) learn of others having mastery of an experience and can relate to the experience, it strengthens their own belief that they will be successful. Bandura suggests a third source of efficacy is *social persuasion*. When students or teachers are encouraged to take on a task and are told that they could be successful in the task, it increases their efficacy to positively

accomplish the task. Therefore, the beliefs of a school influence what they encourage learners to accomplish. The fourth way that Bandura shared that efficacy could be built is through strengthening a learner's *affective processes*. Affective processes influence a learner's ability to cope when problems or challenges arise. Negative thoughts and anxiety can cause students or teachers to avoid challenging tasks rather than working to solve them. The learning environment can influence a learner's affective state, both positively or negatively. Bandura's work suggests that successful schools promote efficacy in their students and teachers and collectively shape positive experiences for all.

Bruner (1977) further emphasized the role of culture on learning, including how text and language could facilitate or diminish learning. He warned about the lure of schools to substitute "text or language from experiences" (p. 6). He cautioned schools to focus not only on the knowledge that students were acquiring, but also on the "nature in which it is acquired" (p. 1). Chaudhary and Pillai (2019) continued to highlight the relevance of Bruner's warning by emphasizing that "Meaning is not simply an attribute of objects inside the mind, but the way in which people live in the world and make sense of it" (p. 662). A learner creates a narrative shaped by their surroundings, and this narrative informs their identity as part of that community. This learning theory suggests that successful schools work to design a culture that promotes each individual's identity as well as the collective achievement of everyone in the school.

Culture Shapes the What and How of Learning

Learning is a social process shaped by and infused within a system of cultural meaning. Therefore “culture is a matter not only of *what* people learn but also *how* they learn” (NASEM, 2018, p. 23). Schools as organizations reflect the numerous interactions and decisions of stakeholders within the school and the values of the larger society (NASEM, 2018). It is important to note that students are not the only learners in a school. Learning principles apply to adults and children (NASEM, 2018). Consistent with Bandura’s views, understanding the social relationships and interactions between all stakeholders in a school provides an awareness of the school’s culture. That is, a school’s culture supports and influences learning for both children and adults. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the dynamic interactions that happen between the numerous stakeholders in a school because “sociocultural theory is more concerned with the ways in which learning is an act of enculturation” (Scott & Palincsar, 2013, p. 4). Herrenkohl (2008) writes that “meaning as a unit of learning is negotiated in relationships” (p. 675), underscoring that beliefs of the group determine what is valued as learning. In this study, I sought to understand how the beliefs of educators in effective schools impacted their decisions and how those decisions supported a culture of learning.

Expert/Novice Learning Theory

The second set of assumptions informing this study relates to expert/novice theories of learning (NRC, 2000) that posit, “Experts notice features and meaningful patterns of information that are not noticed by novices” (p. 31). This section will explore how expert practitioners, namely principals and teachers, create learning

opportunities that support students' motivation to learn and they coach and inspire students to develop their expertise or proficiency in reading.

Experts Become More Internally Motivated

Dreyfus' *Five-Stage Model of Skill Acquisition* describes the learning transition from the novice rule follower to the proficient analyzer as one in which the learner is "more emotionally involved in a task" (Dreyfus, 2004, p. 178). When a learner moves from stages of proficiency to expertise, they remain emotionally involved in the task, and their ability to make decisions becomes more fluent and intuitive. A learner's level of expertise impacts their decisions because of their ability to notice information, make sense of information, and ultimately act on that information (NRC, 2000). Further, Dreyfus suggests that learners become more committed, involved, and motivated as they move from novices to experts, which speaks to the importance of creating a supportive learning environment for novices. Overall, expert/novice theories of learning point to the importance of developing expert practitioners in schools, as their expertise directly influences how they make decisions to support student learning.

Expert Teachers Coach and Inspire Learners

Lyon (2015) explored changes in educators through Dreyfus' model of skill acquisition and concluded that expert educators are reflective practitioners. Dreyfus posits that as a learner moves from novice to expert, their internal motivation also increases. Thus, it makes sense that compared to novices, expert educators (principals and teachers) are more motivated to teach and they also recognize the need to model and inspire learners. In addition, expert educators can assess the needs of their learners

and make decisions about how to support learners more fluidly. This capability to fluently assess for learning aligns with the need to have on-going formative assessment to support students' literacy development (Afflerbach, 2016; Johnston & Costello, 2005). Also, expert educators more frequently respond to a students' struggle as a coach by providing on-the-spot instructional cues to support a child's thinking and problem-solving, which increases their achievement (Taylor et al., 1999). Coaching for learning requires a substantial depth of knowledge and almost intuitive decision-making, which Dreyfus attributes to becoming an expert practitioner. Accomplished educators use data to understand students' reading skills and motivation (Afflerbach, 2016); their understanding of these data enable them to design informed and customized supports for students.

As expert practitioners, educators also coach students along the path from novice to expert learners by intentionally planning to foster students' motivation to read. Expert educators ask higher-level questions of students and design appropriately challenging learning activities; both efforts are linked to increases in student reading achievement (Taylor et al., 1999; Taylor et. al, 2003). Higher-level questions require students to think deeply about their reading and provide students with opportunities to make connections to their experiences. Teaching in a way that provides students with purpose and voice is motivational and, thus, supports *engaged reading*. Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker (2000) describe engaged reading as “strategic and conceptual as well as motivated and intentional” (p. 404). Reading engagement is a complex process that includes what a student knows cognitively and what the student is motivated to accomplish or learn. Lesson design can affect reading engagement

(Wigfield et al., 2008), which mediates reading achievement by increasing students' perseverance and desire to read. Guthrie and colleagues (see Guthrie et al., 2004; Guthrie et al., 2006; Guthrie et al., 2013) define engagement as learning for purpose, not entertainment. Efforts by principals and teachers to intentionally design motivating and purposeful reasons to read also increase students' reading achievement. Alexander (2003) posited that while K-12 students may not be actual "experts," learning environments that engage students in "*problem finding*" (p. 12) increase students' motivation to learn and academic proficiency.

Overall, theory and research suggests that educator's expertise greatly influences how they make decisions, which in turn influences student learning. Thus, this study sought to understand how principals and teachers support their expertise in pedagogy and how they then designed instructional practices that fostered students' motivation and proficiency.

Deep Learning for Equity

A third set of assumptions that informed this study reflects tenets of deep learning pedagogy and how these practices influence equity. Students are at an unfair disadvantage if they do not understand the rules, written or contextual, for the world they are trying to access. To have the ability to question and change, all students must first have deep learning opportunities that support critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and participation as citizens in the world that they are a part of.

Importance of Safe Learning Environments

Freire (1970/2016) argued that students do not come to the classroom as empty vessels for teachers to fill. In fact, education designed with this simplistic "banking" or

depositing notion devalues the learner, as it disregards the knowledge and information that a learner already has. Students bring a wealth of diversity to the classroom because of their different family structures, languages, ethnicities, socioeconomic resources, and expectations (Hammerberg, 2004). Teaching designed to support all learners requires educators to recognize the unique set of knowledge and experiences that every student brings with them to school (Lenski, 2008; Luke et al., 2011; Moje, 2007).

Importantly, these differences among students are not static. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) assert that “people *live* culture” and they caution about making overgeneralizations about individuals. Within each culture, there is great diversity, making it vital for schools to invest in understanding the interactions of cultural diversity and learning (Ogbu, 1992). Culture influences what and how students learn, which underscores the importance of cultivating safe learning environments where every student can share their background knowledge without negative judgment (NRC, 2000; NASEM, 2018). Educators who do not create safe learning environments may unintentionally strip the value from each student’s prior knowledge and experiences and, instead, view student differences as deficits. This negativity can diminish students’ self-efficacy as learners in addition to educators’ expectations of students (Rist, 2000), which results in inequitable opportunities to learn.

Further emphasizing the need for awareness of deficit-based views, research has shown that at-risk and non-at-risk students have similar motivation and efficacy to be learners when they start school (Howse et al., 2003). Nevertheless, a performance gap persists. Hammond (2015) warns that coping methods employed by economically

challenged families are not culture and should not fuel deficit thinking. In the context of the proposed study, these ideas suggest that schools seeking to close achievement gaps intentionally allow all students to integrate their prior experiences with new learning in meaningful ways, which helps to cultivate the motivation and efficacy of all learners.

Designing Deep Learning Opportunities

Fullan and Langworthy (2014) suggest that deep learning opportunities develop “the learning, creating and ‘doing’ dispositions that young people need to thrive now and in their futures” (p. i). Deep learning is about shifting away from defining content knowledge that must be mastered, to instruction that develops students' skills as learners and prepares them to participate in the world in which they live (Fullan, 2018; Noguera, 2018). Lessons designed for these purposes can foster students’ abilities to go beyond simple facts and become “experts” who are able to synthesize complex information and create new knowledge (Coiro et al., 2019; Fullan et al., 2018; NASEM, 2018). Deep learning experiences increase students’ self-regulation and motivation by providing choice and purpose in ways that connect learning directly to students’ lives. Furthermore, deep learning promotes equity as it provides all students with opportunities to think deeply about engaging and motivational content (Hammond, 2020; Noguera, 2018). If one is not interested in the learning experience, it is biologically impossible for a healthy brain to attend to information (Immordino-Yang, 2016). Attention drives learning; therefore, deep learning is essential for students to utilize information to solve complex problems (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016). These ideas suggest that classrooms, in which students

are achieving, are likely to engage students in this type of *deep learning*; defined in this study as educational experiences designed to intentionally foster students' motivation to learn and apply knowledge by increasing their expertise. Students that are engaged in deep learning increase their achievement through developing knowledge and skills in their daily activities, in and outside of school, as well as on assessments. This study sought to understand how educators in effective Title 1 Schools made decisions and designed instructional practices that fostered deep learning and achievement for all learners.

Principles of Learning

In line with the three learning theories that inform the present study, findings from previous empirical research point to a parallel set of three key principles for how people (both children and adults) learn (see NASEM, 2018; NRC, 2000). While validated through research, these foundations of learning are better understood when aligned to theory, as they have significant influence on learning environments and instructional practices in effective schools. This next section details how these principles of learning align with the theoretical frameworks that inform this study as both learning theory and research-based principles of practice suggest that motivation to learn and achievement can be influenced by the decisions and actions of educators.

The first principle of how people learn assumes that learners bring prior knowledge, preconceptions, misconceptions, and new understandings that need to be unearthed and explored to ensure that new learning will take place. This principle aligns with social and sociocultural learning theory and deep learning theories that posit learners are not merely blank slates but that learning and development are

ongoing processes. Learning environments that welcome people's prior knowledge is a critical tenant of this principle.

The second principle of how people learn accentuates the importance of time needed to provide learners with opportunities to develop usable knowledge and create a deep understanding of information. This principle connects to expert/novice theory and deep learning for equity (see also, Hammond, 2020; Noguera, 2018), as learners who are encouraged to delve deeply into content can solve problems that are more complex, they can use their environment as a resource, and they are able to integrate new knowledge effectively (NASEM, 2018).

The third principle of how people learn calls attention to the importance of employing a metacognitive approach. A metacognitive approach makes the goal of learning explicit to the learner, and fosters awareness and reflections of one's own thoughts and progress towards the goal. Reflection on learning empowers students by providing them with a voice to control their learning.

All three principles of how people learn suggest that motivation to learn and achievement can be fostered by the design of purposeful learning opportunities, the collective support to accomplish each of these opportunities, and the shared beliefs about the important role each opportunity has in a school's overall culture of learning. In this study, I draw on these overlapping perspectives and research-based principles of learning to better understand how the practices and beliefs of effective Title 1 schools are enacted in ways that intentionally promote achievement as well as students' and educators' motivation to learn.

Research on Effective Schools

In the remainder of this chapter, I will draw on these three learning perspectives to review the bodies of research on effective schools, while also explaining how school-based practices intersect with learning theory to influence how these practices are enacted in daily school routines. This review will show that each unique practice has contributed to an understanding of what works in Title 1 schools. However, the design of the present study was informed by the premise that these practices cannot be viewed in isolation, which prompts the need for more research that explains how these practices intersect to inform the decisions and instructional practices of effective Title 1 schools.

Despite the billions of dollars that have had little impact on bringing about school-based reform and student achievement in ELA, there is research and hope that all students can attend schools where they learn to read and write well. In their book, *Schools That Work: Where All Children Read and Write*, Allington and Cunningham (2007) shared common practices among successful schools, including those that emphasized a strong instructional framework for reading and writing while also affirming the need for sustained opportunities for professional learning and family involvement.

In their text, *Teaching Reading: Effective Schools, Accomplished Teachers*, Taylor and Pearson (2002) argued that “First, effective literacy instruction can be achieved” (p. 385), underscoring the belief that all students can learn. Taylor et al. (1999) researched the practices in four effective low-income schools and found important commonalities across the schools. In all four schools, teaching students to read was a priority, evidenced by the amount of time these schools allocated for

reading instruction. After further examination at the classroom level, Taylor et al. (2002) concluded that teachers in effective classrooms approached instruction in a supportive coaching role, as opposed to taking a more dictative or “telling” stance (p. 278). While these studies focused primarily on individual classroom practices that contributed to effective schools, they failed to explain the organizational dynamics that transpired in the schools.

Moreover, while school reform efforts have had an inconsistent impact on student achievement, my review of the literature uncovered recommended practices from effective reading reform efforts (Taylor et al., 2011) and research on effective schools (Bryk et al., 2010; Klugman et al., 2015). Believing that each school has a unique context, I surmised that these common research-based practices would provide a beginning framework from which to accomplish two purposes: first, to describe and analyze the narrative of effective schools and, second, to strengthen the collective knowledge about how these practices of effective schools come to life by offering insight into how to promote learning for all students. Thus, my review of relevant literature is organized below in line with the following research based practices: (1) effective schools operate from a shared vision of high-expectations, (2) they are guided by intentionally supportive leaders, (3) they engage educators in collaborative community building and professional learning, (4) they use data to drive instruction, and (5) they support a student-centered learning climate.

Effective Schools Operate from a Shared Vision of High Expectations

Setting the vision for a school is essential work. Leaders that set a vision for the school positively impact student achievement compared to other leaders at both the

elementary and high school level (Leithwood et al. 2008; Leithwood et al. 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Administrators working alongside teachers to develop a shared vision of high-quality literacy instruction and student achievement create a unifying goal that positively influences instruction and school culture (Au, Raphael, & Mooney, 2008). Shared visioning repositions the purpose of change from a mandate that is imposed upon teachers to an invitation for teachers to become an integral part of the change process (Taylor et al., 2011).

While research has recognized the importance of having a shared vision, in the recent study of *Effective School Practices in Title I Schools Exceeding Educational Expectations* (Padilla et al., 2020), principals and teachers ranked vision last of 11 identified characteristics considered essential in effective schools. When Padilla and colleagues further explored this outcome, they discovered that educators often viewed the school's vision as a formal document and not the enactment of their beliefs. Furthermore, the researchers reported that all of the educators in the study espoused a strong belief that all students could learn and felt that it was important to have high expectations for learners (Padilla et al., 2020, p. 117). Consequently, rather than only reviewing each school's written vision statement, the present study seeks to explore how educators enact their visions as a set of beliefs about students and learning. It was hoped that findings from this study would offer a more precise understanding of how enacted visions may influence the decision-making processes of teachers and principals in effective Title 1 schools.

Effective Schools Are Guided by Intentionally Supportive Leaders

A second finding in the literature on effective schools is that principals can positively influence student achievement directly as well as indirectly by engaging in shared leadership practices and fostering a collaborative learning environment for teachers. Additionally, research indicates that successful principals engage in very similar leadership practices. This research, as synthesized below, is relevant to the present study as it informs what practices are important in school leadership and supports the study's design to elicit how effective principals enact these practices.

Positive Influence on Student Achievement

Principals can positively influence student achievement. Hallinger (2003) included three goals when conceptualizing instructional leadership: (1) defining the school's mission, (2) managing the instructional program, and (3) promoting a positive learning climate. In a longitudinal study, in which data was collected from 192 elementary schools over a period of four years, Hallinger and Heck (2010) documented the positive impact of leadership on improving school quality and student achievement. In a different study, Coelli and Green (2011) demonstrated the positive relationship that principals could have on student outcomes after being in a school for three years. Further, Miller (2011) noted a decrease in student achievement after a principal left the school.

Shared and Instructional Leadership

Principals that engage in shared and instructional leadership increase students' achievement directly as well as through indirectly. Louis et al. (2010) concluded from a national survey of 180 participants that leaders that fostered teacher participation in decision-making (shared leadership) and were able to provide guidance and feedback

concerning instruction and curriculum implementation (instructional leadership) positively affected student achievement. More recent research indicates that instructional leadership also had reciprocal effects of distributing or sharing leadership, by providing teachers with more voice in decisions, and creating a stronger commitment to the school's vision. These direct and indirect pathways combine to increase student achievement (Sebastian et al., 2017).

Valentine and Prater (2011) also conducted a leadership survey and concluded that principals that promoted instructional improvement positively impacted student achievement, noting that these principals were also more likely to have advanced degrees. Hallinger et al. (1996) reported a statistically significant positive relationship between instructional leadership and school climate. Sebastian et al. (2017) also noted a link to an improved learning climate and student achievement when principals fostered teacher leadership. Teachers' instructional practices directly impact students' achievement, yet Mincu (2015) noted that when principals support collaboration, effective practices increase throughout the school. While the role of the principal is very complex, research is attempting to define the qualities of a school leader that bring about change in student achievement (Sebastian et al., 2018) by documenting the importance of an instructional focus and organizational qualities.

Similar Leadership Practices

Principals that positively influence the learning environment and student achievement engage in similar leadership practices. Leithwood et al. (2008, 2020) recently revisited their original claims about successful school leadership to build upon four claims and revise three claims to reflect current research. Through

quantitative and qualitative analysis, they concluded that school leaders can positively impact student achievement, and they do so through their influences on school organization and their employees. Successful principals utilize similar leadership practices, but it is how they enact these practices in the unique settings of schools that demonstrate their responsiveness and ability to be reflective more than the practices themselves. Successful school leaders motivate their staff and build positive relationships throughout the school organization. Notably, principals do this by understanding the power of distributive leadership. However, while Leithwood and colleagues added to the knowledge of *what* successful leaders do, they suggested that more exploration was needed “to explore in greater depth *how* school leaders enact certain practices, what those practices are and their resulting impact” (Leithwood, 2020, p. 16). This study sought to provide more information into *how* principals in Title 1 schools enacted the common practices identified in previous research.

Effective Schools Engage Educators in Collaborative Community Building and Professional Learning

A third finding in the literature on effective schools highlights the importance of integrating collaborative practices, developing educator expertise, providing teacher agency, and demonstrating a commitment to learning. Because of the sociocultural implications of learning, research focused on educator collaboration and research involving how to build the professional capacity of educators will be reviewed together, as collaboration greatly influences educator learning.

Integration of Collaborative Practices

Successful school systems integrate collaborative practices (Jensen et al., 2016). In successful school systems, professional learning and collaboration was not an add-on but embedded into teachers' regular work routines. The National Center on Education and the Economy benchmarked countries' educational systems to surface similarities of high-performing countries (2016). Their research highlighted the importance of “redesigning schools to be places in which teachers will be treated as professionals, with incentives and support to continuously improve their professional practice and the performance of their students” (p. 10). Research has confirmed that teacher collaboration positively impacts student achievement (Goddard et al., 2007; Tucker, 2016).

Importance of Educator Expertise

Expert/novice theories of learning align with the importance of professional learning for educators, yet often school systems have difficulty providing the resources (both time and funding) to create productive learning experiences for educators; it is important to understand what research has shown to be effective. Taylor, Raphael, and Au (2011) compared successful professional development programs, revealing essential similarities. These programs supported individual teacher development of disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge. In considering teacher development, there was a focus on professional learning, effective literacy instruction, complex thinking, and motivating learners. Teachers impacted student achievement when they made a “concerted effort to go far beyond the basics” (p. 620). In their study of effective professional development practices, Lovett et al. (2008) stressed the need for teachers to have a vast repertoire of strategies to increase their

own metacognitive understandings about when to incorporate different strategies into their work with students. Other research confirms that teacher expertise supports the development of student expertise (Fisher et al., 2018; Honan, 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1999).

Providing Teacher Agency

Additional research has focused on how to apply adult learning principles to the design and implementation of professional development opportunities (Gravani, 2012; Zepeda et al., 2014), stressing the need for adults to have a voice in defining and solving the problem. Gravani (2012) writes, “Unless teachers, as adult learners, have an active involvement in the teacher development programme through discussing their needs and problems and utilizing their experience in schools, they are not satisfied and committed to the programme” (p. 430). Teachers need to be seen as part of the solution, not a problem to be fixed.

Commitment to Learning

Adams and Pegg’s research (2012) highlighted the importance of having professional development [PD] span multiple years to support teachers’ incorporation of new literacy practices into their classrooms. Without this intense support and time to develop deep understanding, teachers only adopted parts of their new learning into the classroom, often resulting in “strategies being modified from their intended use” (Adams & Pegg, 2012, p. 158). Multi-year PD initiatives can help teachers understand the pedagogical shifts of policy and how to implement instruction aligned to the policy’s intent (Stein & D’Amico, 2002). Others have stressed the importance of on-site PD, rather than attending a conference, to support teachers’ knowledge about

literacy instruction (see for example, Kennedy & Shiel, 2010). A long-term focus on literacy and learning initiatives develops expertise and avoids the temptation of schools attempting to carry out too many different initiatives at once (Reeves, 2020).

Embedding PD into the school day has also been found to increase teachers' self-efficacy about implementing new instructional strategies in the classroom. Daniels' (2017) found professional learning impacted teachers' efficacy and their motivation to be effective for students. Importantly, Katz and Shahar's (2015) research linked teachers' motivation to students' motivation, yet their study failed to suggest how to increase teachers' motivation. Research has documented the importance of embedded time for collaboration as well as onsite professional learning experiences that honor teachers' knowledge and provide deep coverage on topics of need. However, these studies did not share how time for collaboration and professional learning was established within the daily practices of the school day. The present study seeks to build on this work by exploring the nature of teachers' collaboration and how schools influence teachers' professional learning in ways that impact teachers' motivation and efficacy.

Effective Schools Use Data to Drive Instruction

A fourth common finding in the literature on effective schools highlights their regular use of data to drive instructional practices. Research has established the importance of formative assessments and feedback to support student achievement. More recent research has indicated that data use also impacts educators' motivation to change instructional practices, as described next.

Formative Assessment

Educators and students must understand the role of well-designed *formative* assessment for learning (William, 2016). While data takes many forms, student work is a critical piece of data to evaluate. By approaching assessment not as an event but as an ongoing activity, educators can be more critical of lessons as they are unfolding. This critical reflection process encourages continuous lesson improvement in ways designed to support all learners in a classroom (Jensen et al., 2016). Additionally, expert teachers have used formative assessments to create small groups with lessons focused on students' particular needs. Notably, teachers did not view these groups as fixed, and students continuously moved through groups based on data (Taylor et al., 1999).

Importance of Feedback

Providing ongoing feedback increases student achievement on outcome measures (Andersson & Palm, 2017; Hattie, 2009). Feedback on the learning process allows students to focus on the learning rather than the performance of a grade, which has been shown to positively influence students' effort (NASEM, 2018). Portfolio assessments have also been incorporated into school redesign efforts to further expand the potential of formative assessments to inform teaching practices (Au et al., 2008). Similarly, Allington and Cunningham (2007) have advocated for instructionally useful assessments, or those that encourage educators to use classroom observations, checklists, book selection, and portfolios to inform instruction (p. 167).

Impact on Educators' Practices

In Reeves's (2020) comparison of high and low-performing schools, high-performing schools used data to provide insight into why certain practices appeared to

be effective. In low-performing schools, data was often used as a threat to improve performance. Yoon (2016) used surveys from both teachers and principals to study the impact of data-driven practices. The study concluded that when principals used data to support initiatives, it positively increased teacher's buy-in of the reform efforts, which, in turn, led to increases in student outcomes. Future research should continue to explore teacher perceptions of data use, as well as how data is used to support student outcomes and to support changes in educational practices in effective schools.

Effective Schools Support a Student-Centered Learning Climate

All three theories that informed this study stress the importance of creating learning environments that foster student's motivation and efficacy as a learner. The fifth common finding in the literature on effective schools also underscores the importance of a student-centered learning environment where students feel safe and motivated to strengthen their mindset and belief in themselves as learners.

Safe Environments

For a student to learn, educators need to create safe environments that elicit prior knowledge and provide opportunities for students to reflect on their new knowledge (Hammerberg, 2004; Lenski, 2008; Luke, Woods, & Dooley, 2011; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). A student-centered learning climate values the diverse personal knowledge of each student while also providing all students access to a rigorous curriculum (Hammond, 2020).

Motivating Learning Opportunities

The learning environment greatly influences a person's motivation to learn (NASEM, 2018). Moreover, a teacher's ability to create a positive learning

environment is the most significant variable regarding student achievement (Ko & Sammons, 2012). It is important to acknowledge that motivation and self-regulation, or a learner's attention for learning, can be supported by the external factors in the learning environment (NASEM, 2018). Of particular relevance to the present study, motivation and self-regulation were the strongest predictors of future achievement for students from economically challenged backgrounds (Howse et al., 2003).

Growth Mindset

A learner's mindset also influences motivation. In her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck (2006) described the differences between a "fixed" mindset, or the belief that intelligence is a permanent state, and a "growth" mindset, which is the belief that intelligence and learning are dependent on efforts and strategies. Resilience and the ability to grow is a mindset that all students can develop (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Recently, Dweck and colleagues published research underscoring the importance of supporting students to develop a growth mindset, as students with growth mindsets demonstrated strong academic achievement regardless of economic background (Claro et al., 2016).

Belief as a Learner

Another factor that influences a learner's motivation is their self-efficacy, which is a learner's belief in their capabilities to accomplish a goal or task (Bandura, 1977). Learning cannot be isolated from the beliefs that one has about their capabilities. As Bandura (2005) argues, "People are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just the products of them" (p. 1). Also important is that learners' perceptions are

influenced by their learning environment (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1993). This study sought to explore how effective schools create positive learning environments.

Schools as The Unit of Analysis

While there is a volume of research that investigates effective school practices in isolation, two studies informed my design of a study that would be mindful of the practices that emerged from the literature while also allowing for a more holistic view of how these practices were enacted in schools. In the first study (Mosenthal et al., 2004), the authors presented a detailed and rich description of practices in six schools where students demonstrated strong reading achievement. This study did not test an intervention; rather it provided an analysis of practices that were evident across all successful schools, bringing to life the story of these schools. After being sorted into demographic clusters using data available through state reporting, three clusters of schools (small, middle, and large) were selected for the analysis. Using an analysis of variance (ANOVA), the researchers confirmed that the six schools were in three demographically different categories, which was important for the authors to represent diverse schools. The authors ruled out students' economic backgrounds and a specific literacy approach as explanatory factors for student achievement through their design. Then they identified four findings that contributed to the schools' success: (1) a multi-year commitment to improving literacy instruction, (2) a shared vision of student achievement, (3) teachers had a high-level of expertise, and (4) students had many opportunities to engage in reading.

Mosenthal et al.'s (2004) study honored the unique contexts of schools and shared details about literacy practices that supported achievement for all students. This

study greatly informed my research design, including the development of interview and focus group questions, as the authors designed research questions informed by the literature in effective school practices. Differing from the current study, which sought to understand how practices of effective schools were enacted in schools, their questions sought to understand reading practices and their questions focused solely around reading instruction. Additionally, the study by Mosenthal and colleagues took place before the authorization of NCLB, the report of the National Reading Panel, and The Reading First Initiative, all of which had a significant influence on instructional practices and professional learning.

The second study that greatly influenced my research design was John B. King's (2008) dissertation study titled *Bridging the Achievement Gap: Learning from Three Charter Schools*. Similar to the previous study, King did not attempt to test an intervention but designed a research study that provided a narrative description of three successful charter schools. King used commonalities from literature to ground his research questions and present findings of three case studies. Using quantitative achievement data to select the schools, King set his sample to be "information-rich." Using interviews and focus group data, King created narrative descriptions of how these schools utilized their control of budgets, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture to advance student achievement. King's research illuminated how successful schools operationalized their control to ensure that all students achieved at high levels. King's methodology increased the analytical generalizability (Smith, 2017) of the study, and informed future policy and practices of charter schools. Moreover, King's findings illuminated the importance of culture in effective schools.

The present study seeks to reframe the common mantra that student demographics predict their learning destinies by examining the practices of effective schools in which student outcomes exceed the expectations that demographics might predict. This study helps to bridge the gap from research to practice; that is, we have decades of empirical research suggesting *what* works in education, but this study seeks to shed light on *how* schools enact these recommended practices to create school cultures that promote student achievement. Additionally, this study contributes to effective school research as it offers teachers, principals, and policymakers a window into four successful Title 1 schools with implications that are likely to inform future practice and policy alike.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the major events and education policies that provide both context and a rationale for the current study. Of particular importance were the implications to reading assessment and instruction from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorizations, including the authorization in the 2001 No Child Left Behind and 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act. While both policies required states to account for students' reading and math achievement, the new authorization encouraged states and schools to examine what works in education, which allowed students to fully benefit from the billions of dollars provided to Title 1 schools (Darling-Hammond, 2016).

I then reviewed the theoretical perspectives that informed this study. First, I introduced a sociocultural perspective of learning as enhanced and influenced by social relationships, beliefs, and culture (Bandura, 1977, 1993; Bruner, 1977;

Vygotsky, 1978). I also discussed the expert/novice theory of learning that highlights how expert teachers positively influence student learning (Dreyfus, 2004; NRC, 2000; NASEM, 2018; Taylor et al; 1999; Taylor et al., 2003). Then I reviewed theories of deep learning for equity to underscore the importance of asset-based framing for students and educators (Freire, 1970/2016; Ladson-Billings, 2015). Throughout each learning theory, I attended to how the theory could influence a learner's (adult or child) motivation and efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Claro et al., 2016; Dweck, 2006; NASEM, 2018; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

In the final section of this chapter, I reviewed the literature relevant to effective schools (Bryk et al., 2010; Coburn et al. 2011; Klugman et al., 2015; Reeves, 2020; Taylor and Pearson, 2002; Taylor et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2003) by detailing research that supports the presence of at least five common practices found in schools designed to promote student achievement and motivation. Chapter three will discuss the methods used in this multi-case qualitative study about how decisions are made and how classroom practices are designed in effective Title 1 schools.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this multiple case study was to learn how principals and teachers in four effective schools, serving students who are economically disadvantaged, make decisions designed to support student achievement on the state assessment for English Language Arts (ELA). Furthermore, this study examined how instructional practices were designed to foster student achievement in four effective schools serving students who are economically disadvantaged. This research was designed to build on the knowledge about effective schools, school leadership, and literacy reform. This chapter outlines the qualitative methods used to tell these schools' stories, providing details of the research design, school selection process, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques, which included both within-case and cross-case analyses. Additionally, this chapter outlines efforts taken to establish the trustworthiness of the research conducted. It is important to note that this study was conducted during the global pandemic of the Covid-19 virus. In the spring of 2019, schools were forced to transition to emergency remote learning while also making plans for significant shifts during the 2020-21 school year to decrease the spread of the virus. Therefore, this chapter will also specify changes made to the original research design because collecting data from some sources was no longer possible.

Research Design

This qualitative research study employed a multiple case design with cross-case analysis (Yin, 2018) to examine the classroom practices and decisions designed

to support student achievement in schools serving families from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. The project purposefully focused on underserved schools that achieved above the state average on the state standardized reading assessment because they are likely to be "information-rich" (Patton, 2015, p. 264) in ways that bring to life important stories and successful practices.

Using an embedded design, with sub-units of analysis, this study sought to illuminate the uniqueness of each case or school (Yin, 2018) while considering the extent to which the practices in each school aligned with common characteristics of effective schools found in the literature. The unit of analysis for the study was the school itself, and this design provided multiple data sources from which to construct a rich description of how the teachers and principal in each school made decisions to support student achievement. The sub-units were used to conduct pattern matching to see if and how the findings of this analysis converged, while the narrative descriptions retained the holistic nature of each school (Yin, 2018). Thus, this design offers educators a window into schools that have beaten the odds, which contributes to practical knowledge in the field (Patton, 2015).

The advantage of an in-depth study of four effective schools instead of a broader sampling of schools using survey data is that case studies provide a depth of understanding that is not available from other research designs (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Therefore, this study was designed to examine the patterns of practices and interactions within each school beyond one classroom or individual. By looking at themes that surface from multiple data sources, it is possible to better understand the interactions that happen within a school. These themes were then used to create my

framework for analysis (Yin, 2018). Findings from this multiple case study design with a cross-case analysis will add to the research base on school improvement, as they can serve as an important bridge between research and practice. That is, a great deal of research identifies *what* makes schools effective; however, this study is designed to provide a rich source of information about the more practical dimensions of *how* schools enact effective practices.

The Role of the Researcher

As someone who has worked in education for over twenty years, I have to acknowledge the biases and the advantages that this experience provides. I began my teaching career in a school system in the same state as the study setting. That school system at the time, and still to this day, was known as one of the poorest in the state, as over 90% of students came from families that were economically disadvantaged. However, when working in those schools, I worked alongside and learned from teachers who connected with their students. I have worked in several different states throughout my career, mostly working with students from underserved communities. I fully acknowledge my belief that educators can make a significant positive difference in the learning for all students. I believe that learning takes place in social spaces where identity and knowledge are validated and reinforced by interactions with others, thus my reason for wanting to explore the interactions between principals and teachers in school settings.

Another experience that influences my perspective as a researcher is my background as a reading coach for a state department of education in a mid-Atlantic state. In this role, I worked with schools that were identified as needing improvement.

This identification was determined from the state's ELA assessment. In this position, I had the opportunity to work with five different schools over the course of two years as they worked to incorporate evidence-based strategies in reading and writing. I am thankful for my time in this position because of the lessons that I learned about how teachers (and students) change in schools where it is safe to be a learner; these lessons have remained with me for the last seventeen years. In these schools, I had opportunities to learn from reading scholars including Dorothy S. Strickland and Lesley Morrow while also working with classroom teachers who were driven by their desire for students to learn. I will always be grateful for the opportunity to collaborate and work towards positive change with these teachers.

My time in these schools aligned with the launch of NCLB and the Reading First Initiative, and I learned that accountability ratings were merely one indicator of a school. These schools all had different cultures that welcomed new learning and worked against change. In some schools, I worked with almost all the school's teachers and regularly designed professional learning opportunities that they requested. In three of the schools, I was offered a small office and was warmly greeted by the office staff each day. This was a stark comparison from one of the schools, where I was all but invisible, except for one teacher who kindly offered me a spot to hang my coat. This experience as a reading coach fueled my interest in strengthening students' ability to learn from reading. As it was my first experience working in a school in which I was not a direct employee, it also increased my ability to observe subtle interactions in a school to understand more about the school's culture. Many years later, I have realized how significantly these skills overlap with those of a

qualitative researcher. Over the course of my career, I have worked in over 30 schools. While I bring a personal connection to the topic, I also bring a keen ability to observe the interactions in schools, which I feel is valuable to this study.

Finally, it should be noted that to gain access to the four schools that agreed to participate in this dissertation study, I revealed my current position, working as the Director of Curriculum in one of the largest districts in the state where the research was conducted. I also shared that I had been a principal for almost 10 years in another district in the state. While these roles gave me a personal connection to the topic, they also provided knowledge about current state initiatives and the credibility of having experienced the challenges of working in public education. I believe this instilled a certain level of trust that, in turn, inspired principals and teachers from each participating school to be open and candid during the interviews and focus group sessions.

Overall, I acknowledge that my experience and beliefs about education bring biases to any qualitative study. However, they also provide me with a perspective as a researcher that, I believe, will allow me to make a significant contribution to the field (Patton, 1999). With this in mind, I employed sampling criteria that utilized quantitative data to ensure that the identified sample would be information-rich and used my knowledge and experience to bring depth to multiple phases of data analysis, as discussed later in this chapter.

Methods and Procedures

Sampling Procedures

From a pool of 159 schools from a state in the northeastern United States, four public non-charter elementary schools were selected to participate in this study. Schools were selected based on two criteria. First, eligible schools were recipients of school-wide Title I funds, which meant that at least 40% of their students received free and -reduced lunch (FRL) instead of targeted funds provided to all public school districts. This reduced the sample of elementary schools in the state from 159 to 69.

English Language Arts (ELA) scores from the state assessment were used as the second criterion to identify effective schools. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) bridge ELA into content areas by including standards that address reading, writing, speaking, and listening in science and social studies. State assessments aligned to the CCSS no longer required students to limit their reading performance to lower-level skills that involve simple memorization or recall; instead, these assessments expect students to apply their knowledge (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Thus, this measure was likely to reflect the different instructional components that comprised the elementary school day in a particular school.

Of course, it is understood that these state ELA assessment scores have multiple layers of assumptions. For example, when students produce writing on the assessment to demonstrate their ability to make inferences from text, they need to decode the text, form a general understanding of the text, make an inference, and create a written response. Although many competencies are needed to complete the task successfully, the assessment only captures and scores the final products of comprehension.

Despite these shortcomings, scores from this common reading assessment often inform policy decisions. While state assessment scores are not comprehensive because they represent an individual student's reading performance at one point in time, this common assessment serves as a valuable proxy of what students know about reading comprehension and how they apply their knowledge in a testing situation. The assessment provides a common data point that is used as one indicator of an individual school's effectiveness. In turn, assessment scores enable opportunities to compare overall student achievement and variations in students' reading performance among schools.

Consequently, the 69 school-wide Title I schools in the state were ranked by their ELA scores on the 2019 state reading assessment. Three of the top four schools fell in the top third of all schools in the state and the fourth school ranked the highest in the second tercile. Notably, as depicted in Figure 1, there was a gap in ELA proficiency scores between the four top-ranked schools and the fifth highest-ranking school. Thus, the four highest-ranking Title 1 schools in the state were invited to participate in the present study. This purposive sample (Patton, 2015) of four high-performing schools provided the opportunity for multi-case analyses that would be both information-rich and realistic in scope.

Figure 1

ELA Proficiency of Title 1 Schools 2019

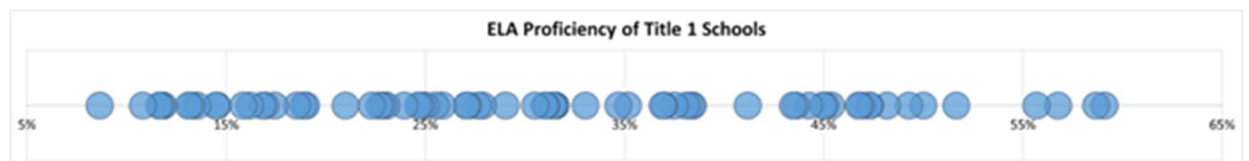


Figure 1 also serves as a reminder that these four schools are unique, as family demographics or income level was not the most predictive measure of student achievement for these schools (Hill, 2017; Reardon, 2011). Thus, these four schools appear to have beaten the odds. In the state where this study was conducted, 19 Title 1 schools scored above the state average of 38.5% proficient, comprising 19% of all schools above the state average. Conversely, 49 Title 1 schools scored below the state average on the state ELA assessment, comprising 84% of all schools below the state average. These schools clearly separate themselves from other Title 1 schools in the state.

To ensure that the corpus of data collected from these schools would be information-rich, I also reviewed each school's accountability report cards, which had been recently revised to meet new federal regulations. Under *the Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), the federal government expected states to expand accountability from solely proficiency measures on state assessments to include measures of engagement and opportunities to learn (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Thus, a new holistic report card system was designed to provide a more comprehensive examination of each school's performance on measures beyond scores on the state ELA assessment.

This new state-wide holistic rating system for elementary schools to meet ESSA regulations included achievement and growth on state assessments, English Language Proficiency assessment data, student absenteeism, teacher absenteeism, suspension rate, and exceeding expectations, which measures the percentage of students earning top scores on the state assessments. In comparison, accountability

ratings under *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) used only achievement data. There were many critics of NCLB's policy because low-performing schools that were improving often received sanctions. Subsequently, schools that had high achievement for the year, but students' scores were declining overall, were not labeled in any way (Forte, 2010).

Thus, the expectation under ESSA that states were required to include measures of school quality marked a substantial difference between the two policies (Darling-Hammond, 2016). In the state's new rating system, schools were rated on each component with a system of stars, ranging between 1 and 5, with a score of 5 stars being the highest. While this report card was intended to provide a more holistic view of each school, a school's rating cannot be higher than the lowest star. For example, if a school earned a four-star rating in six categories, but a two-star rating in the seventh category, the overall rating for the school would be two stars.

Therefore, I used this report card to strengthen the credibility of the sample, because using one year of achievement scores would have been making the same uninformed assumptions of the accountability ratings under NCLB. I reviewed the ratings in the report card to ensure that these schools would be information-rich, and more likely to replicate relevant theoretical perspectives and literature identified (Yin, 2018). All four schools had received a five-star rating in at least one category on the state's new accountability report card, with one school receiving five stars in all categories except for one. Two of the schools were four-star schools (receiving five stars in at least one category), and two schools received a three-star rating (receiving

five stars in at least one category and four stars in another category), which puts them at or above a typical rating for all schools in the state.

Case Study Participants

In school 1, which will be identified as Stewart Elementary School [pseudonym], I met with the principal and seven teachers at one of three different times, for a total of eight participants. First, I interviewed the principal at Stewart at the beginning of March 2020. The interview lasted about 90 minutes. During the first focus group with teachers in mid-April, I met with five educators, including two reading teachers, a second-grade teacher, a school social worker, and a librarian, who also serviced other schools in the district. During the second session in mid-May, I met with a fourth-grade teacher and a fifth-grade teacher. Both teacher focus groups lasted approximately one hour.

In school 2, which will be identified as Fairview Elementary School [pseudonym], I met with five participants (one principal and four teachers) in one of three sessions. In early March, I interviewed the principal. This meeting took place at the school and lasted about 50 minutes. The first focus group was in mid-April, and I met one of the two reading teachers at Fairview. This session was approximately forty-five minutes. The second focus group, lasting approximately one hour, was in June; and I met with a fourth-grade teacher, a Kindergarten teacher, and a teacher who serviced multi-language learners at Fairview and throughout the district.

In school 3, which will be identified as Seaview Elementary School [pseudonym], I met with a total of three participants (one principal and two teachers) in one of two sessions. In early March, I interviewed the principal at the school. This

meeting lasted about an hour. In June, I conducted a focus group with two teachers, including a third-grade teacher and a fifth-grade teacher. This session was approximately one hour.

In school 4, which will be identified as Great Neck Elementary School [pseudonym], I met with a total of seven participants (one principal and six teachers) at one of four different times. I was first scheduled to meet with the principal in mid-March at the school. Due to the emergency school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, this interview was rescheduled for the middle of April and conducted using a video platform. The interview was approximately one hour. In late April, I conducted a focus group with a Kindergarten teacher and a part-time reading teacher. The other two focus groups were conducted in late May. I met with a second-grade teacher and a math interventionist for grades K-5 that serviced Great Neck School and another school in the district during one session. In the remaining session, I met with a second-grade teacher and a special educator. All of the teacher focus groups were conducted virtually and approximately one hour in length.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Protecting the rights and confidentiality of the schools and study participants was very important to me. Participation by principals and teachers was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw participation at any time. Teacher participation was anonymous to the principal. All participants had a right to review their data and study findings. Pseudonyms were used for the school and participants. Districts approved the research study, and principals and teachers all provided consent prior to data collection (see Appendix A and B). All of the forms included study details, participant and

researcher roles and responsibilities, and participants' rights. All of the forms were approved and stamped by my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All data was stored on a password-protected computer.

Data Collection Sources and Timetable

Data Sources

Recognizing that schools are dynamic and complex, data from multiple sources were collected to inform each case analysis. In the original plan, data sources included face-to-face interviews with each principal, teacher focus groups, classroom observations, and school documents. However, during this research, the COVID-19 virus dramatically impacted the schooling world. Teachers in this study (and worldwide) transitioned their classrooms to remote learning. The teachers that I met with all referred to teaching using virtual platforms. Although the study's original design included classroom observations to focus on the nature of each school's ELA instruction, I did not attempt to conduct these observations due to the dramatic change. While this data source would have brought to life the environment that the teachers and principals shared with me, data collected from the other sources still allowed me to create a "thick description" of each school (Patton, 2015).

Data was collected for a period of four months, beginning in January 2020 (see Table 1 for the timetable). All data were analyzed and synthesized to create a case description of each school. This data was then used to create a cross-case analysis of the four schools.

Table 1

Time Table for Data Collection

Month	January	February	March	April	May	June
IRB Approval	X		X			
Outreach to Schools	X					
Principal Interviews			X	X		
Teacher Focus Groups				X	X	X
Classroom Observations			Did not happen due to Covid-19			
Researcher's Reflective Memos			X	X	X	X

Principal Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the principal of each school in the study. To introduce myself to the principal, I sent an introductory email and included a recruitment flyer (see Appendix C), which provided an overview of the study. Additionally, I secured a letter of agreement from the four school districts involved in the study. Each school principal was interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol of open-ended questions (see Appendix D). The interviews lasted

approximately one hour and three were held at the school in the principal's office. It should be noted that these interviews took place in March 2020. While remote learning had not yet begun, the principals were already making reference to family activities that might be canceled due to increased concern about the virus. The fourth interview was postponed due to the pandemic and rescheduled in mid-April utilizing a video platform.

A set of thirty interview questions created by the researcher were designed to yield in-depth responses and different perspectives (Patton, 2015) related to five themes drawn from the literature on effective schools: *leadership, vision, collaborative school community and professional practice, deliberate use of data, and student-centered learning climate* (see notations in Appendix D). Interview questions were piloted by the researcher, with a willing colleague, to ensure that they would facilitate participants' reflections, eliciting usable data to answer the research questions. Questions were standardized to facilitate a cross-case analysis of the four schools, as there was commonality in the topics discussed. The interviews were audio-recorded, and notes were taken during the conversations to promote accuracy in developing underlying themes and to help with coding and analysis.

Interview recordings were uploaded to the Otter.ai transcription service. However, upon close review of the transcription, there were too many mistakes to move forward. Therefore, I listened to each recording and closely compared and corrected each transcript. This process took approximately five to six hours per transcript. While time-consuming, it allowed me to listen closely to the details in each

recording; in turn, this close listening became an important part of my data analysis, as described later in this chapter.

Teacher Focus Groups

Teacher focus groups, inclusive of all grade levels and specialization, were conducted at each of the four schools using a second set of standardized open-ended questions (see Appendix E) to guide each group's conversation. As the researcher, I designed twenty-six questions to elicit information about how decisions in the school were made to support student achievement as well as to gain an understanding of the classroom practices in the school. Again, the standardization of the questions served to ensure that similar topics were raised in all groups and that a cross-case comparison could be conducted.

Participation in the focus groups was voluntary. Each school principal emailed their respective staff a recruitment flyer (see Appendix C) to introduce the research study and me. Because teachers were not in buildings, principals also distributed a personal introduction document (see Appendix F) via email that included the meeting information. While principals made the first communication to their staff, I communicated directly with all interested participants after the initial introduction. Communicating directly with the staff enabled them to participate anonymously in the study without their principal's knowledge. Additionally, separating the principal interviews from the teacher focus groups strengthened the data quality, as it allowed for different perspectives to be shared and removed any potential power differential (Danner et al., 2018).

Originally, the teacher focus groups were to be conducted at the school in face-to-face meetings. Additionally, light refreshments were planned to help improve participation. Due to the pandemic, focus groups were instead scheduled using the video meeting platform Zoom. In place of the planned refreshments, each teacher who participated was offered a \$15 gift card to a restaurant.

This shift, alongside the pandemic's stress, most likely reduced the number of teacher participants. However, using the video platform became a positive design change, as I returned several times to the recorded conversations and watched the educators' gestures and interactions. There were slight technical difficulties, such as teachers' comments were sometimes disrupted due to poor connection issues. However, these teachers' persistence and willingness to share despite these challenges should be noted. Teachers smiled and nodded in agreement with their colleagues and typed responses in the chat when necessary. Interactions happened through nods and sometimes typed responses in the chat feature. While these challenges may have impacted the number of teachers I talked with, the data's richness remained.

As Patton (2015) has suggested, using focus groups allowed teachers to build on each other's responses, offering more nuanced answers. Patton has also noted that focus groups minimize the possibility of extreme or false answers. As a researcher, I found it interesting that many examples and stories shared were similar across the multiple groups in each school, including the principal's responses. This repetition deepened my understanding of what happened in the school and strengthened the credibility of the data I collected (Patton, 1999). It was also enjoyable to have one teacher start an answer and another teacher add to the original response.

Again, all audio data was uploaded to a transcription service. I listened and watched each recording closely to correct the transcript and closely observe the group members' interactions. The smiles, sighs, and nods strengthened my data analysis described later in this chapter.

Documents

After the principal interviews and teacher focus groups, I asked the principals to share documents to clarify information they shared during the interview. These documents included master schedules to highlight common planning time, an agenda for data meetings, and a flyer for a family night. These documents were reviewed during the analyses of each school's data to provide a stronger context of the school and give me a deeper understanding of the data obtained from the interviews, increasing the data's credibility.

School and District Websites

School and district websites were reviewed several times to provide a general context of each school. For example, they provided information about how many classrooms were in each school. Further, each school posted information on their website to share with families. One school had their Blue Ribbon application linked to their website, which described their recent efforts to increase student achievement and engagement. Additionally, the schools all had a stated vision or mission about their education beliefs on the websites. These sites provided an initial understanding of the school. I also revisited the websites several times during my analysis as they provided a general backdrop to my analysis of qualitative data obtained through the interviews and focus groups.

Accountability Report Cards

The state also published school report cards, which included the measures of accountability required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Besides using this data to strengthen the selection criteria' credibility, I drew from this information to provide a context and introduction to the school for each of the case studies discussed in Chapter 4.

SurveyWorks

Yearly, each school in the study participated in SurveyWorks This survey provided information about the school's climate and culture. Survey results were reported publicly by the state's Department of Education. Educators, parents, and students at these schools participated in SurveyWorks, beginning in Grade 3. Typically, the survey has high participation amongst elementary school students as it is often administered during the school day. Responses to survey questions were grouped into ten categories. I chose to focus on four categories that closely aligned to the current study; defined by the vendor of the survey as follows:

(1) *School Rigorous Expectations* -How much students feel that their teachers hold them to high expectations around effort, understanding, persistence, and performance in class.

(2) *School Teacher-Student Relationships* -How strong the social connection is between teachers and students with and beyond the school.

(3) *School Climate* - Perceptions of the overall social and learning climate of the school.

(4) *School Engagement*- How attentive and invested students are at school.
(Panorama Education, 2021)

The four categories were comprised of Likert scale questions (see Appendix G, H, I, and J for questions). National comparative data, representing over 800 elementary schools, were available for all four of these categories. Therefore, responses to the student surveys increased the credibility of the findings by providing information about the schools from the student perspective.

Data Processing and Analysis

A detailed case study for each school was constructed after many rounds of coding. As Saldaña (2016) offered, "coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act" (p. 5). Therefore, I did not follow one strict method for coding, as this limitation would have thwarted my ability to analyze the data deeply. This ability to "play" with the data revealed information that would form the framework for the cross-case analysis (Yin, 2018). I combined many different coding methods to summarize and synthesize the data, and while this chapter may read as if it was a linear process, it was not. I would describe the process as iterative. Each time I began another phase in the analysis, I worked to see the data with new eyes and build on the wealth of information from the previous phases.

Case Analysis

Phase 1: Transcribing Data and Writing Analytic Memos. During the first phase of coding, I transcribed all of the interviews and teacher focus group sessions. I chose to transcribe all of the principal interviews first, and as noted above, this process took between five and six hours per interview. The focus groups were all conducted

via Zoom, which provided me video and an audio recording of the meetings. Therefore, I watched the focus groups and the interactions between the group members as I was transcribing. I finished the transcriptions for each school before I began the next school, providing me the ability to focus on each school's unique narrative. I had spent over forty hours listening to these schools' stories to complete the transcripts.

After completing each transcript, I wrote an analytic memo. In the memo, I attempted to summarize the subtleties of tones, gestures, smiles, and sighs and my initial feelings and insights of the meeting (see Appendix G for an example). These memos contained reactions to the data as well as emerging codes. This type of coding was my interpretation of the "oral coding" method developed by Bernauer (2015), as cited in Saldaña (2016). Utilizing this method, "audio recordings are listened to repeatedly over several days to gain intimate knowledge of their contents..." (p. 74). This process allowed me to internalize the transcripts, musing the stories long after the transcripts were complete.

Additionally, I returned to these memos throughout the coding process, as they allowed me to delve deeply into small pieces of data without the fear of getting too far removed from the whole. I referred to the memos before I began each coding step. Rereading the entirety of twelve memos in one sitting provided me with a high-level overview of the entire data set, which Tesch (1990) considers a critical step in the coding process. My memos strengthened the trustworthiness of my analysis (Patton, 2015).

Phase 2: Paper Coding a Priori Codes From Effective Schools Literature.

During the second phase of coding, I applied the five a priori codes gleaned from the literature, which also informed my interview and focus group questions. These codes gave me an initial starting point of expected data (Creswell, 2014). These codes were *vision, leadership, collaborative school community and professional capacity, deliberate use of data, and student-centered learning climate*. At this point, I hand-coded directly on three paper transcripts, helping to confirm the presence of a priori codes and crystallize operational definitions that I would then be able to refer to for the remaining transcripts.

Figure 2

Example 1 of Paper Coding

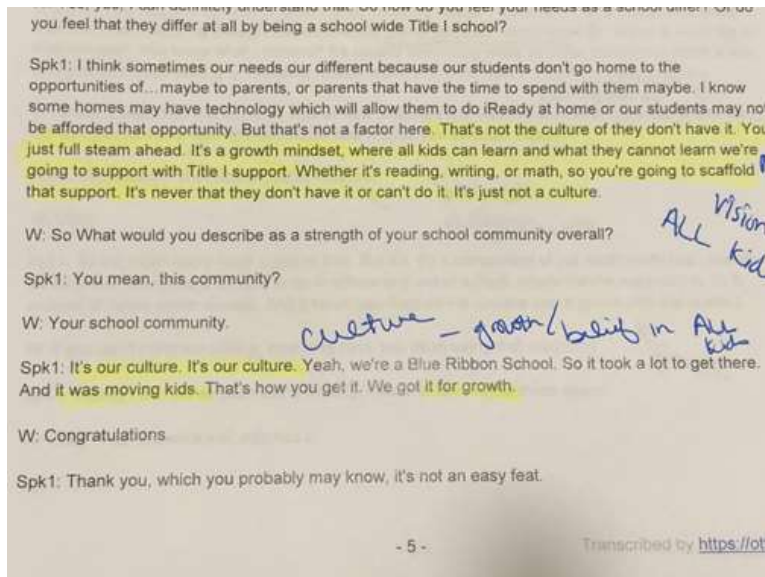
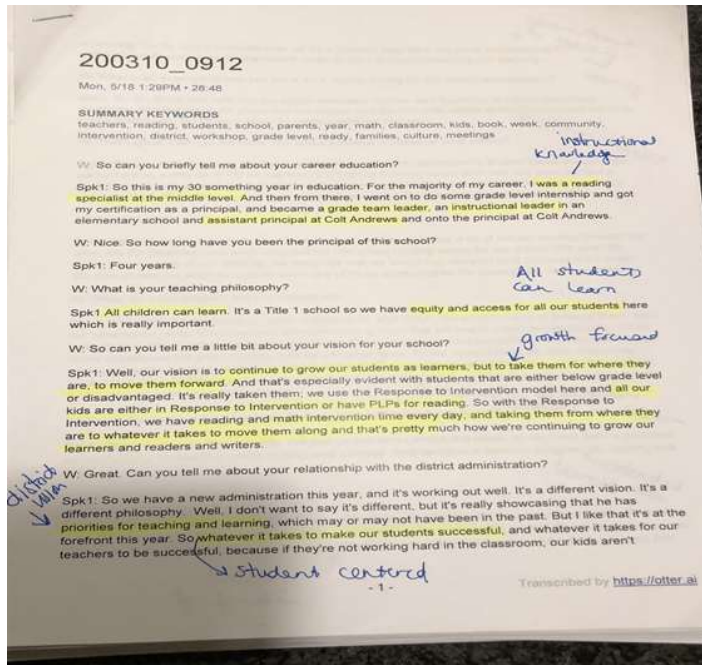


Figure 3

Example 2 of Paper Coding



While this step confirmed the a priori codes, it also expanded my thinking. I realized *leadership* had sub-elements to the theme. Because this study intended to bring insight and understanding to how leaders in these effective schools made decisions regarding instructional practices, the leadership of these schools was explored from both a principal and teacher perspective. As I was meeting with the principal and teachers, it became apparent that most of the school's decisions were shared. It was at this point of my analysis that I began to realize that much of the coded data for leadership was much more nuanced than could be captured in a single code. I feared that I had made assumptions about categories without spending time to break down the different codes that made up the category.

Phase 3: Refining the Coding Scheme. During this phase of coding, all transcripts were uploaded to the qualitative data software (QDAS) NVivo 11.4 for

MacBook, which allowed me to examine and organize my data efficiently and check my codes for consistency (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Through paper coding, I realized that many of the a priori codes were large headings with many nuances. As a result of these realizations, I initially expanded the concepts I was coding for in this third phase of analysis by remaining open to inductive codes that emerged from the data. However, the examples below serve to illustrate that expanding the codes allowed the sub-units of analysis to distract from the holistic sense of the case and I realized that I needed to reduce my themes to maintain the holistic nature of each school (Yin, 2018). Table 2 provides a progression of the codes and how they were originally expanded and then redundant or distracting codes were eliminated.

As an example, I will use the progression of the code leadership. After inductively coding for *principal leadership*, *teacher leadership*, *shared leadership*, and *district leadership*, I began to realize that many decisions were being made collaboratively, relying on input from various stakeholders, rather than solely by the principal. I recognized that I was assigning all three codes, principal, teacher, and shared leadership, to many of the same sections of data. I returned back to the effective school literature and connected that effective schools indeed utilized shared leadership. Reviewing my coding, I eliminated the shared leadership code. I then reviewed the data for the code principal and teacher leadership, many were still double coded. I made the decision to code that data as principal leadership, as the data illustrated *how* these shared leadership decisions were being made. Under teacher leadership I included data that was not captured in the principal leadership code. I used the teacher leadership code to signify when a teacher had taken a leadership role

in the school apart from the collaboration that was noted in the principal leadership code.

Furthermore, I reviewed the data coded as district leadership. However, since the study did not aim to examine the district's leadership practices, I did not include interviews with any central office leadership to obtain that perspective. Instead, data that I had coded reflected the district's impact from the perspective of the building educators. Upon reviewing these data, I decided to delete the code of district leadership as it overlapped with other codes such as family outreach and professional learning.

During this phase I also reordered the themes, as the code of *vision* became a dominant code that appeared to create a foundation for each case. My initial analysis revealed that these schools' vision had an in vivo code, "All children can learn." Underlying transcript excerpts that were initially coded as vision was emerging data from educators of a "growth mindset." That is, educators often mentioned adapting or changing strategies to ensure that all students were learning. Inherent in these data initially coded as vision were reflections of what teachers valued and their beliefs that anyone could learn, both educators and students. The dominance of evidence coded as "all children can learn" inspired me to further reflect on its influence, since my participants had shared examples that aligned with this code throughout the transcripts. After reflection, I reordered the codes and chose to introduce my findings for *vision* before those for *leadership*, which I had originally ordered first.

At this point, I took a step back to realize that I had a wealth of data and needed to reflect on and winnow themes to ensure that I could share a case study with

others that emphasized key data (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, I decided it was important to zoom out from my close analysis of the transcripts and return to a more holistic view of the data. As such, I re-watched portions of the recorded focus groups and re-listened to portions of the principals' recordings. After I completed this step for each school, I returned to NVivo to refine my codes, being mindful of areas that I coded into multiple categories in an attempt to highlight key themes that were emerging from the transcripts of each school. During this phase, I reduced and reordered my themes from the earlier identified themes (see Table 2). My order of codes was not to rank priority of findings, as the interactions that happen inside a school are complex and interconnected. I ordered my findings in a way that would provide readers with the most complete sense of the interactions that happened within the school, increasing transferability (Smith, 2017).

Table 2

Progression of Codes

Codes from October 2020	Codes from November 2020	Codes from January 2021
<p>Leadership Teacher Leadership Shared Leadership Principal Leadership District Leadership</p> <p>Vision Student-Centered Growth All Students Can Learn</p> <p>School Climate Student Feelings Staff Relationships Inclusiveness</p>	<p>Vision</p> <p>Leadership Shared Leadership Principal Leadership Teacher Leadership District Leadership</p> <p>School Climate Student Feelings Teacher Perceptions Inclusiveness of families and community</p> <p>Professional Learning and Collaboration</p>	<p>Vision</p> <p>Leadership Principal Teacher</p> <p>School Climate Student Feelings Teacher Perceptions General feelings</p> <p>Professional Learning and Collaboration</p> <p>Deliberate Use of Data Instructional Practices Student-centered Motivational</p>

<p>Resources Curriculum Materials Technology</p> <p>Professionalism Teachers commitment</p> <p>Professional Learning Structure Negative views Positive views Principal Learning Declined by district Principal driven</p> <p>Instructional Practices Student-Centered Social-emotional Science/ SS instruction High Expectations Foundational Skills Extended learning opportunities Engagement Commitment to the Standards Alignment in school</p> <p>Instructional Background Teachers Principal</p> <p>Family Relationships Positive Needs of Families</p> <p>Deliberate Use of Data</p> <p>Community Outreach</p> <p>Collective Efficacy Layers of support</p> <p>Collaboration Structure</p> <p>Challenges SEL Challenges Resources</p>	<p>Deliberate Use of Data</p> <p>Instructional Practices Student-centered Engagement Alignment Commitment to the Standards Focus on Foundational Practices</p> <p>Family Relationships Connections Challenges</p>	<p>Alignment Commitment to the Standards Focus on Foundational Practices</p> <p>Family Relationships Connections Support</p>
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Phase 4: Segmenting Data to Understand the Case. In this phase, I began to organize my findings to help formulate the assertions of the study. I coded each school

and wrote a short set-up and commentary to each meaningful segment of data that I coded to organize my thinking (see Figure 4 and 5). By organizing and color coding the case for each school, high level assertions surfaced from the key themes that were identified in phase 3. These assertions would be used to create the analytical framework (Yin, 2018) in phase five.

Figure 4

Example 1 of Color Coded Data Segments

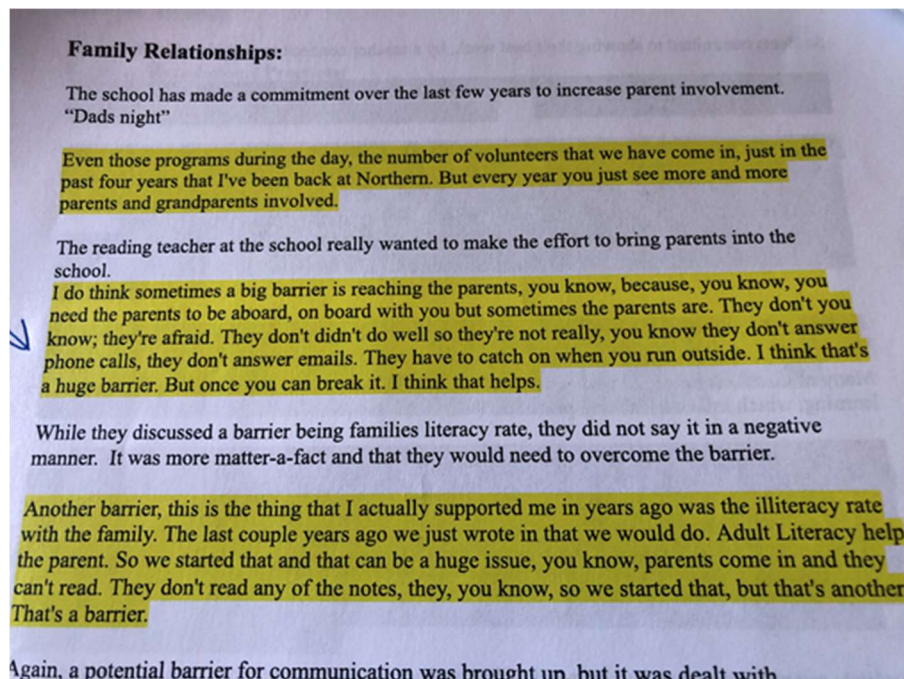
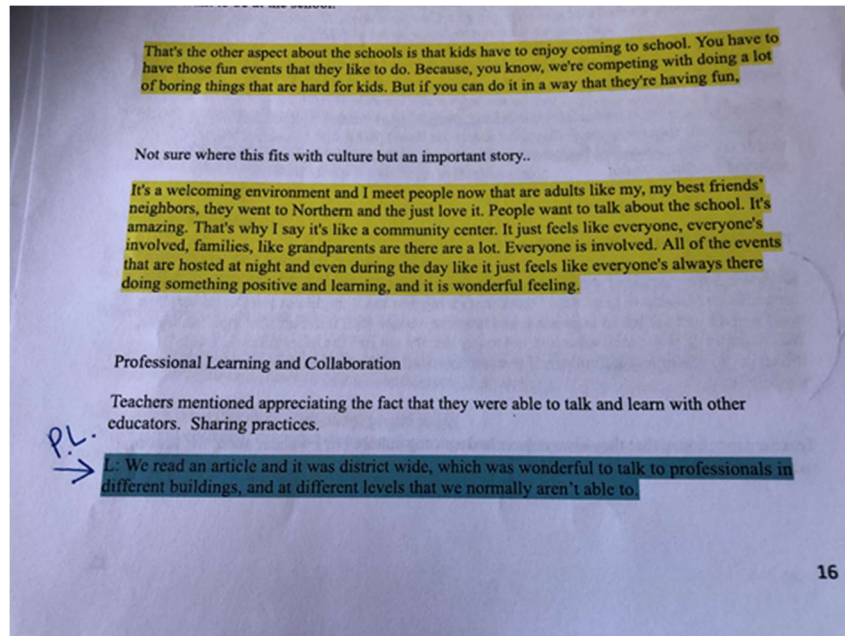


Figure 5

Example 2 of Color Coded Data Segments



Phase 5: Generating a Pattern Matching Analysis Framework to

Construct the Case Narrative for Each Participating School. In this final phase of within-case analysis, I utilized the coded commentary to create a pattern matching analytical framework (Yin, 2018). Pattern matching involves the comparison of a predicted theoretical pattern with an observed empirical pattern (Sinkovics, 2018). As this study was informed by effective school research, *what* effective schools do has been well documented. Pattern matching provided me a way to share how I contextualized the practices documented in research with what I noticed in my findings, to illuminate the *how* (see Table 3). Thus the pattern matching technique enabled me to honor each school's unique context while also allowing for analytic generalizations (Smith, 2017; Yin, 2018). I pattern matched similar themes across the

cases as well as sharing unique patterns, maintaining the holistic sense of the case. I organized each case as a descriptive narrative highlighting critical incidents for the reader (Patton, 2015).

Table 3

Pattern Matching Analysis Framework

Code	Stewart	Fairview	Seaview	Great Neck
Vision	All students can learn	All students can learn	Teaching and learning a priority Growth mindset Excellence	Creating a love for learning All students can learn High expectations
Leadership - Principal	Coaching Professional respect Instructional leadership Being present Shared decision-making Advocating for school needs	Continuous improvement Shared decision-making Advocating for school needs Support for student learning Motivating students	Shared decision-making Being present Positive support Support of student learning Instructional knowledge	ELA focused Shared decision-making Support for student learning Advocating for school needs Building relationships
Leadership - Teacher	Re-visioning fundraisers	Leading professional learning Shaping school's climate	Instructional choices	School improvement Teacher initiatives
School Climate	Teaching Kindness Building relationships	Inclusive Building relationships Community feel Fun for staff	Welcoming Focused on growth Building relationships	Sense of belonging Positive staff relationships
Professional Learning and Collaboration	Lesson observations	Book Studies Professional learning days	Data-driven instruction Teamwork	Collaborative planning Sharing lessons

	Structured professional learning Commitment to collaboration Principal learning	Focus on student learning	Collaborative planning Lesson observations New learning Professional learning days Principal learning	Shift in professional learning
Data-Driven Instruction	(no additional sub-headings)			
Instructional Practices	Student-centered Scaffolding learning Motivating learning ELA integration Aligning instruction Commitment to standards Focus on foundational practices	Student-centered Motivating learning Aligning instruction Commitment to standards Focus on foundational practices	Student-centered Aligning instruction Motivating learning	Student-centered Motivating learning
Family Relationships		Dad's night Family outreach	Family outreach	

Cross-Case Analysis: Seeking to Understand the Complex Culture of Effective Schools

As the purpose of this study was to add new knowledge to the effective schools' literature, I selected a cross-case analysis to further “mobilize knowledge from individual case studies” (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008, p.1). I recognized that a cross-case analysis would further highlight the similarities and differences of effective schools, allowing practitioners to bridge the findings from research into daily practices of schools. All four schools were effective schools based on their achievement data, but the cross-case analysis allowed me to delineate common factors

that contributed to the schools' success and begin to build a theory of *how* effective schools operate (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008).

The cross-case analysis consisted of four phases: first, to more precisely articulate patterns in data influenced by the eight forces of culture (Ritchhart, 2015); second, to analyze the role of efficacy across students, teachers, and the collective stakeholders of the schools (Bandura, 1993); third to better understand the four sources of efficacy (Bandura, 1993), and finally to explore student perception data to more holistically understand the relationships between the influences of culture in creating school-wide practices that foster efficacy. Because this followed Phases 1-5 from the within-in case analysis, the analyses conducted across all four cases are described next, as Phases 6, 7a & b, and 8.

Phase 6: Recognizing Shared Expectations Within a School Culture. As I was working with the findings from the individual cases I recognized that I was using the words vision and beliefs almost interchangeably. A vision is the stated beliefs of the school, and my interest was always in the enacted beliefs of the educators in the school. After reflecting on the order of the subunits of analysis from the individual case study, where I prioritized the role of vision at the schools, I realized that I was actually describing the expectations of the schools. The enacted beliefs of the educators in the school were so powerful that they became the expectations that influenced how all decisions were made at the school. I began to recognize that the expectations of the school created a culture in these schools.

In my initial analysis, my embedded unit of analysis was school climate. School climate relates to the general behaviors and feelings of the school and how

those perceptions influence students and educator relationships (MacNeil et al., 2009). Whereas, the culture of the school represents the collective beliefs, values, and assumptions of the school (MacNeil et al., 2009). While climate and culture are naturally connected, my findings of the influence of *vision* from the case analysis made me realize that vision in these four effective schools represented the beliefs and values of their school culture. This realization guided my search for a framework to conduct this first portion of the cross-case analysis.

It was at this point that I discovered Ron Ritchhart's (2015) framework for culture. His work explained how a culture of thinking in schools and classrooms is created through the intentional implementation of the following eight forces: expectations, language, time, modeling, opportunities, routines, interactions, and environment.

- Expectations influence culture because they "operate as 'belief sets' or 'action theories' that influence our own efforts in relation to the achievement of desired goals and outcomes" (p. 38).
- Language influences culture because of its hidden power "to subtly convey messages that shape our thinking, sense of self, and group affinity" (p.61).
- Time influences culture because it has both a quantitative and qualitative component. "Our allocations of time reflect our values. Our sequencing of events, construction of moments, and reflections on actions allow us to scaffold and draw a connecting thread through learning occasions to create unity" (p. 87).

- Modeling influences culture because it influences what a group explicitly models and, equally important, is implicitly modeled through daily actions.
- Opportunities influence culture because “the opportunities present will serve either to constrain or enhance the activity of both individuals and the group as a whole” (p.141).
- Routines influence behavior because they “represent a set of shared practices that constitute a group’s way of doing things”, and “routines become patterns of behavior for both individuals and the group” (p. 171).
- Interactions influence culture because they “form the basis for relationships among teachers and students, students and students, and teachers and teachers” (p. 199). In this study, these interactions have been extended to encompass relationships with the principal and families of the school as well.
- Environment influences culture because “the physical environment is the ‘body language’ of an organization, conveying values and key messages even in the absence of its inhabitants” (p. 227).

Each transcript was re-coded for evidence of each force and then analyzed for similarities and differences. Similar to the phase in my case study analysis, I color coded the patterns of my framework, and then segmented meaningful data and wrote a set-up and commentary for each one, surfacing my high-level assertions. The decisions of principals and teachers made regarding the forces of culture revealed school-wide practices are detailed in Chapter 5.

Phase 7a: Teasing Out Dimensions of Collective Efficacy. During the within-case coding and analysis, a code emerged that surprised me (Creswell, 2014),

collective efficacy. As an educator, I have often heard the term collective efficacy and had a general understanding of its meaning from how it was used in context and my knowledge of self-efficacy. However, I grappled with how best to articulate this term, since it somehow felt different than previous definitions, yet it connected to so many emerging themes (Creswell, 2014). To explain further, each time that I coded collective efficacy, it was always combined with a code from the pattern analysis, but in some way, I felt that it served to “mobilize” the findings of the individual cases. One challenge was that in the recent literature, definitions of collective efficacy focused primarily on teachers (Donohoo et al., 2018; Hattie & Donoghue, 2016; Klassen et al., 2011; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Therefore, I returned to the literature to better understand the concept of collective efficacy to validate and articulate my initial assertions.

Hattie and Donoghue (2016) argued that the more important influence related to student achievement: collective teacher efficacy (CTE). Schools where educators with high reported CTE were also noted to have recognizably higher student achievement. While this recent correlational finding was particularly salient to my study (since Hattie and Donoghue positioned the effect of CTE well above the influence of a student's economic background), the influence of efficacy on learning and achievement is not new. Rather, this finding dates back to Bandura's work (1986, 1993), as Bandura (1993) explained, "Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave" (p. 118). While Hattie and Donoghue (2016) reported collective efficacy as having a significant correlation on student achievement, this finding was inconsistent with other literature. In fact, forty years of research on

teacher efficacy (TE) and CTE, which are used interchangeably in the literature, has not resulted in a clear connection between teacher efficacy and student achievement (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Additionally, Klassen et al.'s (2011) review of over 200 empirical studies showed a lack of evidence linking TE to student outcomes and called for more research to understand how TE relates to classroom practices and how it can be increased in school contexts. Nevertheless, this belief in working together to support student learning was a theme that I had heard throughout my findings from the individual cases. I also recognized that I needed to further explore the data to understand and articulate the nature of efficacy as it was revealed within and across the four cases. Therefore, I coded the school-wide practices that were revealed from the findings of phase 6, for the three levels of efficacy, student, teacher, and collective, that Bandura (1993) posited influenced student's academic development in schools. The findings of phase 7a are discussed in Chapter 5.

Phase 7b: Four Sources of Efficacy. Recognizing that my purpose of the cross-case analysis was to highlight the similarities and differences of effective schools, which would allow practitioners to bridge the findings from research into daily practices of schools, I realized that labeling the school-wide practices would not fully allow my findings to be mobilized. Therefore, I conducted another level of analysis to organize my findings from phase 7a according to Bandura's (1993) four sources of efficacy. A proposed model for how the three levels of efficacy appeared to operate within the culture of each school community was created and supported by my findings as part of the discussion in Chapter 6.

Phase 8: Comparing Cross-Case Findings to Student Perception Data. To increase the methodological rigor, I chose to review the student survey results, from SurveyWorks after the qualitative data was collected and analyzed. SurveyWorks provided student perspective data, which I was not able to ascertain directly from the schools as classroom observations were not permissible during the global pandemic. Additionally, SurveyWorks provided another set of data to triangulate my findings, uncovering notable inconsistencies across the schools. Student perception data in the four categories of *School Rigorous Expectations*, *School Teacher-Student Relationships*, *School Climate*, and *School Engagement*, were reviewed for the four schools included in this study and compared to a national data set. In summary, this study sought to illuminate the *how* of effective schools. Thus, I felt analyzing the culture of effective schools would allow me to “delineate the combination of factors” that come together to create an effective school and make sense of the *in vivo* code *collective efficacy* (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008, p. 2).

Trustworthiness

Throughout the study, I used several strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of findings. Qualitative research’s strength is found in its acceptance in the contemporary field in which it informs as well as its ability to inform future research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1999). Lincoln and Guba (1985) establish four main criteria for strengthening the trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. The steps that were taken to strengthen the trustworthiness in each criteria will be explained in the following section.

Credibility refers to the confidence or truth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As this study sought to illuminate how effective practices were enacted in schools, I piloted my principal interview questions. An assumption of mine when designing the study was that many of the practitioners, both principal and teacher, were going to be well skilled in their field. According to expert/novice theories of learning (Dreyfus, 2004) expert practitioners would make many decisions intuitively and I wanted to ensure that the questions that I developed would provide practitioners an opportunity to reflect and share their decision-making. While I had worked collegially with the principal that participated in the pilot, I had never been to her school. The participant provided me feedback on the questions and the process. Doing a pilot interview ensured that the questions that I developed would elicit data that would help answer my research questions.

To further the credibility of my study I considered data from multiple sources including principal interviews, teacher focus groups, school documents, school and district websites, state accountability reports cards, and student survey data from SurveyWorks I used data from these sources to draw inferences about the *how* of effective schools. Additionally, to increase the trustworthiness of my findings, I conducted member checking (Creswell, 2014). During this process, I emailed my analysis of each case and the cross-case analysis to the members from each of the four participating schools. I also invited them to a meeting using a virtual platform to listen to their reactions and make any changes or clarifications if needed.

Transferability refers to the extent that findings can be applied to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2014) and Lincoln and Guba (1985)

discussed using thick-rich description as a strategy to increase trustworthiness. Through the introductory description of each school, the case study, and then through the cross-case analysis, I employed this strategy to provide significant information about the school. The richness of this storytelling was done to allow others to adopt and adapt practices in the four schools (Smith, 2017, p.141). Additionally, as I was coding, analyzing, and writing, I returned to the transcripts multiple times to ensure accuracy and reveal the most important data of this study (Patton, 2015).

To increase dependability, I created a case study protocol. I used the same interview and focus group questions for each school. I created a standard letter of introduction to principals and then to staff. For each school I introduced myself following the protocol, first reaching out to principals and then securing district letters of support, before I began collecting data in my interview with each principal. After the principal interview in each school, I asked principals to forward my recruitment letter to teachers. Sharing my selection criteria, case study protocol, as well as my framework of analysis would allow future researchers to replicate this study (Yin, 2018).

Using the multiple sources of data allowed triangulation of the data in two ways. First, the quantitative data from the student surveys, the state ELA assessment, and the accountability report card allowed me to select schools that would provide “information-rich” qualitative data obtained from the teachers and the principals during the interviews and focus groups (Patton, 1999). Second, using the student survey data also provided data from the students' perspective in the selected school.

Conformability refers to the researcher's ability to establish the findings of the study without bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To increase trustworthiness, I used a research notebook to support my reflection and reflexivity (Patton, 2015). I documented my questions and my reactions to the data in the notebook (as seen in Figure 6). I also used it to draft theories and model connections between the themes that were surfacing from my coding. As part of this iteration, I often returned to what Guba (1978) refers to as "bridging" as I actively tried to model how the emerging themes connected (as seen in Figure 7). This process allowed me to revisit the data with purpose. I often reviewed my initial findings and commented on potential gaps in coding or possible questions to explore in my next round of analysis. Additionally, I used the notebook to document my process. Patton (2015) refers to analysis as a type of fieldwork in its own right, and "analysts have an obligation to monitor and report their own analytical procedures and process as fully and truthfully as possible" (p. 531). Thus, my notebook and memos strengthened the trustworthiness of my analysis.

Figure 6

Writing Memo from Research Notebook

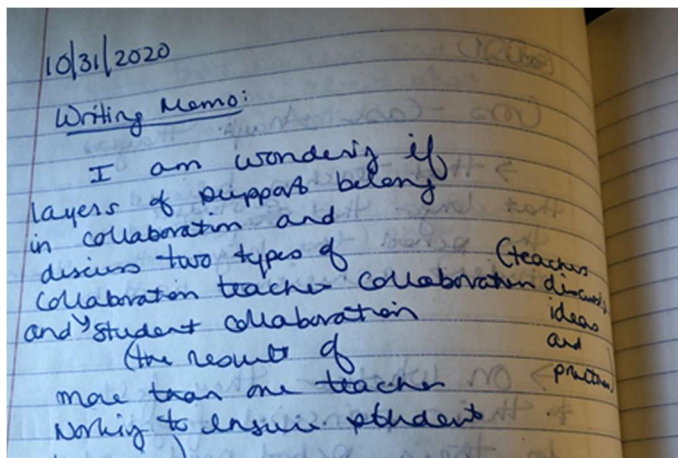
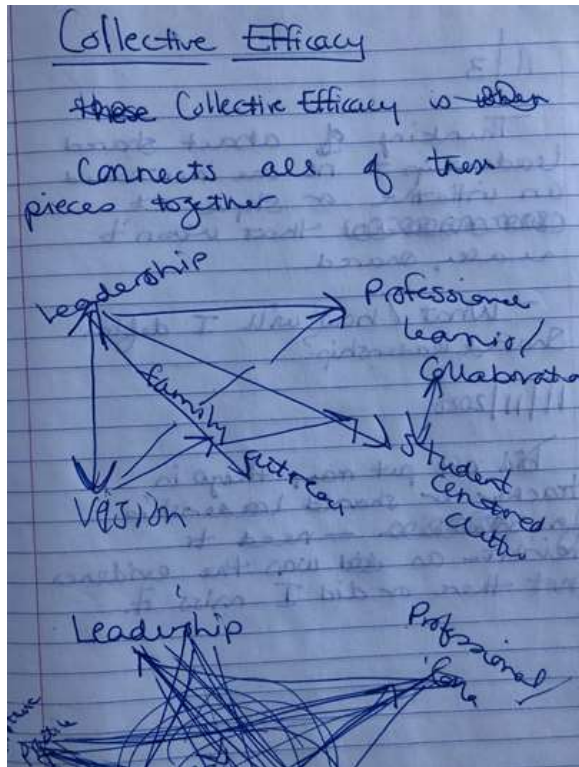


Figure 7

Bridging Attempt



Chapter Summary

Utilizing ELA state assessment data, a purposeful sample of four Title 1 elementary schools was identified. A multiple case study approach was used to examine how administrators and teachers in effective schools make decisions and design classroom practices to foster student achievement. The researcher gathered evidence over a four-month period from several data sources in an effort to illuminate *how* effective schools enact positive school-based practices to bridge what is known in research to practice.

Additionally, a cross-case analysis was created to highlight the similarities and differences of how these schools made decisions and designed instructional practices to support all learners. The data was coded and re-coded several times utilizing several different techniques. This approach allowed me to dive deeply into the data and then pull back to generate a holistic and cohesive view of how participating school made decisions to foster student success. Findings from these within-case and cross-case analyses are presented in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

CHAPTER 4

Case-Study Findings

This chapter presents the narrative case studies of four effective Title 1 schools. The data was collected over a four-month period from March - June 2020. While multiple data sources informed the analysis, data sources from principal interviews and teacher focus groups provided incredibly rich descriptions of how these schools bridged what is known in the literature and how it is enacted in practice. These case studies were created from several phases of qualitative analyses in an effort to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do principals and teachers in four effective Title 1 schools make decisions that are designed to foster student achievement on state reading assessments?
2. How are classroom practices designed to foster student achievement in four effective Title 1 schools?

These schools were purposefully selected and therefore they were likely to predict similar results aligned to the theoretical perspective and literature review (Yin, 2018). Findings for each case are organized by the embedded units of analysis that informed my study and are grounded in the literature of effective schools: *Vision, Leadership, School Climate, Professional Learning and Collaboration, Data-Driven Instruction, Instructional Practices, and Family Relationships*.

As the unit of analysis for each case is the school itself, and not the individual principals, teachers, or individual practices, I took care during my analysis to ensure that I did not ignore “holistic features of the case” (Yin, 2018, p.273). Using pattern-

matching analysis as the structure for my case analysis allowed me to see replications across the embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2018). Pairing replication logic and a careful selection of the embedded units of analysis increased the generalizability of the findings, strengthening the answers to the posed research questions (see Smith, 2017; Yin, 2018).

This study intended to illuminate the stories of effective Title 1 schools in order to better understand *how* these schools, as an organization, made decisions and designed classroom experiences to support all students. First, individual narratives are presented for each school. This introductory overview of descriptive data serves to remind the reader of the unique and dynamic context of each school.

Following these introductory narratives, findings from the pattern analysis are presented for each of the four schools. Pseudonyms are used to identify both the schools and educators that participated in this study. While I organized and analyzed the cases using pattern analysis, I mindfully composed the narratives of each school to maintain a complete and holistic view of all four schools, with careful attention to not present the school as merely a component of the variables (Yin, 2018). Analyzing and presenting the findings in this way allows readers to peek into these schools to see patterns that parallel the substantial literature in Chapter 2 that presented individual aspects of effective schools. Pattern analysis enabled me to make analytic generalizations in the hope that findings from this study can be extended beyond the case to support learning for students in other Title 1 schools (Smith, 2017; Yin, 2018).

At the end of each case, I provide a summary of the findings to answer the research questions posed as well as point out similarities and differences that were

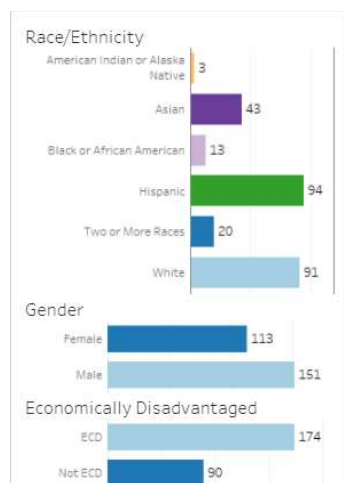
revealed from the pattern analysis and analytic generalizations (Smith, 2017; Yin, 2018), thus illuminating the educational practices of effective Title 1 schools.

Stewart Elementary School

Stewart Elementary School is located in the center of a city neighborhood. At the time of data collection, there were approximately 260 students at the pK-5 school, and Stewart is one of 15 elementary schools in the city. Seven of the schools in the city received school-wide Title 1 funding, and approximately 66% of Stewart students were from economically challenged households. The demographic data for Stewart Elementary is seen below in Figure 8. The school received a four-star rating in the 2019 accountability report card and earned five stars for their ELA growth. Stewart educators actively worked to support students' academic and social-emotional development and they were committed to creating strong relationships with students, fellow educators, and families.

Figure 8

Demographic Information for Stewart Elementary



Note. From Rhode Island Department of Education. (2019). *Report card.* <https://reportcard.ride.ri.gov/201819>

Vision

It was apparent that everyone in the school had high expectations for students, both in their academic achievement and their behaviors towards others. The school shared a commitment to ensure that all students were learning. This belief was a compass that guided their decision-making.

All Students Can Learn

Doing whatever it takes to meet all children's needs was part of the principal's practice, even when she had her very first classroom as a teacher. She reflected that she called herself "eclectic," but not because she was easily swayed by "buzzwords" or "the newest thing that's coming down the pike," as she put it. She firmly believed that all students could learn, which is why she was so passionate, insisting that everyone continue to try and find out what worked for each child; she explained, "One thing I expect...from my staff is when something's not working, reach out to the support professionals" to find new supports or strategies that work for the student in question. She was insistent that connecting and working with others was about helping all students: "You know...find your village...and get other people involved." She recognized that this simple expectation of working with others to create learning opportunities for all students required a great deal of work, adding, "I think...people will say, you know, I expect a lot, but I wouldn't expect any more from them than I do for myself."

Teachers at Stewart Elementary recognized that the principal's vision for student learning involved more than just academics. Carol shared that they felt the "motto is to grow the whole kid, not just educational wise. We grow them into how to

be kids; how to be people in society, also." The teachers shared the principal's high expectations for academics as well. Andrea described the school as "inclusive" and, with this intention, elaborated that "we try to work on every kid, every learner, no matter where they are -- we try and meet their needs." Underscoring this strong belief to work with each child, Nancy added, "I try to reach every learner best I can." Paul shared that this vision is shared by the entire school, remarking that the principal is "always expecting us to expect the best of the kids, and I think that is what all of us expect is to for us to get the best out of the kids that we can get out of them, however, that may be." This last comment refers to the continuous efforts that emerged throughout the case to make decisions that supported all learners and created classroom learning environments that allowed all students to thrive.

The teachers happily shared their vision that all students could learn. There was an expectation to support every student's learning, as teachers felt this vision was shared by the entire school, including the students. Carol shared that "her [the principal's] expectations are our expectations, and kiddos know; they act on those expectations and she celebrates everything," emphasizing with a smile, "she really does." This expectation reflected the respect educators held for students in the school. As a listener, I heard examples of this vision from everyone I spoke to. As the principal shared, she had "kind of an involved little childhood" and felt lucky "to have a couple of teachers that made a difference..." This experience influenced her beliefs for Stewart Elementary School, remarking that "it was impactful." She felt deeply that "we have a purpose, and it may be hard," but it was possible to ensure that all students learn.

Leadership

This clear and committed belief that all students learn required commitment and dedication to create a school that was safe, embracing all learners, and actively worked to support student achievement. The principal had a noticeable presence in the school, but thoughtfully shared decision making with teachers, which appeared to increase their commitment and feelings of accountability to ensure that all students were learning. The principal's background as a reading coach influenced her interactions with teachers and families. The staff shared that they felt she respected them as professionals and appreciated her strong instructional leadership. The principal shared her efforts to stay apprised of policy and instructional practices that could impact the school. Teachers shared with awe that the principal had an ability to be ever present in the school, knowing everything that was happening in the building. In addition to the many collaborative decisions that the principal's leadership fostered, teachers also felt empowered to take on initiatives to improve the school.

Principal Leadership

"[P]assion" was how Carol described the principal. This descriptor echoed through my ears as I listened to the focus groups. The principal "really wanted to be in [the district] where it's home," as she was a resident and had taught in the district. This passion and dedication to students, teachers, and the entire school community were almost tangible. The principal shared that this was so much more than just a job to her, describing it as "a calling" and that being a principal is not about "the money or the hours. It's about the impact that you make." Paul respectfully shared that "she's into

everything." This devotion drove her decisions and kept the school focused on doing whatever was necessary for every child to learn.

Coaching. While these expectations grounded the principal's decisions as a leader, she and her teachers described her leadership style as very coach-like. Carol shared that "[the principal] actually was a reading specialist in the district and held the position..." when it was a coaching role. The principal explained that she had previously worked as a reading coach and had recently participated in a coaching workshop series sponsored by the state principal's association. The principal felt that coaching fostered more teacher agency, "instead of driving the conversation with a teacher," coaching facilitated their own understanding, "trying to get them there more with my questioning."

The principal shared that coaching ensured stronger outcomes for students and fostered stronger relationships throughout the school. To clarify what she meant about fostering strong relationships, she shared a typical scenario that teachers often ask the office to file a truancy case when a student has been excessively absent. However, instead of just reacting, the principal asks teachers questions to see if they have reached out to the student's family to explain "the impact [of the absences] on their school day?" The principal continued by sharing her belief that immediately acting without asking questions "doesn't build relationships," and leaves little room to improve the situation.

Professional Respect. The teachers at Stewart Elementary School agreed that the principal's leadership style was balanced. Teachers felt supported and also empowered to make professional decisions. Tara explained that "[S]he supports by

giving, giving when it is needed, and not trying to help more than is needed," adding that the principal was "really good at, not micromanaging." This was said with a great deal of respect, and as the teacher defined the principal's leadership style, others in the group nodded in agreement. Andrea added that "She understands that we're professionals and we understand our jobs, and we can do our job." Again, multiple sources of interview data suggest that the district's and principal's clear understanding of expectations served to empower teachers to make decisions.

The principal's communication style with staff enhanced this sense of clarity around expectations. Jim explained that "She's honest and she's blunt...She tells you what she needs you to know and that you can take that information and move forward with it." This was said with an appreciation of clear communication as the teacher added, "That's a quality that I like," as it "helps to save a lot of time." Carol added in agreement that, "She [the principal] is very direct," but again, this was shared as a positive attribute. These comments suggest that everyone's work and time were valued and seen as necessary to support all students. Further, clear and open communication was paramount for teachers to feel empowered to make decisions. Jim explained, "[You do] not have to try and figure out what she was trying to say...because I can't always figure out what other people are trying to say...so it helps to save a lot of time."

Instructional Leadership. As a leader, the principal was also clear about her expectations for classroom instructional practices, describing that when she "first got here," they examined the reading curriculum and materials and outlined the "must-dos." By outlining the "must-dos," she not only was strengthening the alignment of

instructional practices, but an often overlooked point was that she was also fostering and empowering teachers to examine their practice about where they would also have choices. She described these opportunities for student choice by explicitly calling out optional "can dos" that were part of normal classroom routines at the school.

Another expectation that the teachers shared was that the principal wanted small group instruction in the classrooms. As Paul reported, "It was actually a big push from [the principal]...years before the district." He added that the principal also championed one of the small groups that incorporated technology into their instruction "well before blended learning was even a thing." As the teachers shared these clear expectations around instructional practices, there was a sense of pride that they have collectively made decisions to impact all learners. These decisions were guided by the principal's leadership to encourage and coach students. Paul shared, "She has really gotten the staff to buy into a lot of stuff." While her expectations were high, Paul respectfully added "She has pushed us from the moment she came in." There was an incredible sense of pride. Paul shared, "Our test scores are where they are" because "we try to work on every kid, every learner, no matter where they are..." The passion and dedication that the principal modeled were reflected in the staff's commitment to students as well.

Through her modeling and high expectations, the principal of Stewart Elementary was a strong instructional leader. In her interview, she revealed that she is constantly reading and very involved in the state principal's association. She realized what she had to do for herself when she left the smaller district that relied more heavily on principals leading curriculum work. She shared that she continuously

collects ideas or information and builds the "agenda over time," as the monthly meetings are "focused" on professional learning. However, she mentioned that professional learning is also happening through Individualized Education Programs (IEP) meetings, common planning meetings, and data meetings. She reflected on the impact she could make on student learning: "Data meetings, I think, are our biggest -- my way into the instructional practice." She continually modeled for teachers ways of reflecting on data to inform their design of instructional practices for students, sharing that sometimes "I may even ask a question at a meeting that I know the answer to, but I want somebody to, like, think about it."

Being Present. When I met with the principal, she struck me as someone who was always aware of what was happening in her school; I noticed, for example, that she kept an ear on interactions in the office during our entire meeting. Her teachers all confirmed my assumption. Nancy stated that "She knows every single thing I'm doing." This was shared with respect and awe for the attention that her principal gave to the school and she wondered how she did it. Paul mentioned, "She's always finding ways...she knows what's going on in my room, all the time, like she's walking the halls." Again this awareness and participation of the happenings extended beyond the classroom, as Carol pointed out that "She's at every team meeting."

The principal also shared how she learns a great deal at special education meetings about how to develop and monitor IEP. While these meetings are focused on the needs of an individual child, the principal shared, "I learn a lot about a teacher." She stressed that good teaching for a student with special educational needs is linked to stronger practices for all students, adding, "It's not just about that kid." She shared

that she doesn't have a "formal agenda" to ask certain questions during the meeting, "but things that come up that I might ask a question or mention something" are very insightful. To put it another way, the principal was always thinking about improving learning at the school for all students, adding that "After the parent meeting, we are changing the way things are done in that classroom." With this constant reflection, combined with her alertness to recognize opportunities, the principal at Stewart Elementary was always making decisions to support learning, explaining that these changes in the classroom "will support that child, but it's going to support other people too."

Shared Decision-Making. Regardless of all of the principal's passion, dedication, and knowledge, she did not lead alone. Her ability to communicate her clear vision for the school, create support for the vision, and empower educators in the building to make professional decisions allowed her to distribute her leadership throughout the school. Teachers commented that she shared decision-making with many educators in the building, including the two reading teachers. One of the reading teachers noted that they met with the principal regularly and that "[h]er agenda is our agenda. And we know what she wants...and we make sure that that happens." This empowerment appeared to strengthen the school community. The reading teacher noted that the principal "has so much that she has to deal with every day that we know what we need to do with the ELA curriculum, so we will go ahead and do that, assisting our teachers in any way that we can."

However, these shared decisions were not limited to just a few educators. Tara also mentioned the principal's ability to encourage teachers to change practices to

support student learning. Tara added the principal was progressive as she was "willing to go outside of the box sometimes to make sure that the kids are getting what they need." Tara shared an intervention program that she led at the school, commenting that this empowering experience was unique to this school, "versus at other schools that I work in, I have my time...and everything is as a whole class, and it's, it's more the standard." Tara's tone communicated her belief that education needed to be forward-thinking to be effective for all students.

In another example of shared decision making, Paul shared that the principal's main focus of data meetings had been ELA. When he questioned her about the practice, she defended the decision stating, "We have so many ELL students." While he understood her perspective, he wanted to incorporate more math into the meetings. As an example of the principal's willingness to accept feedback and change practices to support student learning, Paul shared that the principal "did start incorporating more math meetings." This example was incredibly insightful as it demonstrated that the principal modeled her thinking behind decisions, yet remained open and reflective to other points of view. It also illustrated that reflecting on practice to improve student learning had become common practice in the school for the principal and teachers.

Advocating for School Needs. The teachers all agreed that the principal was constantly looking for resources and ideas to improve the school, "She's always thinking about how to make...our school better." To demonstrate this, Andre reflected on a recent playground initiative. While the principal "found" the opportunity, she encouraged "teachers to join and be part of the committee, which led to a full playground makeover... She's always looking for ways to get better." Paul added,

"[T]here are grants we've gotten...because of how she...she pursues them." The teachers were grateful for the additional resources and her commitment to supporting the school.

Building Relationships With Colleagues. The principal's leadership style at Stewart Elementary also included forging strong relationships with building educators. Teachers felt that their efforts were noted and celebrated by the principal. Paul recounted the principal's incredible efforts "just to make us feel great for teacher appreciation day." Because the school building was closed due to the pandemic and teachers were teaching remotely, "she went to every teacher[']s home], around the state, and dropped off a sign saying that a faculty member is working hard here." Paul emphasized that her efforts "just make[s] you feel valuable and listened to." Furthermore, while every teacher that I talked with thought that the principal had high expectations and expected teachers to support all learners, they also shared that she recognized that they had their own personal lives as well. Nancy noted, "One thing that I see her doing that most principals don't, is like she is family first... We'll help you." Paul also felt it was so important "to know that you have a leader who...who is supporting you."

Teacher Leadership

It is important to note that teacher leadership was evident throughout the previous section of principal leadership, as there was a clear commitment from the principal to encourage and empower educators in their classrooms and throughout the building. Again, this underscored the school's commitment to shared leadership

practices. However, it is important to illustrate a few examples of how aspects of teacher leadership also served to promote student achievement.

Re-visioning Fundraisers. A key example of teacher leadership at Stewart Elementary was how the book fair evolved from being a fundraiser to an opportunity to excite students about reading and connect them with texts. The librarian mentioned, "A few years ago, the book fairs were turned over to me...which I love." This empowering opportunity not only permitted her the funds "to buy more books for the library," but it also allowed her to change the design of the book fair; she continued to explain, "The way we're doing things now instills in the kids that owning a book is a great thing." While this was a great deal of effort for the teacher, she was positive and excited to share how things had changed under her leadership of the book fair. "I work really hard with [the vendor] to get affordable books for the kids...I still find something that the kids can get with that bag full of coins. So I think that's been a good thing...".

School Climate

The educators at Stewart also worked to create a learning environment that was safe and welcoming for all stakeholders. Through their efforts to teach kindness and build relationships, educators in the school modeled their concern for academics as well as with how people were feeling at the school.

Teaching Kindness

The principal shared that they had "restarted" a bucket filling initiative "because that's sort of a nice umbrella to being kind and teaching children." This initiative was intended to spread kindness and foster respect throughout the school. As

part of the initiative, the principal mentioned that they even brought in "the home component," a representation that she did not see the school walls as an end to their work to create a positive school climate.

When I was walking through the halls with the principal, she pointed out evidence of the bucket-filling initiative, both in classrooms and the teachers' room. These bright and colorful bulletin boards and posters cheerfully highlighted people from the school. She shared that they were focusing on this "re-initiative until the end of the year." She further explained, "The first year we did this many years ago, some [teachers] kind of didn't buy in as well...but I think that the culture has shifted here now that there's no question now of, 'Yeah, you have to fill somebody else's bucket.'" I thought that this statement and reflection were so remarkable as it speaks to the fact that the principal truly models and believes in persistence and that sometimes learning is not perfect on the first try. Through her words and efforts, the principal modeled her persistence, especially because this initiative was important for student learning.

Building Relationships

Teachers in the focus groups also reported the importance of creating a climate at the school in which students felt respected and welcomed. Cindy described the school as "nurturing and very effective." Andrea added that Stewart was "collaborative and caring." She elaborated by sharing, "Teachers all really work together to help the students and the caring is because they really care about the students."

Creating a safe and welcoming environment also extended beyond the students. The teachers and the principal communicated a shared expectation to reach out to families to help make them feel comfortable. The principal stressed the

importance of sharing positive experiences with parents and not just to call home when there was a problem, adding "every year, we've done something different." These outreach efforts included "a positive phone call home to every child" as well as sending "postcards," and the principal provided teachers with "postage pre-labeled envelopes" for "letters" as well. She shared it was now "part of their practice" to reach out in positive ways to families. She explained that while parents may not always be active in the Parent-Teacher-Organization, "we've built it now into our culture that you have to get the parents involved." Carol shared that "it's all-inclusive," which serves to create a welcoming environment for everyone.

The teachers that I talked with shared that these positive connections and relationships also included the staff, expressing that the staff was like a "family." While they felt that way because of "the endearment," they all chuckled when Andrea admitted that there might be a "piece that probably drives you crazy too." However, Andrea thought the commitment that they shared to support all learners made it possible to ask any person in the school to "walk a mile with you to help you out." The teachers knew that they would get that support as Carol shared that "we're all there for the same reasons, no matter what, we all enter that door there for the kids and for the families and all willing to go above and beyond." The group's unanimous agreement when the teacher shared this commitment to creating an environment that welcomed and supported all students was powerful and it helped me to understand that the decisions made in this school consistently focused on supporting students.

During the second focus group, the teachers also described the sense of "family" that the school had amongst the staff. Paul explained that he had left a "much

more affluent" school and had "every intention on going back," but he added, "This school from the minute I started working there; it becomes your family." Nancy shared that she also thought of the school "like family basically," adding that the staff regularly connected outside of the school. "Our kids have grown up together, and play together every summer." However, she realized that "not every single faculty member is like best friends, but we respect each other," pausing, and then adding for emphasis, "But when it comes to, like when we need each other, I think every single staff member will step up and help each other out." Teachers in both focus groups conveyed this compelling feeling of trust and interconnectedness amongst the staff.

Working together created a positive school climate, helping to keep teachers socially and emotionally healthy by providing them with a network of support. Carol shared the "sense of cohesiveness and sense of community" that was felt throughout the school, and added, "our kiddos feel it." This work to create a welcoming and supportive environment was indeed felt by the students, as she mentioned that many of the students would tell her that "they're sad about the summer." She shared that while she had been meeting for lessons with her students "on [a virtual meeting platform], they wish they could be at school," and as if on cue, all the teachers smiled and nodded in agreement. Carol expressed that the students "feel that sense of community, and I think that has made us better."

The teachers distinctly felt that their school climate created a special feeling. Nancy admitted, "You have to be a certain kind of person to work there, because we will get teachers that come for a year...but the ones that do stick around, they get it." Associating this comment with the school's description as "busy, very busy," from the

other focus group, teachers expressed that creating this environment required effort. Paul described the school as "intense... It's a very serious place, and a lot of very serious people working really hard to do their job." Expectations of working hard were clearly apparent from my meeting with the principal and both focus groups.

In other portions of the focus group sessions, educators at Stewart Elementary shared their commitment for being accessible for students, and teaching them to have pride in their own abilities. The commitment included how the teachers described taking state assessments. Andrea shared that while the school takes the assessments seriously, "We don't put...fear...in them". Conversely, Andrea explained that teachers work to build students' confidence by saying, "you know this, you can do this, and show us your best." Andrea went on to explain that another teacher in the school always encourages the students by getting the entire school involved during the assessments. "Our little guys in the school, like, make posters." She elaborated that "The whole school is a piece of it...cheering them on." While the teachers felt that there was an importance of doing well, it was almost more important to create an expectation that supported all students trying to do their best. Carol mentioned bringing this awareness to students in a prideful way; sending a message of "We believe in you, just show us." She felt it was because teachers regularly demonstrated to students "we are here" for you.

While academic performance was important and valued, the school's fundamental expectation was about connecting with children. Carol shared, "We really address the whole child, the whole child, and we do not give up." Then she laughed, describing the staff as "relentless." I trusted her words. "We won't give up on a kiddo,

and they know that." The principal also reiterated the commitment to making sure students were in a safe and welcoming environment. she explained that awareness of the standards are important, yet added "even more importantly, I think...the social-emotional..." Again, educators stressed the importance placed on ensuring that all students were in an environment where they felt safe to learn. Cindy added that she believes the school was focused on giving every student what they need, especially "if what they need that day is social-emotional support."

Professional Learning and Collaboration

There was a clear commitment from the principal of Stewart Elementary School that learning was a critical and continuous part of being an educator. She modeled this commitment with her own professional learning and created many opportunities for teachers to collaborate and learn together at the school. Through lesson observations, structured professional learning, and a commitment to collaborate, the educators at the school worked to design classroom practices that incorporated effective practices.

Lesson Observations

The principal fostered strong practices in the school by encouraging other teachers to watch and learn from each other. Paul explained to me that the principal "has asked me to go into different grade levels and watch a math lesson, and then they'll come to my class and watch a math lesson." Paul valued collaborative learning at the school, stating "I think I learned more from in-school PD than I do from the district." The principal also valued the coaching relationships that can develop between teachers, sharing that she is "a strong believer in coaching...modeling and

coaching and kind of holding accountable in a colleague to colleague way you change people's teaching practice.”

The principal, reading specialists, and teachers lamented about the recent changes to the reading specialist role, reporting that the district was shifting the role to more of an interventionist and less of a coach. Under the new model, reading specialists primarily serviced students; this was different from their previous role as a coach, where they were also available for model lessons and co-teaching. The principal mentioned that she still tried "to give them [the reading specialists] a little bit of flexibility," and they "still work in [a] coaching [capacity]" when they can. Paul chuckled as he described one of the reading teachers, smiling that "we have a very intense reading teacher;" he quickly followed with, "She's amazing." He, as well as the other teacher in the group, smiled as they explained that "She is a phenomenal teacher," and when she modeled lessons in his classroom, "I would just take notes." The reading teacher added, "We take pieces of that" old model and think about how it "helps us." Even though the district had shifted more to an intervention model for the reading teachers, the school still valued them as coaches.

Structured Professional Learning

In addition to lesson observations, there were also more formal structures for professional learning at the school and the district level. Each teacher was required by the district to attend "an eight-hour" professional learning experience. Teachers expressed differing opinions about district-organized professional learning. Tara was excited that the district does "offer a lot" and allowed teachers choice about what to attend. She explained how she attended a session on a program that she does not use in

her classroom, but the "kids talk about it," and she wanted to know what it was "when the teachers are discussing" it. Another teacher appreciated opportunities to choose, but she felt that the sessions' timing was not "beneficial" as they happen "after school.... I'm exhausted."

The principal shared a structure where professional meetings for teachers also occurred at monthly data meetings and weekly common planning sessions. Largely, she worked to keep the meetings "PD focused." In addition to these meetings, she shared that "a lot of the PD is happening informally," referencing emails that she would send or conversations that took place. . The teachers shared that this commitment to professional learning fostered understanding, not just compliance with a program. Carol stressed how this learning supported her implementation of programs, as "they're not so forced and done without the knowledge of those things." She went on to explain, "It's more, so the teachers understand what to do, and then they implement it correctly, and so things like blended learning and differentiation can happen effectively." This commitment to adult learning empowered educators at Stewart Elementary and ultimately, it served to facilitate student learning.

Commitment to Collaboration

As noted previously, the students were always at the center of decisions, which was reflected in the educator's commitment to collaborate. Educators shared that collaboration supported students, so they made efforts to work together, even when passing during their busy day. A reading teacher shared that just a "pullout model" for students receiving intervention was not as successful "versus, you know, the collaboration." She shared that the "back and forth conversation" is important to

support students. Jim, who worked closely with the reading teacher to support students, confirmed this belief with a smile and a nod. Besides the weekly structured time for these conversations, a great deal of the collaboration also happened outside of identified time. A reading teacher accredited these efforts to the classroom teachers, pointing out "they're willing to do it. I mean, it's just amazing..." The other reading teacher confirmed, "A lot of us...we do it [collaboratively plan] on the fly."

Teachers also valued their weekly planning sessions; they saw them as a great opportunity to problem solve about a student who was not learning as expected. Paul explained "a lot of times, we'll talk about a kid who's struggling during that time, and share what we can do for that kid, and what are you doing..." Additionally, teachers reported using the time to share practices and plan instruction for the class. Paul added, "We also talked about, like, assessments, when we're going to give assessments. What our plan is, you know, just like where we're going." Nancy shared that some grade-level teams plan together outside of scheduled time more than others, explaining how some grade-level teams "try to keep as similar as possible."

Equally important to note is that this type of collaboration and planning for students' success extended beyond grade-level partners. Paul recognized that during remote learning, his students were getting anxious about their "transition to the middle school." He reached out to the school counselor, and she responded by creating "three weeks of video lessons to try and get [the students] as ready as possible." He stressed that "this is the type of school that it is; everyone wants to help."

A further example of this collaboration to support student learning was evident when Nancy shared the cooperation from the itinerant teachers noting, "Our library

teacher will know I'm doing a research assignment, and be like, hey listen, like, do you want to bring your class to me like, outside the regular library...and she will be looking at my standards and think about how to help teach it." By aligning their efforts, they were sharing accountability and strengthening student learning at the same time.

Principal Learning

The fact that the school valued professional learning and collaboration is not surprising, as the principal actively created opportunities at the school and participated in collaborative professional learning experiences herself. She shared that, the year before, she participated in a statewide initiative to strengthen school leadership, a twenty-four-day commitment. As much as she valued the formal learning of the program, "it was the professional conversations, it was even lunch being able to...sit with a person...you could talk ideas through..." By actively seeking opportunities to connect with other leaders and share experiences, she recognized and modeled that learning happens from interacting with others. Her self-awareness around these issues suggested she valued these opportunities for herself as a learner as well as for the teachers with whom she worked.

Even though she felt that she was afforded more professional learning experiences in her previous district, she actively sought those opportunities when she returned to her current district. She shared how she became an active member of the state's chapter of the National Association of School Principals and has attended several of the organization's national conferences. She shared that these opportunities are "interactive... which again makes you stop and think about what you're doing, why

you're doing it..." Notably, the principal modeled herself as a truly reflective practitioner that welcomed new learning.

Data-Driven Instruction

Data appeared to be the driver behind many of the principal and the teachers' educational decisions at Stewart Elementary. As an example, Paul shared that the principal would often facilitate "a common planning for the grade." He explained that they would use the information from the benchmark diagnostic assessment, and then talk about the results to see "what kids are popping up. A lot of times we find a kid strong or weak falling off from the beginning of the year," and they will discuss if "they've seen [that pattern of performance] before" from that student in previous grades. In addition to benchmark data, they worked to understand what was driving the assessment scores and how they could provide support, as evidenced by this example Paul shared: "Sometimes you think, she needs academic support, but she just needs support, so I now have the social worker talking to her and I've seen improvement."

Nancy explained how this deliberate use of data supported small group instruction for students in her class and throughout the school. "So as far as the data meetings go, it's not just like what are you doing each year. Literally, we go back into the year before. We will talk to the previous teacher, and the reading teachers will ask what their needs are." These meetings focused on making plans to support learning. Nancy continued, explaining "Literally, they will look through, like, exactly what it is that they are in need of, like what skill it is, or skills." Nancy emphasized that data was used to help them identify instructional needs, and then educators would actively plan

to teach those skills. "That's like unheard of to walk into my school and not see a teacher working with small groups."

Paul further explained how they used data to support student achievement. "So I looked at every question on the RICAS, and I broke it down into categories and where did I fall short on, was there any pattern, was there anything that I fall short on as far as teaching and... what should I be spending more time on with them..." The teacher positively attributed using data to inform instruction as "something that [the principal] really forced on us... We always are... how can we meet the needs of the kids, how can we meet them and make them stronger."

Instructional Practices

The principal at Stewart Elementary also had strong beliefs about what she wanted to see in the classroom. This was evident from the vision, the school climate, and what she focused on for professional learning and collaboration at a school level. Ultimately, the principal explained that classroom practices were designed for "giving kids what they need." Interview and focus group data suggested that educators also shared this belief and commitment; through reflection and thoughtful planning, classroom practices at the school were, first and foremost, designed to be student-centered. Additionally, the school worked to scaffold learning opportunities for students and create motivating opportunities to learn. ELA was a clear priority for the school, as they worked to integrate standards across disciplines. The school actively made decisions and designed instructional practices to ensure all students were learning grade-level standards. This school made a decision to ensure that all of their primary students had strong foundational skills in reading.

Student-Centered Instruction

To create learning opportunities that give "kids what they need," it is essential to know and understand students. As a result, teachers in the school focused on supporting students in their skills to be learners, rather than only focusing attention on the content or material in the curriculum. Nancy shared how she fostered these connections both with her students and among her students: "I start the year, it takes a ton of time, probably a month or two, like teaching routines through activities and... I do a lot of group work". She valued building relationships and invested time in teaching these skills to students. Additionally, her commitment to designing lessons to strengthen her students' skills to collaborate and learn together underscores her belief that all students can learn these skills. With a warm smile, she shared, "So they learn, not right away, it does take a lot of time, and you have to build the relationship, but eventually, it works." She added that learning happens through "positive reinforcement" that "motivates [the students] to make good choices"; suggesting that she values building a classroom culture that supports these relationships. It is "almost my main priority."

Paul added to her example, sharing the importance of teaching students how to reflect on what they need to be successful learners; again underscoring that this school believed that teaching involved more than focusing on academic standards. He shared that "every single thing they do, I want them talking to each other and getting feedback off of each other, and that's just a skill that they need for life." He went on to explain that he works with his students to understand and recognize what works for them, such as when sitting in a group is not always productive; in this case, he

established "eight places" in the room where students could go to have "a quiet spot to do the work that they don't even have to ask. They just go." It is important to realize that time was allocated to teaching students when and how to use these different learning spaces. By fostering collaboration and reflection, these classroom routines were designed to support all students as learners.

Another example of student-centered instruction was that teachers in the school prioritized building relationships to help students learn. One of the reading teachers recognized that classroom teachers all had time during the day to make these connections and teach these lessons through their social-emotional program. She felt that when she met with her group, she also needed to give "the kids what they need, and if what they need that day is social-emotional support, that's where we start." As an example, she shared that "sometimes we're picking them up right after recess and something just happened, so sometimes we need to start with that." The focus was on ensuring that the student was centered and able to access new learning.

Scaffolding Learning

Teachers' priority to ensure students could access new learning also extended to providing background knowledge and skills for students when needed. Andrea went on to share that "Sometimes...we think we have a lesson that's planned here, but we realize that the basics haven't been set yet...So just whatever their need is meeting them right there, and that could mean multiple things." The principal and the teachers that I met with confirmed that the school employed small group instruction to ensure that students' needs were met. As the principal shared, she expected teachers to "provide multiple ways" for students to access information. Paul shared that when

"one small group is accessing it through technology," another group might be working with "our staff, we have extra TAs in classrooms" to access the lesson. Carol emphasized this commitment to understanding students' needs to access a lesson. "I could have a lesson plan and... because I find that my kiddos don't have the background knowledge to access the lesson, we might...go back to background knowledge, and I spend a lot of time trying to build them..."

Motivating Learners

The librarian also worked to connect with the students. She shared that she is "very structured and routine. So I expect that from the kids, and that helps them take the best advantage of the short time they're in the library, and then I always try and meet what the kids' interests are, through research or book choice, so that they enjoy reading and learning." Carol thanked Tara for her efforts to get to know all of her students. "Tara was wonderful with that...even though she's there two days a week she gets books for us, and she helps us with books, she is able to pinpoint readers...you tell her who it is, and she will get them the exact right book for them to read..." Tara shared her commitment to fostering learning opportunities that engaged students. "I really try to encourage the kids... I'm not forcing them to the topic, or the type of book that they're choosing, so as to kind of instill in them that they can read for fun..." She designed the library routines to support students' learning. "I always try and give them ten minutes of library time...and encourage silent reading because I know that it takes time for a kid to get into the book." She recognized the importance of taking time to read. "And if I give them that time before they even leave the room, they might be more interested in picking it up and continuing their reading after they leave the

library." The design of the classroom was structured to support motivation and engagement for reading.

It is important to note that efforts to build relationships with students were intended to create engaging learning opportunities. As the principal shared, "Engagement...is the key... it's about depth versus breadth." Nancy explained that she was aware of the curriculum expectations but she designed learning opportunities that she thought would engage students. "I'm all about making things fun for the kids and memorable, and I'm still hitting the skills, but they're having fun..." Making it fun was not about making it easy; to clarify she added, "My expectations are very high, but I think it's important to make it memorable for them... to make it exciting for them." While it did take a great deal of effort to plan, she felt this was rewarding for two reasons. First, she felt that students were learning a great deal. "I'm still teaching the skills. They are still getting a ton." The second reason was related to the classroom environment. She explained that if the lesson was not engaging for students, then negative behaviors also increased; "If they are not engaged, or working hard, then forget it. All the planning is out the window."

Technology was also used to foster engagement. A teacher shared that he could provide a stronger context for new learning by using technology. "One thing that I did this year was [use an interactive video platform]. And I started using it at the beginning of the year because they need to see what you're talking about." He explained how he used the platform. "So, just, for instance, we were talking about underground groundwater, groundwater, and aquifers. And once I showed them it on [the interactive video platform], they were just like, wow. It's not just enough for them

to hear it from a teacher." Teachers at the school intentionally planned to increase student motivation and engagement by supporting their new learning connections.

ELA Integration Into Content Area Subjects

Because the school was departmentalized in the fifth grade, Paul shared that he teaches science and his partner teaches social studies, and they both incorporate "a lot of projects" as he felt that the students' motivation increased. He shared that he often has them reading and writing in science by utilizing the curriculum materials or "a lot of times I give them a journal prompt for science." Nancy shared that she also designed projects to increase students' engagement. "I've got a lot of really cool projects that get them engaged, or I like them to do research. I'll combine skills." As an example, she shared an integrated science and ELA project that she developed. "They will research the animal, but then after researching the animal, like they have to put a book together from the perspective of the animal, write a narrative about them." She felt that these efforts kept the students from getting "bored out of their minds." By asking them to think and create, she felt students were engaged and learned more. "They have to create. They love that stuff." She shared that it was not about memorizing science facts, but designing projects that engaged their thinking. "I'll give them a background picture of, like, the desert if we are learning about different adaptations. They have to, like, figure out and choose which kind of adaptation would work best and... make up the animal that doesn't actually exist that would...thrive in that environment..."

This commitment to ELA integration was also evident in the school's Kindergarten classrooms' curriculum selection. Both the principal and the reading

teachers positively shared that the school had adopted the Boston Public K2 curriculum, as they felt it fostered student engagement. Adopting this curriculum was a choice made at the building level, and it required a commitment to professional learning and collaboration. The principal shared that she prioritized common planning time for the Kindergarten teachers because they were implementing the program. There was intentional planning for integration across the school that served to increase engagement and strengthen student learning.

Aligning Instruction

The educators I interviewed respected the practice that all teachers would have clear and aligned expectations for student learning. The principal and reading teachers shared that these expectations were set by the central office through curriculum and pacing guides, and reported that "every single grade level has curriculum expectations and exactly what they need to teach for each semester." Paul shared that compared to other teachers in the district, "we are the only teachers that follow the letter of the law." However, the teachers still felt empowered to make classroom choices that supported students. Nancy added, "The curriculum is the curriculum, but how we get there, I think, I feel like we have the freedom to get there, but we have the tools that we're expected to use."

Commitment to the Standards

When I talked to the principal and the teachers at the school, it became apparent that educators had high expectations for students at the school. These expectations were guided by a clear understanding of each grade's standards and learning expectations. Carol recounted how they celebrated a student who began

second grade as a "non-reader" and collectively worked to meet those expectations. "[The second-grade teacher] worked really hard last year. [The primary reading teacher] worked really hard, too. That kiddo then got released to me in November... She's now a third grader, and she's reading at third-grade level." Carol's voice filled with excitement when she described how they celebrated. "I mean, we called her mother. We had her come to the school. Every single teacher that ever had her celebrated...so it's just so special." Underscoring this story is a clear understanding of the learning standards and a belief that all students could meet those expectations.

The educators' commitment to ensuring that all students worked on grade-level expectations was also evident when teachers shared how they designed integrated projects. Nancy described her efforts: "I come up with so many different ways to kind of switch that up and make it interesting. I'm still teaching the skills." Paul stressed this commitment when he shared his view of the standards-based state assessment. "I do push myself and I push my kids to make sure that they know everything for that test. I mean, to the fact where, usually around this time, I'm not sleeping at night thinking about what I didn't get to...because I want them to feel that pride..." Clearly, a commitment to ensuring all students have access to grade-level instruction guides teachers' work.

Focus on Foundational Practices

A final example of expectations about common instructional practices at Stewart Elementary School was that the school implemented a multisensory, structured language program in Kindergarten through third grade classrooms. They selected the program, and they "took out the phonics from [the reading series]" and

replaced it with the "phonics scope and sequence of [the phonics program]." There was an expectation that all teachers would use this program, which one of the reading teachers stressed that it "is an everyday piece of the curriculum..."

Family Relationships

Stewart Elementary School served the largest percentage of students from economically challenged households in the study. While teachers at the school reflected that large parent nights needed to be strengthened, it did not thwart their outreach efforts to encourage families to be a part of the school. The principal lamented, "We don't have a whole lot of [parents] engaged in the PTG... we probably only have at a meeting the board of four people and maybe four others that come to a meeting." She also recognized that they did not have a large budget and fundraising was difficult in the school community. "I'm concerned about asking for donations because I have some families that have nothing that will still give fifty cents if you ask..."

Consequently, the principal emphasized her strong commitment to connecting with families: "It may not be through a parent organization" but "a lot of time goes into parent meetings." She shared that parent conferences were "something that I started doing when I got here, and we utilize some Title I funds, but then I trade-off with a faculty meeting. But we've built it now into our culture that you have to get the parents involved." Paul appreciated the principal's efforts to see situations from a parent's perspective. "You know, I'll go to her and be like this family, they are driving me crazy about something, and well, she always turns it around and makes you see it from another perspective."

As illustrated earlier, it has become part of the school's regular practice to reach out to homes in order to share positive celebrations, whether a student reached an academic goal or a behavioral goal. Carol also mentioned that the principal encourages them "to send postcards to celebrate things that kids have done periodically throughout the year. There are a lot of parent phone calls home." Although the district "no longer sends out fliers or hard copies," the principal shared that she will "send out hard copies when I think it's something important. You know, not everyone reads email or reads it thoroughly." Thus, the principal modeled the importance of connecting with families, adding that the district just recently allowed social media as a way to communicate, "so that's something I know I have to get back into doing."

The school's outreach efforts also expanded into support for the families. As Andrea explained, "What I will say is, we try to do a lot of things for them. We do the can drive...and the nurse in our school is phenomenal. She knows all the families. She reaches out." Again, Andrea's emphasis was on making connections with families and removing as many barriers to learning as possible. "I think what we try to do is, we try to pinpoint who really needs help, and we always try to get them the help they need. You know, again, it starts with [the principal] and [the secretary]. Our secretary -- she has a great relationship with a lot of families." While the school educators recognized that there were many barriers for the families they served, these barriers only appeared to further fuel their efforts to build personal connections.

Summary of Stewart Elementary School

To summarize, the belief that all students can learn appeared to impact almost every decision that educators made at Stewart Elementary School. Through my conversations, it became evident that all of the educators I interviewed had high academic expectations, while at the same time, they intentionally worked to create a learning environment that was welcoming, safe, and motivating for all students. The principal actively increased her own professional learning and created opportunities for new learning for her staff as well. The school's classroom practices were designed to be student-centered, evidenced by teachers' commitment to building relationships and connecting with their students to support student learning. This school prioritized designing motivating learning opportunities for students while staying focused on grade-level expectations. Finally, connecting with families to celebrate learning had become a regular practice for the school.

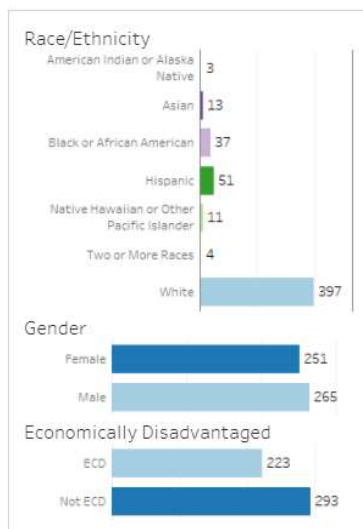
Fairview Elementary School

Fairview Elementary School serves a very diverse student body. At the time of this study, over half of their students come from economically challenged families, while many of their other students came from households of relative wealth. Fairview is situated geographically between these different neighborhoods, but educators at this school shared their commitment to creating a learning environment that was inclusive for everyone. Fairview is a pK-5 school and serves approximately 500 students. It is one of four elementary schools in the district, and the only school that received Title 1 funding, with 43% of students identified as economically challenged. Demographic data for Fairview is shown below in Figure 9. The school received a three-star rating on the 2019 accountability report card and it earned a four-star rating for three of the

holistic categories including the number of students that exceeded expectations, absenteeism reports, and suspension reports. The school’s website prominently shared that the school was “dedicated to excellence in education”, and this commitment was evident in data collected from interviews and focus groups with the principal and educators alike.

Figure 9

Demographic Information for Fairview Elementary



Note. From Rhode Island Department of Education. (2019). *Report card.* <https://reportcard.ride.ri.gov/201819>

Vision

The educators at Fairview Elementary School were committed to excellence. The teachers and principal of the school sought to support and develop students' social-emotional skills as well as their academic development. Their collective belief that all students can learn guided how the school made decisions.

All Students Can Learn

When asked about the school's vision, the principal answered without hesitation, "All students can learn. If students are not learning the way we teach, we must change the way we are teaching. We give them the most diversified approaches, and we do everything that we can, sooner or later we will hit upon who they are and how they learn." This succinct and powerful expectation brought an immediate sense of clarity around how decisions are made at the school. Jill, a Fairview Multi-Language Learner teacher, commented, "Everyone is expected to do their best in all areas academically, socially, as people." This expectation supported the lived vision of the school. Sara, a fourth grade teacher, felt the teacher's role was "making sure that children are well rounded, well educated, you know, caring human beings."

Educators undoubtedly believed that education would provide opportunities for their students. This belief that a student's path in life was not fixed or pre-set but could be opened with educational opportunities created a stronger commitment to the work, as evidenced when Sara expressed, "Everyone at [the school] wants the best for these kids. They want everyone to be given an equal opportunity and to make something of themselves."

The school district's vision was excellence for all, and the teachers and principal of Fairview Elementary School carried out this statement with deep conviction. Dawn, a primary teacher, simply stated, "It's always been that every child learns no matter what." It is "the no matter what" that will be revealed in findings from this case study, unveiled in numerous examples of the staffs' effort and dedication to creating a school culture wherein that simple and profound statement was actualized through intentional decisions to support learning for all of their students.

Leadership

As will be demonstrated in this first section on leadership, commitment to the vision that all students can learn was demonstrated through the principal's and teachers' dedication to create a school culture that was safe and embraced all learners. The principal's commitment to continuous improvement created routines of reflective practice throughout the school. This school made decisions through shared leadership, empowering teachers to lead professional learning and lead school initiatives. Teachers at the school appreciated that the principal advocated for the school and promoted decisions to ensure that all students were learning and were motivated to come to school.

Principal Leadership

Continuous Improvement. Through his leadership, the principal continually encouraged teachers to think about classroom decisions. The principal modeled that he was not striving for perfection and encouraged a culture of reflection. He thought it was important "to give the teachers the ability and the okay to say, 'I don't know what to do with little [name of a student]. I have done everything. I don't know what to do'." He shared that his supportive, open, and student-centered leadership style fostered teachers' willingness to try new practices to support student learning. "The 'It's okay' has really helped out a lot of people and also, allowing people to take those risks without being worried." He smiled as he recalled an incident in which he supported change that wasn't all that successful but it was clear that he was committed to the process. "You know what? We tried it? We thought it was going to be a good idea. We fell on our face. We'll never do that again. Let's go. Yeah, let's move on to learn." The

principal was not paralyzed by fear of failure, but rather, aimed for progress. This process of confidently analyzing the current state, deciding, implementing, evaluating a change, and continually planning for improvement was clearly collaborative.

Shared Decision-Making. Teachers agreed that their principal encouraged them to be part of the decision making process during conversations to improve student learning and when looking at data. Jill explained, "He is looking for our input too, as far as what we can do to help this group of kids move up." While student achievement was "high on [the principal's] priority," Jill suggested it was so much more. Sara explained how it was more about how they collaborated together to make the decisions for students; "Not only does [the principal] put his input into it, but he takes our expertise, our professionalism into account when he is making those decisions." These teachers conveyed that their input was critical to decision making at their school.

Dawn also shared how she felt supported to change instructional practices in her classroom based on student learning. The principal remained with her through the entire decision-making process, as she implemented and evaluated the change. "I said, 'Can we try it?' and they [Curriculum Director and principal] were absolutely, yes go for it. Try it..." Smiling, she added, "He also checked in. He observed it, you know, looking at it, evaluating his own way." Dawn went on to explain that he was very approachable and was "very open to anything that would benefit kids. And he would give you positive feedback and negative feedback on what he thought was appropriate or not appropriate, so it's a good relationship." Sharing these decisions around

instructional practices also meant they were holding each other accountable for ensuring that all educators actively evaluated student learning.

Again, Dawn stressed that making the initial decision was only part of continuous improvement. "You just have to show that it's effective, and if not you drop it. I appreciate the fact that he respects my professionalism enough, or our professionalism enough, to let you try things." The principal clearly took an active role in the teaching practices that were happening in the school, as one teacher mentioned that he "doesn't walk away from it, he stays with it...assesses it." Providing feedback is an important role for a leader as this feedback serves to shape the organization. Smiling as she explained their typical process of exploring new initiatives, she expected and appeared grateful that her principal would give her feedback. There was not a hint of negativity. This teacher viewed the principal's feedback as evidence of his support and commitment to implementing their joint decision. There was no judgment on the capability of the students or the teacher as part of the change process.

Additionally, teachers found that the principal's leadership fostered respect among the staff. Jill commented that "I find him supportive, and I feel like he trusts your opinion and what you're doing, which is a good feeling." By trusting teachers' opinions, the principal fostered an environment of sharing. As a result, teachers were thoughtful about what they wanted to share, fostering intentionality to the school's educational decisions and practices. Teachers described the relationship with the principal as "respectful." Sara appreciated that he often took time to think before deciding, "I do like how many times he will not respond right away. He is a thinker, and he tries to think about it from all angles before he puts his two cents in." His

words and actions were evidence of his strategic ability to analyze a decision from different perspectives before taking action.

Advocating for School Needs. Teachers also felt that the principal championed their interests at a district level. Lynn, the reading teacher, felt that "he fights for our program," calling out that he was not easily thwarted. "So he'll, he'll try to go around things, you know... he'll try and come in the back door, you know, and get us what we need." The principal championed support for the school's decisions as a testament to the respect that he placed in the educators with whom he shared the decision-making process.

Support for Student Learning. Nevertheless, the principal did not think that all of these school changes came easy. He credited the school's success to "looking at what is needed. Listening to the teachers and then systematically chipping away at those big things that we need to change and the direction that we want to go." While the principal stressed the importance of listening to teachers, at the same time he shared that he also initiated changes in classroom practices when he felt like learning was not equitable for all students. He reflected on how the phonics program became implemented with fidelity. "When I came on board, second grade was like, 'Yeah, well we kind of do it sometimes.' Then I said we are going to do it all the time... We're all doing it." It should be noted that he made this decision by observing student learning, as the principal shared, "You could see the kids who kept up with [the program] and didn't. So that was very strong."

However, it should be reiterated that most of the changes that he has implemented in the school did not come from a "top-down" leadership style. Positive

change evolved through conversations and by modeling his thinking around decisions that were made. An example of this is how it was decided that the school would provide resources for reading services. He reflected that in the beginning, it involved "looking at those kids who are struggling..." He shared that the first two years that he was at the building, he worked with his support staff, reflecting on whom they were servicing for reading support, "painstakingly going through who are you seeing? Why are you seeing them?" However, none of the teachers that I talked to, including the reading teacher, viewed this process as a negative one. Rather, teachers fully appreciated how connected and invested he was in every student's learning at the school.

Motivating Students. While achievement on the state assessment was valued at the school, it was not the driver for the principal or the teachers. Dawn described that the principal "is constantly looking for ways to motivate kids, how to get them interested in not just their scores, but the learning period." As a leader, this ultimate goal of ensuring students' learning was evidenced by the collaborative process of how decisions were made at the school and classroom level. Teachers recognized that his decisions were always student-centered. Dawn emphasized, "It is always for the kids. You know, it may not necessarily be for you, but we end up liking it." Additionally, the principal shared that he takes an active role in staying connected to the school, "I go to the common planning times, grade-level meetings, and I'm in and out of as many classrooms as I can be." The principal's strong connection to the school and his constant efforts to understand what is and is not working allowed him to thoughtfully engage in conversations about improving student learning at this Title 1 school.

Teacher Leadership

While teacher leadership was evident throughout the examples of principal leadership, the teachers at Fairview clearly initiated professional learning and school-wide activities on their own. Teachers made decisions about what they felt they needed to learn to be more successful practitioners.

Leading Professional Learning. Jill explained how she led a professional learning community at the school "for the ELL students, in language and literacy learning." Anchoring their discussions around text and research, this group focused on supporting ELL students in the classroom using "scaffolding and language frameworks and graphic organizers." As Jill explained the group's work, Sara nodded in agreement, as she was also part of the learning group. Teachers mentioned that it was common for teachers to lead professional learning in their district. Jill explained, for example, that teachers who were seeking their National Board Certification would also "offer training, one or two hours during professional development [days]."

Shaping the School's Climate. Teacher leadership also shaped school-wide initiatives. The principal shared a story of a teacher that had a new idea for "Dr. Seuss Day" and described how she took the idea to the PTO and helped to organize a day that was very memorable for students, "It was so much fun. The kids loved it. So, you know, we went with it." Besides celebrations, teachers also took an active role in spearheading character education throughout the school. While I was meeting with the group, Jill mentioned Sara's extraordinary efforts to support positive behavior in her classroom, but also throughout the school. Teachers taking ownership to improve the school evidenced the trust that the principal had placed in them.

School Climate

Fairview's expectation that all students can learn was also evident by how decisions were made to create a school where children are valued. Fairview was the home to many specialized programs for students, and the school made decisions to be an inclusive school for all stakeholders. Building relationships was valued at the school and, because of their efforts to connect with each, educators remarked that the school had a community feel. The principal was committed to ensuring that students and teachers wanted to come to school, and he thoughtfully planned with others to make sure that Fairview was a school that people wanted to be at.

Inclusive Practices

While the school's mission and vision were to support excellence, the teachers and principal certainly realized that to reach academic excellence requires creating an environment where all students are welcome and feel safe. The teachers described the feeling in the building as "positive" and focused on more than academics. Sara added, "it's also about life and other people, and treating other people with kindness, and character building." She described the school as an environment where students are valued, "They feel cared for; they feel listened to; they feel supported." While Sara articulated this, others in the group agreed. Dawn added that the school was "inclusive," as she emphasized "Every child, and everyone, every day" because "I can't think of one child in my entire experience who has been overlooked." It was easy to connect to her strong sense of commitment and values, and her comments offered an understanding of how those values guided her decisions because, she stressed again "Every child counts, every single day, every person counts every day."

Lynn stated that "the strength of the school is its inclusiveness," and while the school had a very diverse economic make-up, everyone that I talked to shared the belief that there was no division in the school community. Jill emphasized, "Everyone doesn't know who has and who doesn't have." This sentiment was echoed by the principal, describing the school's feel as "being very inclusive, knowing that half the population, actually more than half comes from down the road that's very, very poor." Lynn, who also lives in the community, shared that this inclusivity extends to children playing with each other outside of the school, adding, "It's all one school community."

The expectation of inclusiveness extended to include students from diverse economic backgrounds as well as students with learning needs. The school has several classrooms for students with behavioral needs and challenges, and there was a strong commitment from the teachers to ensure students from these special programs were included. Jill affirmed, "Children are all integrated as best as possible...as best as possible." This strong expectation guided the decisions that were made in the school.

Building Relationships

As Fairview teachers shared stories about their school, it gave me insight as to why they appeared to value every interaction as an opportunity to truly connect. Jill explained, "That community feeling and, and people doing things together in a building is really motivating to learn." While Jill recognized that many of the activities found in their school were common, "a lot of like, fourth and fifth-grade classes go down, which I am sure is common, to the Kindergarten and first grade, and you know do buddy reading," she also conveyed that these activities created a strong, connective fabric in the school. "I feel like there's a lot of support amongst the students and the

teachers and doing whole building activities." Other teachers in the group nodded in agreement. Sara added these types of activities "really motivates and engages them [students]." From talking to the teachers, I concluded from their smiles and laughter while recalling these school-wide activities that it was motivating for both the students and the teachers.

It was evident that the teachers and principal valued student relationships. Kids needed to want to come to school. The principal expressed, "Kids have to enjoy coming to school. You have to have those fun events that they like to do." While there are many pulls for students' attention, he felt that even the things that "are hard for kids" can be done "in a way that they're having fun." The teachers also shared that the principal was often leading events for students. Jill shared an example of "a whole school [read of a] book" where "each classroom switched, and the teachers switched." They all laughed at the recollection. Dawn emphasized that their principal "really supports all of that, and he was dancing in front of the students," adding that, "[H]e's always a part of it. He is always front and center." Importantly Jill noted that these activities are "so engaging for students, they love it." "They love it" speaks to the heart of the school. The teachers and principals viewed everything through the lens of the students first.

While their school culture might sound almost magical, the teachers and the principal mentioned the time and resources they invested in order to build a safe learning environment for the students. Sara explained that many students "don't know how to be a friend. They don't know how to share crayons." Taking time to teach students these skills was valued. Sara continued, "[T]he amount of teaching that has to

be spent on how to treat others with kindness, and it's okay if someone likes your answer and wants to write about that, too. It's okay." When the teacher calmly mentioned the words "It's okay," it was as if I could imagine her saying this to a student in her class to remove any worry that someone was going to be upset; this teacher's comment echoes an earlier comment from the principal as he explained how he often tried to create shared responsibility and "it's okay" to seek support from others.

There was an awareness of the importance and value around supporting social and emotional needs by all the educators I talked to. The principal highlighted the importance, "For students to feel safe, and trust, where they are, is essential in order to start learning." Students' social-emotional needs may often be mentioned with a negative connotation, yet the principal and teachers at Fairview did not mention it negatively. They described the work in almost a casual manner, but yet, they recognized it as a necessity, suggesting, "When that level is met, it is easier to move forward in other areas." Again, these comments underscored the school's belief that students have the ability to learn these skills; it just required the intentional design of opportunities for them to do so.

During the spring of 2020, teacher burnout was often in the news due to the pressures of teaching remotely during a pandemic, yet it struck me that these teachers did not appear drained. They were almost fueled by the positivity they worked to establish in the school. Lynn, for example, mentioned that the students "want to be there [at the school building]... for the most part they love to see you." Even with the challenges of remote learning, "The kids that are coming online right now...their

parents are stepping up and getting their kids on every day." Jill shared that she has "been in different schools...and there's just something genuine about the kids at Fairview."

A Community Feel

The school's connectedness expanded beyond student relationships, as Jill noted that "there is a lot of cooperation between teachers, between administration, and family." Fairview was a school that people wanted to be connected to. Jill, who worked in other schools as well as Fairview, really emphasized the school's atmosphere, "People just like to be there. It is a community. You feel like you are part of a community in that building." Teachers in the focus group explained, "People don't leave [the school]" and "if they've gotten bumped out, they come back," laughing. Another teacher in the group added that she "ran back." However, they realized that this level of commitment and dedication was not for everyone and Dawn mentioned, "Someone who doesn't like their job isn't going to stay."

Jill explained that she felt that this connectedness has lasted for generations, sharing that she had friends that had attended "Fairview and they just love it. People want to talk about the school. It's amazing." She added that the school felt "like a community center. It just feels like everyone, everyone's involved." Kara agreed that she has seen the climate improve "over the last four years" since she returned. Jill added that there are many school sponsored events and, "everyone's always there doing something positive and learning, and it is a wonderful feeling."

Fun for Staff

While all four teachers agreed that the school's feeling had been there before the current principal, the principal described recent efforts to further instill feelings of connectedness among staff, thus, intentionally striving to foster an atmosphere where it is fun for teachers to come to work. He believed that this positivity amongst staff was important for student learning. "When you enjoy what you're doing, you're going to do it better, and your kids are going to benefit from it." He recognized that the staff was always modeling for students. "They're going to see you enjoying yourself. They're going to enjoy themselves. They are going to be doing better." To support these efforts, the principal established "a climate committee" that meets "every other month," and the "sole purpose is to plan fun things to do." He shared that some of their previous events ranged from going to a major league baseball game to bowling. It was clear that he valued opportunities where the school staff could "share some experiences." Laughing, he added that some might view it as a silly idea, but "it worked. It's a lot of fun. People enjoy coming to it." His dedication to fostering positive interactions with the staff was evident.

Professional Learning and Collaboration

Professional learning and collaboration at the school happened in structured and unstructured times. Teachers collaborating and learning with and from other educators was a common expectation of the school. Book studies as well as multi-year professional learning initiatives facilitated educators' motivation to increase their professional learning to better support student learning. Topics of study at the school aligned to their reflections of what students needed.

Book Studies

Learning and collaboration happened in district, principal, and teacher-facilitated book studies. At a district level, the teachers commented that they were reading "*The Writing Revolution*," which supported the district's initiative to improve writing instruction. It is important to note that teachers appreciated the collaboration that happened when using the text as a foundation. Jill shared that it was "wonderful to talk to professionals." Collaboratively reflecting on instructional practices was evident in the teacher-led book club facilitated by the ELL teacher. They examined "scaffolding and language frameworks and graphic organizers" to support student learning.

The principal facilitated book clubs that served as a way for the school to come together to learn, share practices, and align decisions that supported student learning. The principal shared that one previous selection, *Unselfie* by Michele Borba, was "a great book" as "it talks about how you talk to kids." As part of the book clubs, the principal intentionally provided a space for teachers to reflect and he shared this outcome "It's amazing just reading through it and having teachers go back...to a kid who this is hitting upon? And what did you do? What would you do better?" The principal was never wavered by mistakes; he stayed committed to learning and improving practices in order to strengthen student learning. He mentioned that they also had a book study around Carol Dweck's *Mindset*, underscoring his belief that "all students can learn" and his expectation that when students are not learning, it is essential to try "diversified approaches and...do everything that... [can be done] to support learning." The school also read John Kotter's *Our Iceberg is Melting*, and the principal reflected, "[it's] a very interesting book on human behavior...about

identifying ourselves." His smile suggested he knew everyone could be reluctant to change at times, but he believed that collaborating with others fostered a safe environment to incorporate new ideas from the books.

Professional Learning Days

In addition to structured book studies, teachers appreciated that the district offered dedicated professional development days. They appeared to really enjoy learning with and from other teachers in the district. Jill shared that often the time was designed so that "teachers will provide training in areas that they are experts in." The time allotted for professional learning was four days, but it was evident from my time with the principal and teachers that learning never really stopped at their school. It was part of their daily routines as professionals, and they believed there was value in learning with and from their colleagues.

The principal noted that the district was committed to the ELA initiative that began several years ago, describing that "there is a literacy component in each of the professional development days" and "the last two years we've been looking at writing because that, that, is very poor." This type of consistent vision and leadership builds teachers' efficacy, as they are respected and given time to deepen their own learning and instructional practices in an identified area of need. Spending over two years on learning how to teach writing validated what teachers saw in their classrooms and the district's student data. Furthermore, by investing resources in learning how to change instructional practices, the district also reinforced a growth mindset. This decision to allocate resources was based on a belief that both teachers and students can continually learn and improve.

Collaborative Planning

Three days a week, attached to their lunch, teachers had common planning time; the principal reported, "They're really good about using the time wisely to get the most out of what they need." When I asked the teachers about this time, they laughed, sharing that "it's supposed to be half an hour, but generally everyone just gets together, and we talk and eat lunch at the same time." These connections about learning together extended beyond the grade-level teaching partners. Jill explained, as a specialist, "I'll say I'm coming in on Monday during your common plan and work on PLCs...or we'll work if we are having trouble doing something together...so every grade level and the specialists...have one day". Working with colleagues was clearly a value and expectation of the school. Teachers were empowered to work with others, noting that before the yearly schedule was built, the principal asked them, "Who else do you want in your common planning time?" These repeated examples of collaboration served to engage all educators at Fairview to be responsible for continuously working to support learning for students and teachers.

Jill commented that the staff is "always learning...it doesn't matter how long we've been teaching." There was a feeling in all three of my focus group interviews at Fairview that their role as educators included being active learners. Sara offered that "it's a highly professional staff and... the most important part is that everyone's continuing to learn." Jill, who works in multiple schools in the district, added that she felt "a higher level of collaboration" among Fairview teachers. As an example, she shared a social media platform that the teachers contributed to and connected on; she explained there were many resources posted on the site, stating that "It's

unbelievable." She also highlighted this platform as evidence of the positive "communication, so they communicate better. I can access all thirty teachers in a second". Based on the smiles and nods of agreement, openness of communication was valued by the entire focus group.

Focus on Student Learning

A priority of the collaboration and professional learning that happened at Fairview was to problem-solve together about how to increase student learning. While these conversations often took place during structured times, they also happened whenever they were needed. Sara shared "Staff, they are so flexible, it doesn't just have to be common planning time, if I'm struggling with this student, I can talk to you at any time and say...this isn't working, what do we do?" Dawn said to Jill, "We worked together well this year, and it was nice to figure out what students need together." Again, student learning was at the heart of professional learning and collaboration. Educators at this school believed that problem-solving together was essential. Lynn commented that "We meet all the time, you know, talk about the kids." Teachers appeared to fully embrace this expectation; the reflective practice of what Dawn described as educators coming together to "talk about how it's going and decide what to do," was not an event but a daily practice in the school.

Data-Driven Instruction

Grounding many of the decisions at Fairview Elementary School was data. Sara commented, "We have a lot of data that we collect," and while this was probably common at many schools, this data was used actively. As detailed in the examples below, teachers at Fairview discussed how they reflected on expected learning goals,

and then changed instructional practices throughout the grades to ensure that students were learning the expected standards to be able to show proficiency on state assessments. These decisions were made as a staff and included Kindergarten staff, even though the state assessments did not begin until third grade. Dawn summed up the process they utilized to make data-driven instructional decisions, "We do as a staff... We try to pinpoint areas of need and then bring those needs down to the grades below to see what you are going to look at or do."

Instructional Practices

Instructional practices at the school were also intentionally designed to support student learning, both in knowledge and skills. Because the school wanted learning to be a positive experience for students, educators designed motivational learning opportunities with a commitment to aligning instruction with grade-level standards. Further, the school prioritized ELA learning and made efforts to ensure that all students had gained foundational reading skills.

Student-Centered Learning

It was evident that student-centered learning guided the school and classroom level decisions. As Sara shared, "I'm passionate about teaching, but also about each child and how they are learning and how I can reach each of those children." The structure of the classroom was designed to be student-centered, as Jill shared that "there's a lot of co-teaching, there's inclusion in the classrooms, so all the special ed. teachers are in the class." Kara agreed, adding that the special educator is in the classroom "all day." Not only does this support learning, but it aligns with the values

of ensuring that all students feel welcome and safe to learn, which serves to cultivate more equitable learning environments.

The principal expressed that using a program to support teaching provided "everyone that common language." Sara shared a significant "amount of teaching that has to be spent on how to treat others with kindness." To support these classroom practices, Title 1 funds were used to provide professional learning for classroom teachers in a social-emotional program. This was a multi-year investment, which underscored the belief that teaching at Fairview included planning learning opportunities to develop social-emotional skills. The principal and teachers believed investing time and funding in social-emotional learning resulted in academic learning. Kara expanded on this commitment to creating safe classrooms. She explained why she intentionally designed opportunities for students that are "engaging and connecting," because these experiences are "where [she] can get students to show [her] their best... by connecting with them well."

Both the principal and the Kindergarten teacher shared evidence of these changes due to selection and implementation of the Boston Public Curriculum that "incorporates student-centered instruction, developmentally appropriate practices, and culturally responsive teaching" (Boston Public Schools, 2021). The principal beamed as he shared how the classroom practices were impacting students, "We have seen so much improvement." After two years of implementation, he thought the change was remarkable; "Just the presence of the students. Just how they appear at the end of Kindergarten, you know, leading groups talking about their work." He shared that as a student, he was not provided enough time to practice these skills, and he valued the

time invested in "getting kids feeling comfortable standing up in front of their classmates talking." Dawn felt that the program really was a "child-based, center-based program" and that "it was extraordinary." The decision to use the Boston K2 curriculum reflected Fairview's commitment to ensure learning for all students, including those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

Dawn explained how she designed her classroom to be "hands-on" and "exploratory" to empower students and provide agency. She felt that it was important to design opportunities for students "to take it apart and put it back together." Otherwise, she felt that students "really don't master it." She explained how she made decisions in her classroom so that "every child learns, no matter what."

Sara shared that she incorporated a "blended learning model, as do many of the teachers," to design learning opportunities based on student learning needs and interests. She constantly reflected on student learning to create these opportunities, sharing that she would make adjustments to the classroom groupings "depending on the reflection at day's end of the learning that took place." The principal confirmed that he was "seeing more and more of the station rotation and meeting individual needs." He shared that the school had recently offered professional learning on incorporating "getting technology into that rotation to help it" and that teachers were interested in utilizing technology to support student needs and that it was "very positive."

Motivating Learners

At the core of how learning opportunities were designed was the question of whether the opportunity would be beneficial for kids. The principal suggested that

incorporating technology into the station rotation model enabled teachers to meet students' needs. Equally important, he thought of it as a way to increase student motivation, sharing that "there's a lot of things online that we can use to enhance everything." Similar to researchers (Coiro et al., 2019; Quinn et al. 2020) who believe technology can be used as a catalyst to draw students into their learning, the principal also shared their school's focus on technology as a positive; "We have the technology" and "we use the technology." He added that while they had "infused a lot of technology into the school," teachers were still essential for student learning, and that "nothing's gonna take away from that teacher." However, he believed it was the intentional design of blending the use of technology into instruction that could strengthen student learning even further.

To increase student motivation, teachers also noted the power of integrating ELA standards into content areas. The Kindergarten teacher shared that "the Boston Curriculum has allowed us to have a fully integrated program for science and social studies...totally integrated with their Language Arts." After teaching with this level of integration, she commented that "trying to completely integrate science and social studies into language arts" was powerful and that "there is no other way to do it." Dawn felt so strongly about the need to integrate ELA standards into content areas that it was the model she would "follow throughout my career."

Likewise, Sara felt that there was a commitment to integrate ELA standards, even though "it's very difficult." She shared that the science materials included "textbooks that go along with each kit, and we tried to incorporate the reading, and the writing around it..." Jill agreed, commenting that she felt the upper grades were "very

project-based and the kids really get engaged and do well with it." Additionally, the reading teacher felt that "social studies...is integrated into the reading" as well. The principal also shared that teachers would make efforts to integrate social studies and ELA standards "as much as they can." Kara added that integration in science and social studies was "incorporated into the writing piece." Intentionally planning for integration was done to motivate and strengthen student learning.

Aligning Instruction

Alignment of practices across classrooms was valued at the school. This deft navigation of empowering teachers around decision making while working to ensure alignment to support student learning is a difficult balance. However, the educators I spoke to felt that too much variation around instructional practices fractured student learning. As with other decisions at Fairview, alignment happened through shared decisions and conversations. The principal described their efforts in selecting a writing program, explaining that "Yeah, they both are good, but, someone's got to give up something that they're doing, for us all to be doing the same thing." He also shared that he had noticed inconsistencies with teachers implementing the phonics program when he first came to the school. "You could see the kids who kept up with [it] and didn't." Consequently, he shared that he purchased all of the teachers' materials to support the program, noting that they "have a very strong phonemic approach." These efforts toward alignment appeared to stem from a belief in creating equitable learning environments for all students.

The delicate balance between equitable learning classrooms and teachers' ability to create student-centered learning opportunities that highlighted educators' and

students' uniqueness was captured by the principal's explanation of what he saw regularly in classrooms throughout the school. In the intermediate grades, "You're most likely to see things pretty much the same...but the lower grades, the scope and sequence would be the same, but the delivery might be different." I sensed from our conversations that alignment was driven by a common expectation that all classroom decisions were grounded in prioritizing student learning. Teachers' collaboration and willingness to share practices strengthened this alignment in a way that was organic and committed to working together to ensure that all students were learning.

Commitment to the Standards

When talking to the principal and teachers, most of their classroom decisions were to ensure that students felt safe, welcome, and motivated to learn. At the same time, they all mentioned the principal's awareness of the state assessments. The principal thought that part of their high proficiency scores on the assessment was an effort to champion student practice on a program that was "formatted very much like RICAS." He shared that teachers noticed students' growth when using the program and encouraged others to use it as well, sharing that student achievement "numbers skyrocketed."

Across the focus group sessions, the staff appeared to have a clear understanding of what students needed to learn based on the standards and they shared how they would collaboratively make decisions around instructional practices. These conversations fostered reflection and encouraged teachers to make decisions in their classrooms that supported student learning. The principal explained that he often had teachers bring him ideas for changing the curriculum lessons, stating that they "don't

see the benefit to it" and proposing that they "would like to do this instead." He explained that it was often "a give and take between myself and the teachers," but the conversation always focused on the "goals" of the "unit." Importantly these conversations encouraged teachers to understand the "goal to make those benchmarks" and use evidence of student learning to support change, noting that teachers knew that they would "still need to show...results." He felt that this approach differed from allowing teachers "autonomy to do whatever they want." These conversations provided "the okay to be risk-takers; to look at it a different way and do something a little differently" while focusing on the standards and evidence of student learning.

Focus on Foundational Practices

As the principal shared, the school had "a very strong phonemic approach." They had implemented a multisensory, structured language program in the Kindergarten through third grade, "which is more than any other school at this moment in time, more than any other school." Implementation in classrooms is based on the needs of the students. The principal emphasized that "everyone gets it in K" and "everyone gets it in one," and after "second grade, it starts to wane off, it's the kids who really need it will get it in third grade...it really acts as a station in the room." He was excited to share that the two reading teachers "have been trained in" the intervention component of the program and they were also "very versatile" in the classroom program. The reading teacher confirmed this connection to the classroom's core practices, sharing that "generally with the younger kids, I go into the classroom and I would be like, in a part of their rotation."

The foundational instruction did not end with the primary classrooms, as there was a clear commitment to ensuring that all students would be proficient in phonics. The principal smiled as he shared a story about "a student's first year to us in our behavior program." While the principal acknowledged that the student had significant behavioral challenges that they were addressing, they had also recognized that the student, while "brilliant... can't read to save his life." Clarifying, the principal explained, "He can read because he's memorized... he'll memorize the words, and again he can understand, but to break down the word he has no idea." The student began seeing the reading teacher for intervention with a multisensory, structured language program, and admittedly the principal laughed that "he hates it," but quickly became more serious, adding, "but you know what, it is helping him. I think he has finally realized because he's that smart that this is how I learn to read." This commitment to focus on foundational practices extended to all students.

Family Relationships

As stated earlier, Fairview teachers felt that their school had a community feel because of the strong relationships they developed with families. Educators at the school have ongoing communication with families, as well as planned activities that are well attended.

"Dad's Night"

An illustration of this strong commitment to building family relationships was "Dad's Night," an event mentioned in all three focus groups. The principal shared that the idea came out of a Title 1 conference that he had attended with a few teachers from the school. They "saw it being done," and while he smirked that on the surface it

might sound like a "really bad" name for the night, he explained that research suggested, "Kids do better when their fathers are involved." Similar to so many of the examples that were shared about the school, he added that they "started very slowly, systematically" with the goal of the first year to create a fun night where everyone felt encouraged to come, "basically a barbeque." Shrugging his shoulders, he added that "there was some educational value to it," explaining that it happened just before the summer break, so students "got their bag to go home with, and flashcards and stuff like that." Nevertheless, he really emphasized that the night was about bringing in families and that "they played lawn games together," demonstrating a commitment to creating opportunities for positive interactions.

While the night was called "Dad's Night," they encouraged everyone to come "mothers, fathers, you know everyone was listed, so everyone is welcome to come." As the "Nights" went on he shared that they "made it a little bit more educational and a little bit more educational." Demonstrating their commitment to being an inclusive school, he proudly reported, "Just by doing that step, we got a lot of parents that we very rarely saw." Lynn beamed when she talked about the night, commenting that "it was a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful program." This enthusiasm for the night was because of how the students reacted. She shared that "we had kids, you know, coming in telling us that their dad was coming" and that "[k]ids that you never see come. And it was, it was the most unbelievable experience to watch every time we've done it." This night illustrated the school's intentional efforts to make all families feel welcome. However, just getting the families there was not enough. From everyone I talked to,

there was also an effort to make sure all families felt "comfortable coming to school." It was about making connections, enjoying the lawn games and barbeque.

Family Outreach. While the school was not without challenges, teachers were committed to removing any hurdles to support student learning and they recognized the importance of partnering with families. The reading teacher underscored that "you need the parents to be on board with you." Recognizing that sometimes "they're afraid," she shared her persistence in trying to build positive relationships with families, even if she had to "run outside" during drop-off or dismissal to make the connection; "once you break in, I think that helps." This dedication was not shared as being extraordinary. It was shared matter-of-factly, indicating the school's value in including families in their child's education.

The school appeared to reflect on how they could include and connect with all of their families. To demonstrate, the principal and all of the teachers shared that they created a program to provide "adult literacy help." A teacher shared that they had recognized that this could be a "huge issue" because if parents cannot read, "they don't read any of the notes." Using Title 1 funds, they supported all families to be part of their child's education.

Communication with families was a clear expectation from the principal. He is "a huge proponent" of "calling them and talking to them...call home, call home." He thought it was the most positive way to communicate, especially if there was "a problem with a student." He shared that it has "been working really well." Teachers appeared to be equally committed to connecting with families, despite some of the noted challenges of communication; they described their school as "the most transient

and diverse school in the district," explaining that "we have a lot of multilingual families" as well. However, they proudly described their relationship with families as "the best in the district," and another teacher mentioned it is "extraordinary." To highlight this strength of communication and outreach, Dawn added, "Through this whole COVID virus and remote learning process, I keep saying... if we didn't have the families that we have, this would not be successful." This demonstrates the value the school placed on connecting to and partnering with all families.

Summary of Fairview Elementary School

Overall, educators at Fairview Elementary School showed an incredible commitment to professional learning and on-going collaboration. The principal's leadership fostered continuous reflection to improve student achievement and motivation. The educators at Fairview expressed their commitment to intentionally support students' social-emotional development. The principal expressed the importance of creating a learning environment, where students, staff, and families wanted to be. Their belief that all students could learn paired with their commitment to ensure that students were learning guided their decisions.

Seaview Elementary School

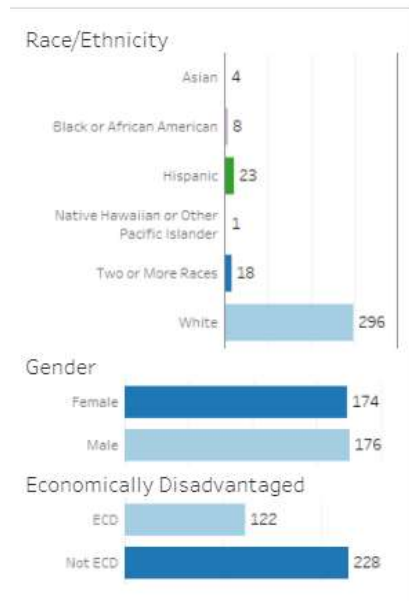
Seaview Elementary is located on the main street in the town, and its campus comprises two buildings. The school received a four-star rating in the 2019 accountability report card and earned the maximum score for ELA growth. At the time of the study, there were approximately 350 students at this K-5 elementary school, and Seaview was one of four elementary schools in the district. There were two school-wide Title 1 programs in the district, and approximately 35% of Seaview

students were from economically disadvantaged households. Demographic data from Seaview Elementary is seen in Figure 10.

With respect to practices in this effective Title 1 School, and similar to practices at Stewart and Fairview Elementary Schools, analysis of interview and focus group data suggested Seaview educators also made decisions utilizing shared leadership, with a focus on supporting achievement for all students. While the principal, teacher, and school website all celebrated their Blue Ribbon recognition, it should be noted that this was not always the case for the school. In their application to the U.S. Department of Education, "in the 2013 - 2014 school year, [the school] was identified as a school in "Warning Status" by the state's Department of Education. To begin the 2014 - 2015 school year, the new principal instilled the tenants of a 'Growth Mindset' with all staff members...Teachers altered the conversations about students and learning" (p. 7). The application concluded by stating, "The other schools in [the district] are embracing some of the initiatives that have turned the environment around and allowed the focus to be on learning"(p. 8). The pride of this accomplishment came through during the principal interview and the teacher focus group.

Figure 10

Demographic Information for Seaview Elementary



Note. From Rhode Island Department of Education. (2019). *Report card.* <https://reportcard.ride.ri.gov/201819>

Vision

The educators at Seaview Elementary held a strong belief that by working collaboratively, they could support all students. The school held a strong growth mindset, for students and educators. Their drive for excellence was paralleled by their commitment to create a welcoming environment for learning. As detailed next, these beliefs guided how the school made decisions.

Teaching and Learning was a Priority

Seaview's principal was excited that the new superintendent was putting teaching and learning at the center of the district's focus. "It's really showcasing that [the superintendent] has priorities for teaching and learning, which may or may not have been in the past. But I like that it's at the forefront this year." The principal

described how the superintendent was communicating the importance of teaching and learning. "[The superintendent] has said it at our admin meetings. He has said it publicly at our school committee meeting, and last week, he presented our budget, and the first slide talked about teaching and learning to the community." With a clear appreciation, she added, "It's really publicized that way."

The teachers that I met with also believed that the district had established high teaching and learning expectations. Beth mentioned that this "is the expectation from the top-down." Larry quickly added, "No one's really on your back, like, maybe, watching you. But the expectation, in [the district] right now, is to achieve and move forward." Beth smiled with his comments, signaling her agreement. Larry shared that the district's focus and expectations keep growing because of their school's recent recognition as a "Blue Ribbon School." This recognition as an *Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing School*, Larry believed, "built a lot of momentum, and hopefully it's snowballing in the right direction. I think it is; I think it is snowballing." Larry's comments suggested that he felt this dedication to improving student learning continues to grow in their school.

Growth Mindset

The principal also shared her belief that it was important to focus on growth. "Our vision is to continue to grow our students as learners, but to take them for where they are, to move them forward." She stressed that this vision was "especially evident with students that are either below grade level or disadvantaged." She clearly communicated a dedication and commitment to ensuring that all students were learning, highlighting that "we have reading and math intervention time every day, and

taking them from where they are." She added in a calm, but certain tone, that the school would do "whatever it takes to move [students] along, and that's pretty much how we're continuing to grow our learners as readers and writers." The teachers also believed in this vision for student learning. Beth summarized these feelings in the simple yet profound statement that "All students can learn; no matter what."

It is important to clarify that this belief in growth was emphasized in the school's Blue Ribbon application, by the principal, and by the teachers. In the focus groups, Larry and Beth also shared the importance of a growth mindset, mentioning that their school led this district's initiative. "We would do things...and then other schools would follow." While they felt the school was at the forefront of many initiatives in the district, they specifically identified "growth mindset" as an example.

Excellence

While a vision of excellence and growth was evident, as Larry shared that "Our motto has become anchored in excellence," it was equally important to communicate how the school should support this vision. "To piggyback on what [Beth] said, that definitely, all children can learn in a warm, welcoming and positive place for everybody, for parents, grandparents, and of course for students, and for staff." Learning was a priority, and the *how* of learning was also valued. Their vision for education included making sure to create a warm and welcoming environment for learning.

Leadership

The collaborative leadership at Seaview strengthened educators' ability to make decisions that supported student learning. The principal knew all of the students

at the school and worked to be present in the school daily. The principal's positivity was noted as well as her support for students and staff. Teachers appreciated her strong instructional knowledge, as they felt that she was a valued resource with whom to think through problems of practice. Teachers shared in many decisions of the school and were empowered to make instructional choices.

Principal Leadership

Sharing Decision-Making. Being ahead of the curve in promoting student achievement may be because of how the educators at Seaview shared in the decision-making process and positively increased their ratings on accountability measures. For example, teachers credited the principal's leadership style in promoting this shared leadership. "I really like working with [the principal]. And I say *with* [the principal] and not necessarily *for* her. You know we are a team. I think because as a principal, she seems to embrace a lot of our philosophy where she is a coach, but yet she is very respectful, open to new ideas, and she's easy to talk to." It is important to note that because the principal was open to new ideas, it fostered teachers' willingness to think about new ideas and bring them forward. This shared belief in leadership was evident throughout the conversations that I had with both the principal and the teachers.

Being Present. Notably, the principal spoke very little of her leadership style, almost as if her behavior was typical and not extraordinary. When reflecting on her leadership, she paused and simply offered, "Well, I'm visible every day. In classrooms every day, I think that's really important to be in classrooms. I greet my students every morning on the sidewalk and see my families every morning." Her humility was apparent when she explained about her presence in the "cafeteria, I'm not in there

every day, but try to be." The principal's commitment to being present as a leader underscored how she made decisions with her staff to support student achievement. "I think; I think it's being visible. I think that that is first and foremost with me, and in walking through classrooms, it is giving feedback."

The principal's commitment to be present in the school was appreciated by the teachers. Beth commented, "She knows every student's name. The personality of every student, their strengths and weaknesses, so I think she is a marvelous leader." Larry agreed with Beth, elaborating how the principal's style encouraged them to continue to improve their instructional practices to support student learning. "I will add it's very nice, coming to school every day...there is no anxiety as...sometimes you have anxiety with principals..." He positively mentioned the coaching that he received from his principal. "[The principal] is more of, here is something you could get better at, and it is more a conversation and advice." He noted how the principal's leadership and personality created a positive environment. "[The principal] is very friendly, very approachable, and you just, I feel good every day coming into work, I feel, I want to get there. I want to go to work every day. I love it."

Positive Support. Beth also agreed that the principal's leadership was very encouraging, remarking that the principal "stresses the positives" and that "in every faculty meeting there is a section for celebrations." She added, "I think that has a lot to do with the whole environment of the school, so she is non-threatening." Beth offered a twist to a familiar story of being called to the principal's office, "when you get told the principal wants to see you...you're not nervous, like you say, Oh, I wonder what [the principal] wants to say." Beth believed this comfort extended beyond teachers. "I

think that is the same with many people and parents, and so I think that's helpful as well." Larry nodded in agreement, portraying that the principal's decisions as a leader created a very safe and encouraging environment.

Support of Student Learning. In addition to her upbeat personality, the teacher also appreciated the principal's ability to organize and facilitate a meeting to promote collaborative problem solving. "We have plenty of time to analyze [student] data and see what we can do. Brainstorm how we can move forward, you know, with the kids who are struggling. So, she is very open to that and...very organized." Larry appreciated the principal's commitment to organize student support meetings by highlighting that not only does "[the principal] schedule the meetings, she tries to get everyone there that she can." The principal's efforts to increase membership at the meeting also increased accountability on metrics of student learning, by sharing the decision-making process with her teachers.

Both teachers in the focus group felt that the principal's commitment to these student meetings "is very supportive" and that "she takes [the organizing of the meeting] off your plate...so it saves a lot of time," implying that the teacher can then focus on the needs of the classroom. Beth added to Larry's comment, sharing that the principal is very willing to call home to parents, "She'll get them right on the phone if we try and it doesn't work, [she] will say, well let me see what I can do and will get on the phone right away." It was important to note that it was much more than calling parents. As Beth explained, it was about the principal's efforts to "put a team together."

Instructional Knowledge. In addition to the principal's attitude and presence throughout the school, the teachers appreciated her experience and knowledge as an instructional leader. Beth explained that the principal "was a reading specialist, for many years" and then was the assistant principal at the school before she became principal, "So she certainly is a great resource when it comes to specific concerns we have for students, you know with reading difficulties, as well as children that need to be challenged, she is a good resource for that." The teachers also felt that their parents appreciated her help. "She is a great resource for support for parents as well." Smiling, the principal took pride in the supportive environment established at the school, as I asked her if her regular attendance at meetings, such as common planning time, was allowed by teacher contract. She quickly responded that it was because of the school's "culture!"

Teacher Leadership

While I did not hear of a solely teacher-led initiative at Seaview Elementary School, the school's shared decision-making was evidenced throughout my time with the teachers. Teachers' empowerment to make instructional decisions in their classrooms was evident throughout my conversations with the principal and teachers.

Instructional Choices. An example of how teachers were empowered to make instructional decisions was when Beth described how she collaboratively made decisions around text selections with her colleagues. She explained that there are "units of study...based on what we have to teach." Her grade "has to focus on literature for the first trimester, non-fiction the second trimester, and back to literature for the third." She shared that the school had an extensive collection of texts that teachers had

procured over the years, as teachers were given small budgets to spend on instructional materials. "I would use the bulk of that for reading materials for level texts, based on a unit of study." Although funding to individual teachers was no longer allocated, Beth noted they could still select texts, as "our principal has been really helpful." The teachers valued this opportunity to decide which texts would be purchased as they were committed to making sure their selections would strengthen the unit's learning goals. "We will meet with the reading teacher, and we'll talk about the standards that need to be addressed during the first trimester, and we will focus on that and what literature that we want to use."

When Beth was recounting their planning steps, she displayed confidence and professionalism in the decision-making process. She felt empowered to make text selections in her classroom and shared that "the district passes out" a "binder" with curriculum expectations; even though "there are books that we are mandated to read every year, at different grade levels," it did not thwart her inspiration, as her smile was wide when she added, "and then we play off those books."

School Climate

As much as educators at Seaview Elementary School strived for academic excellence, they were equally cognizant of the feeling of the school. They made decisions to ensure that the school was welcoming, and built relationships with families, students, and each other as staff of Seaview. The school was focused on growth, and that belief permeated through school-level conversations focused on efforts and strategies to support the school.

Welcoming Feeling. The school's vision was that "All students can learn." Yet, the importance of the environment that students learned in was equally emphasized, as Larry characterized his school as "a warm, welcoming and positive place for everybody..." Beth described the school as a unique place because of its climate. "So, to give you an idea and how welcoming it felt when you walked in the door, you just knew this place is different. And it's from the secretaries that greet everyone... [secretary] is just incredible...and when they say may I help you, [the two secretaries] mean it." She shared that so many stakeholders in the school feel this welcoming feeling. "I mean; I have people...who volunteered in my classroom for years because they just can't imagine what it would be like not to come into [the school]. So it is...that positivity."

Focused on Growth. Beth emphasized, "We do a lot with growth mindset and we really do practice what we preach, and we teach it to the children, and, you know, hear them coaching each other. And it's just one thing that builds on top of another, on top of another." Beth viewed the school's feeling as a positive feedback loop that grows and spreads into all school aspects. The initiative of a "Growth Mindset" was also emphasized in the school's Blue Ribbon application, highlighting this positive climate that "[w]ith hard work and perseverance, students began to believe they would be successful" (p. 7). This positivity changed the language of the school, as the application goes on to explain, "Teachers altered the conversations about students and learning."

Building Relationships. Larry commented that these positive efforts and determination helped all students. He shared that a former superintendent often said

that "a rising tide lifts all boats," and Beth immediately added that she also felt that the message of good things positively impacting all students really "fits [the school]. The teachers thought that this feeling was because of their regular efforts. "We try. We try!" The teachers thought that while the adults initiated the climate, it influenced how students treated each other. Beth summarized by sharing, "I would say the positivity of the staff, and that just trickles down. You know the kids see that model, you know how we all get along, and we support each other, and you can see them doing that as well." An example highlighted in their application was the relationships that were formed between grade-levels at the school. "Each year, fifth graders welcome kindergarteners by greeting them as they enter the school for the first time. To end the year, kindergarteners line the way as fifth-graders enter the Moving On Ceremony" (p. 7).

The teachers I met with described Seaview as "it's just a great place to be." Their smiles and nods emphasized that both teachers in the focus group felt this sentiment. Larry added that he felt the school was "progressive because [the staff is] always striving to move forward." These efforts to move forward will be further explored through the lens of professional learning and collaboration in a later section of my findings.

I was struck by the teachers' positivity and energy for teaching amidst a global health pandemic. I was meeting with them at the end of a school year where teacher burnout had become a growing concern across the country. Despite the stress regularly reported because of remote learning, Larry shared with a chuckle, "I feel good every day coming into work, I feel, I want to get there. I want to go to work every day, I love

it." Beth laughed with Larry and shared that she does not even call it work. "I still say that I'm going to school, not that I'm going to work... I think when I say I'm going to work; I will know that it is time to leave." They felt that the principal's leadership and efforts cultivated this positive climate as "[she] doesn't forget her staff and that's very important...we are part of the team." Larry stressed that the principal tries to make the school "warm and welcoming for everybody," and he thought "it can only help things if the teachers are as comfortable as possible."

However, it is important to note that this comfort was not about complacency, as both teachers indicated that educators at the school were actively driven to support students and fellow educators. Beth described an incident where she was displaced from her classroom because of an emergency, and she expressed the staff's willingness to help. "Well, there had to be just about every teacher in the two buildings...who came by and... TA's and said, 'What do you need?', 'What can we do?', and, you know, they're just very supportive, no matter what happened." Again, she shared that the school's energy created a situation where good actions led to more good actions. "And, you know, that just snowballs, so it's just you don't know where it begins and where it ends. It is just a really positive, welcoming place."

Larry believed that the school environment was respectful for students and staff. "I think the best thing is [the feeling of the school] is...professional, but yet we are still able to have fun...most everyone really gets along, and it's pretty sincere...everyone has mutual respect." Beth shared again that positivity at this school grows and impacts everyone. "It's just a great place to be."

Professional Learning and Collaboration

Seaview educators' unwavering belief to support students also guided the professional learning and collaboration at the school, as efforts to promote student learning influenced all decisions. The educators at this school actively shared their goals for learning and they focused on data to drive their new learning. Teachers felt that they were afforded many opportunities for new learning, through their book clubs and professional days. Moreover, the principal shared that she also participated in professional learning with other principals in the district. At the heart of their professional learning and collaboration was a commitment to design learning experiences to strengthen students' learning.

Data-Driven Instruction

The principal reported that the school has data meetings three times a year. She explained what happens during these meetings and what happens after the meeting. "So three times a year there, it's about a two-hour meeting per grade level, and at that meeting, we'll have the math coaches, the reading specialists...special educators, social workers... it's a full team, and it's a full conversation." She described the meetings as a large conversation, where data is not only presented; it is also talked about and examined by educators with different areas of expertise. The principal explained how they review the data for "strengths and weaknesses" as well as "student growth." Notably, these meetings did much more than document student progress. They were a time of planning for continuous improvement. The principal reported that during these meetings, "strategic plans" are made "for kids moving forward." These plans were grounded in student data by educators who believed that all students can learn. It is no wonder the principal thought that the meetings were "really valuable; really valuable."

The teachers also shared how valuable they thought these meetings were. As Larry explained, while they have structure professional development (PD) days, "The data days also, are kind of a little bit PD as well, it's not just looking at charts on the screen, but it's brainstorming about how we can help the kids that are being challenged, and that ends up being a PD day." The use of the word "we" in Larry's transcript conveyed to me that he felt part of a team to support and strengthen student learning together.

This sense of team was further expressed as he explained how the data meetings then carried over to daily practices designed to improve student learning. Larry shared examples of how this collaboration continues. "I have the good fortune to have two reading specialists that I could go to if I needed help." He clearly felt that this was different from the past, where he felt solely responsible for students. "It's opened up a lot, and the lines are kind of blurred, and I like that. So, if I need help, they will do some (diagnostic assessments with students)." Larry went on to share that it was more than just helping to assess students, as he and the reading specialists worked collaboratively to support students." It helps so much having that fluidity, where they can take the kids...the reading specialists are very, very flexible." He shared that at times it may be "challenging to have the kids leave the room and come back in," as they have a flexible service model for reading support. Some students have pullout instruction in "basic skills," and the reading specialist might "come in" to the classroom for other students. He smiled and explained that "It's kind of a blend that way" and added that "we make the best of it." His use of the word "we" appeared to signal that he and the two reading teachers were a team.

Teamwork

While their collaboration began with the goal of supporting student learning, Larry noted how he had come to feel more supported with this change in how teachers interacted with each other. "It's not like, 'oh, that's not my job; that's not my job.' No one's saying that. It's opened up quite a bit. And I think that's nice." He revealed that in the past, he could "get overwhelmed sometimes, especially when you're departmentalized." He reflected, "[the relationship with the reading teachers] has changed, and I like that. It has been much, much nicer."

Beth also shared this collaborative sense of a working team, as she explained that she and the reading specialist "meet to co-plan." Additionally, she described how there are built-in structures to allow time to collaborate as her grade level team has "the same prep five days a week." She added, by the teachers' contract "(administration) can't tell you what to do during your prep, but it is organized so that if you want that time you have it. So, I would say that we meet at least once a week, but we talk daily." Beyond aligning break times for teachers in a grade, Beth also noted that the principal ensured their proximity in the building also fostered collaboration. "Our first principal called it the pod...So we're all in one section, and we see each other constantly, talking before school, we are in one another's rooms." Beth's description and hand gestures allowed me to visualize the teachers' daily interactions and her comfort level with sharing practices that had developed with her grade-level partners.

Collaborative Planning

Teachers' comments about teamwork and planning overlap with additional evidence of continuous collaborative planning outlined next. Beth explained that their planning is guided by the district's expectations, "especially before a unit begins. We will sit and collaborate during lunch or before school quite often. If it takes three days in a row, then we will do it three days in a row. Then we will divvy up the work." The planning and collaboration were continuous, as Beth explained that the conversations would continue through "sending emails to each other with attachments; here I have this; this is the article, and share it that way." This example underscores teachers' efforts to continuously improve student learning by refining their instructional practices through reading and sharing professional articles.

While Beth explained that this process was continuous, she also explained there was a cycle to their planning. "The beginning of the year, we probably meet almost daily, and then whenever we start our new units of study, whether it is math or science or social studies. We will get together for several days...as well." While it was evident that she appreciated the common grade-level time embedded in the day, she explained that they often met outside of this time to include educators who do not share the common time but are valuable in planning. "We also plan with our reading teachers and our special ed. teacher...We try to have them in the discussion...so that's when we will meet before school so everyone can come in." Beth emphasized that "there is no beginning and no end..." underscoring the daily efforts to strengthen instructional practices at the school. Beth's example of collaborative planning illustrates the school's intentionality behind instructional decisions.

Lesson Observations

Beth and Larry's examples also illustrated the trust between educators in the building. Larry shared that he appreciated learning from educators throughout the building. His comments were filled with respect and positivity for his colleagues' teaching abilities. "We also have the opportunity to get...subs in so we can go visit a colleague's room and see what they are doing. And spend an hour or two spreading the good work among their colleagues, so we have opportunities to do that a lot, which is nice." This type of modeling between teachers makes evident the building's commitment to share and learn as educators. Seaview's collective vision to ensure all students were learning fueled educators' motivation to share best practices amongst the staff.

New Learning

Sharing instructional ideas was undoubtedly part of educators' daily practices. Similarly, teachers at the school also selected educational experts to read and learn from through book clubs and workshops. The principal explained that teachers at the school participated in a book club twice a year with a selection by the staff that aligned to an initiative. "We're just getting ready to maybe select the next book...We've done a lot with Jennifer Serravallo's reading and writing books."

Beth explained how these books provided a foundation for collaborative conversations. "They are absolutely incredible resources for your focus lessons." It is interesting to note that the teachers' book selection was because they wanted to be better at a district initiative, suggesting they were empowered to become stronger as a result of the charge. Beth added that the books were "particularly helpful for teaching reading instruction because...you wanted to look for something that would address

what the district expected, aligning your instruction to the standards of your grade, and that's exactly what this book does, with wonderful modeling..." The Seaview learning community also used webinars to ground their discussions. "[The author] Serravallo had...[webinar] professional development lessons [that teachers watched together] ... one morning a week for about eight weeks and... then continue when [the author] started the next round [of webinars]. And that was so helpful." Educators came together once a week as a community of learners, committed to strengthening reading and writing instruction.

Being a continual learner was evident throughout my conversations at the school. When I asked Larry about instructional practices, he immediately responded about what he was working towards. "I'd like to get a little more familiar with teaching reading stations. That's, that's where I'm working towards having stations..." He seemed energized by this cycle of continuous reflection and action to improve student outcomes through instructional decisions. Although this was a personal goal, he shared that he was working with the reading specialists to implement this model, further illustrating the school's collaborative professional learning environment.

Beth's example of a book study that supported the social-emotional curriculum they had recently implemented provided another example of teacher engagement and ownership of professional learning goals. She proudly explained that while they began the program implementation with outside trainers, "a couple of our teachers have gone for extensive training, and then they run the PD." To strengthen program implementation, Beth shared that teachers "will also meet, voluntarily, before school, and there will be books related to [the SEL program] that...have been purchased for

us." Beth shared that the books focused on incorporating SEL practices with academic planning. "We'll pour over those books and have book discussions and implement it in class and then come back the next week and talk about that." Her language of "pour over" the book's information resonated with me. Her illustration of these supportive conversations about implementing new learning into her classroom speaks to her commitment to improving instructional practices through professional learning. It highlights the trust developed in the building. Implementing new learning exposes one's vulnerability, and Beth shared this experience as one of value. She found building-based learning opportunities "the most rewarding and helpful because it's what we feel we need." Staff at this school believed that they have control over their own learning, which encouraged reflective teaching practices.

Professional Learning Days

In addition to the school-based learning, the district also dedicated funds and time for professional learning. The principal listed many of the ELA, math, and assessment trainings that the district had offered and she spoke about the collaborative conversations between the building principals and central office to determine district priorities. "We'll talk about what we'd like to move forward with." This participation in the decision-making process may explain why the principal felt connected to the work. Additionally, she shared that they had invested significant resources into a curriculum to support students' social-emotional learning. "We've had a lot of [SEL curriculum] PD."

Beth also expanded on the writing example that the principal had shared. Beth explained that the district provided funds for her to attend "a week's worth of

instruction" on the writing program, and "some people went to New York" to meet with the author of the program. She also shared that "there was follow up during the school year for people who could not attend during the summer." Beth also explained that the district funded a "writing coach" to support professional learning. While Beth and Larry appeared to connect more to the school-based professional learning, there was a clear commitment at the district level to allocate resources to support professional learning. Furthermore, the professional learning at the building aligned to the district initiatives, allowing teachers to delve deeply into an area of study.

Principal Learning

The principal also shared that she appreciated the time she spent learning with other principals in her own district. As she described their possible attendance at the upcoming principal conference for the state network, she used the word "team." Again, this language choice offered a glimpse into the district-wide relationships that supported her learning and collaboration. "We go to the summer conference as a team. I'm hoping that we'll go again, I'm not sure if that'll be afforded to us again this year, but that's our hope." In addition to the summer conference, she mentioned attending other workshops and training offered by the state's principals association and the department of education. She explained that "we participate," signaling her attendance was with principals from her district, with whom she sees as supportive to her learning.

Data-Driven Instruction

Data-driven instructional practices were evident throughout my data review of Fairview Elementary School. In their application to become a Blue Ribbon School,

they referenced that in 2013, they aligned their professional learning to support student learning in identified areas of need. "As part of Title I planning, a comprehensive plan was developed to align with the School Improvement Plan. The Title I School-wide program focuses on school improvement and support for all students..." This plan identified how they would use resources to align in areas of need that were identified through data reviews.

This intentionality was evident throughout my conversations at the school. The teachers' consistent and deliberate use of data to ground instructional decisions was found throughout the school, especially in recounting their conversations during their "data days." As Larry explained, "the data days have really, really helped us target the big needs of the students, and then that way we can work on specific skills and strategies." Larry went on to share that these data days included supportive, knowledge-building conversations, and he reported that it was "also nice to have...other eyes, looking at your data...I may see it and not really recognize a pattern." He mimicked the back and forth that is typical during the meetings. "My principal might say, 'Wait a minute, it looks like a lot of kids are in this category', or the math teacher might say, 'Larry, look at my group.'" These data conversations were grounded in positive intent, guided by their vision that all students could learn and equally important that when everyone worked together, they would be able to plan a successful course of action for students. As Larry shared, "the willingness to collaborate and cooperate" is essential. Collectively using data and sharing accountability for student learning inspired a positive working environment for teachers and positively impacted student learning. "I really think the flexibility

between specialists and classroom teachers has really helped immensely; immensely, we're really pulling these kids up. You can see it. You can see it."

Instructional Practices

Throughout this case study, data suggested that Seaview educators collaboratively made decisions that often focused on improving student achievement. As detailed in this next section, it was evident that educators were mindful of student equity and reflected on how classroom practices would look and feel for students.

Student-Centered

Beth explained that when she and the reading teacher were planning together, it was necessary to ensure that all students had opportunities for instruction aligned with grade-level standards. "[The grade-level team] will meet with the reading teacher, and we'll talk about the standards that need to be addressed." Beth had previously shared how she and her partners had engaged in designing standards-aligned lessons for all students. These efforts underscore their belief in equity for all students, as classroom practices were designed to provide grade-level access for all students regardless of their decoding abilities. Beth explained further that "teaching the standards" can be accomplished using "a variety of leveled text, even for the focus lesson itself."

The principal also shared the importance of all students having access to instruction on grade-level standards. "I think kids need time...(to) get their core instruction at grade level." She recognized that this expectation was "really paramount" for students who needed targeted support. "You've got... they've got to be where they are. You've got to read where they are every day independently, get that

core instruction, but also get scaffolded during the day as well." This balance is difficult for many schools, as intentionally scheduling and designing lessons for all students requires effort and commitment to orchestrate many school day components. While this was the principal's expectation, the teachers positively shared their efforts to design their classroom practices to support equity.

Another critical point is that Beth intentionally designed her classroom practices around equity and she wanted students to feel a sense of equality. Designing lessons that serviced students' needs but did not make them feel different was important to Beth. She described how she and the reading teacher begin together with a focus lesson because "the reading teacher and I like the children to see us working together." Beth understood that negativity students could feel if they feel labeled. "We just don't want to have 'so these are the reading students', and they have to work with Mrs. So-and-So, and they don't get to work with [the classroom teacher]." Through the intentional design of classroom instruction, she and the reading teacher worked to "blend that group (of students) together and sometimes that group will work with the reading specialists and sometimes that group is with me."

Larry also worked to bring high expectations into the classroom, as his own learning goal was to make the classroom "more cohesive." He described that he would like to have stations that "kids rotate" through with different opportunities for learning. Beth echoed this intentional design of students working on different learning activities in her description of teaching while building relationships with her students to foster their independence as learners. "I am certainly here to give them the focus lesson...but then I put on my roller skates, and then I am going from student to student

and group to group to see where they are, more [like a] facilitator and the coach."

From Beth's description, I could picture a classroom filled with student voices as they collaboratively worked in groups.

Beth further explained that the changes she made in her instructional practices to design learning experiences specifically for her current students' needs were not always easy. "I'm not saying that it was easy, but I found this less stressful and less overwhelming or daunting." She went on to share that she saw value in this classroom design. "So the idea of being able to work with children, based on their needs...and having different stations and going through and working with them." While sharing, Beth paused and added with a smile, "I have found that I really enjoy that. I can't imagine teaching any other way."

Designing classroom instruction to support students appeared at the forefront of their decisions. As Larry shared, he continuously reflected on his practices. "I keep what's good, but then try to move forward with things that I think will be helpful and beneficial to my students. So you always want to try something new..." The principal shared that these practices were happening throughout the building, confirming, "the workshop model" is "pretty much what you'd see here with our teaching and learning." Notwithstanding, though, was her reflection that as new research and materials are being introduced, teachers are working to shift their practices to support student learning. She explained that their new math curriculum was a shift designed so that "kids do more talking and sharing and discussing their answers and... problem-solving and being able to explain your answers." Again, it was clear that classroom practices were designed to foster students' interactions with each other. Finally, the school

demonstrated its commitment to student-centered practices by adopting a social-emotional curriculum over the last few years. As the teachers worked to “implement it in class”, their new professional learning experiences were positively impacting classroom practices.

Aligning Instruction

Throughout my conversations with the teachers, it was evident that there was an alignment of instructional practices throughout the school. While the fifth grade was departmentalized, which offered alignment in design, both teachers spoke of the strong collaboration throughout the school, from planning units to watching colleagues model a lesson. While the teachers spoke of district "pacing charts" that they "try to follow," the strength of the school's alignment was sincere and organic, happening through the open sharing of ideas and commitment to supporting all students as learners. The principal believed that this commitment to align instructional practices and ensure that the curriculum was being implemented with fidelity came from her daily "classroom walkthroughs." She believed that regularly being out in the building gave her insight into the school, sharing that when you are in classrooms regularly, "you know, you just know."

Motivating Learning

Another common instructional practice in the school was their integration of ELA standards into science and social studies. Beth shared that they intentionally planned for "integrating social studies and science" and she felt that the principal valued and supported this integration. While funds were limited, Beth complimented the principal on her efforts to ensure that teachers had access to texts that supported

integration. "[The principal] will always find a way because she knows the importance of getting good literature to support the content areas, which isn't always easy and money is tight, but she has always been able...to support us." Although fifth grade was departmentalized at the school, Larry also reported that "non-fiction writing" was integrated into science instruction and the principal also shared that ELA standards are integrated into social studies instruction. "[I] t's embedded in all...with reading and writing."

Family and Community Relationships

It was evident that educators at Seaview Elementary School worked to forge strong relationships with families and the community. The principal's comments summarize their unique context.

“I'm trying to think if there is a specific program or outreach night. I can't right now, but we have a very close relationship with families, so many students live in the area, as well as get bused, so we can have a real community school, and we are kind of a town landmark and centerpiece. It's a huge marble building and a huge brick building, and the fourth of July activities are done there. So, we are like a centerpiece for the town. The community thinks very highly of those two buildings, architecturally, and the students and the families have also embraced that. So I would say, very warm and welcoming relationship with families for the most part, for the most part.”

While the principal could not think of any specifics that fostered the relationship, several examples of intentional outreaches to families unveiled themselves throughout the course of my conversations, as described next.

Family Outreach

As Beth shared, she believed that it was both the "school's philosophy and the district that it is imperative to have parents involved in their child's education." She stressed the importance of being "as welcoming as possible and positive, not, not judgmental." Beth shared that she felt that it was important for parents to attend the open house, as it was at the beginning of the year, and it provided parents opportunities to meet many of the teachers involved in their child's day. For that reason, she shared that she "would personally email or call as a reminder about open house." She felt that while they "do outreach during the school year," it increased their participation throughout the year if she could welcome parents at the open house. "We know if we can get them in there, there is a greater chance that's when we have them sign up for parent conferences, and we also give them information as to upcoming events, for parents and children."

One of these outreaches, Larry explained, was "Learning Looks," which allowed families a glimpse into the daily instructional practices in the classroom; "You would invite parents into your classroom, watch an everyday lesson." He shared that the school was "very transparent" about the classroom's instructional practices and "parents are invited to all... it's very open." As a result of this commitment to include parents, the principal shared that they have many "parent volunteers" and specifically that "parents are always welcome."

The school had even designed its summer program to include families in its instructional practices. The principal explained that the summer program ran one day a week during the summer and welcomed all of their families. "We run it like a

workshop model where the teachers introduce a lesson, then kids have time to work on an activity or skill, and then we have like a group share out for the kids." Parents also participated in the program, as the principal shared that "we have parents who will do a craft" during the program.

The school celebrated instruction with the community as well. Larry explained that every year, his students participated in the "Declaim Competition...where students memorize patriotic speeches". This competition concluded with a ceremony on the school's front steps during the town's Memorial Day parade, providing an opportunity for the school to connect with the community. These relationships positively benefit the school, as the principal shared that the town restaurants hold a fundraiser to benefit the school each year.

While many schools ask for parent volunteers, the approach for soliciting parent feedback was one that I had not seen before. The school flipped the call for volunteers from a perspective of what the school wanted to what parents wanted to share with the school. Beth explained that parents were asked what they could share versus limiting volunteer options to specific opportunities that the educators offered. This encouraged parents to think about how they could participate in the school and honored the diversity of parents' talents and skills. "If their expertise is math, they may want to come in during math time. On the form we will say share something that interests them, and some parents have very specific unique interests." Beth explained how this led to positive classroom experiences. "I had one woman who was an artist, and she came in and we worked on making images of the history of [the town] on tiles. We researched it, and she brought it back and put it in the kiln...It's a beautiful

frame now...in the hallway." Beth offered that their efforts to understand parents' interests enabled her to involve more families in the classroom. "Then, as we are doing things during the year, let me call so and so and see if they would like to contribute for that lesson." Beth acknowledged that really engaging parents could be a challenge, but felt that "just being creative" and "reaching out to people individually who are more reticent" led to great relationships and enriched classroom practices.

Both Larry and Beth shared that they felt that the school had a "very supportive parents group" and added that teachers also participate in the group. Beth shared, "At all of [the monthly] events, there are teachers that are present." The principal expressed that it was the school's mindset to use these opportunities "to establish that rapport... we're talking about working as a team." The principal emphasized that they were always working to create a welcoming environment where parents are "not as threatened."

Furthermore, while the principal and educators shared that there were growing needs in the families that they served, it was apparent that they were determined to stay positive and problem-solve issues together. Larry shared that often students needed a winter coat, and when this happened, they solved these issues in a "very discreet" way, and "the nurse had like a beautiful brand new winter coat." He shared that they provided food baskets for families as well, adding that "there's a lot behind the scenes that I don't even really know that's being done that helps create this whole package of [the school]." This "whole package" created a school where students, teachers, and families felt welcome.

Summary of Seaview Elementary School

To summarize, Seaview Elementary embraced a growth mindset to support the learning of students and educators at the school. The principal's ability to build collaboration to support student learning was evident in the relationships that she fostered between educators and families. Her commitment to know the students of the school paired with her instructional knowledge and upbeat personality created a welcoming environment. Seaview prioritized professional learning and collaboration and educators shared how book studies provided a foundation for their collaboration. Classroom practices were designed with intentionality to support student learning as educators recognized the importance of motivating grade-level aligned practices. Finally, families were encouraged to share their expertise and talents with the school.

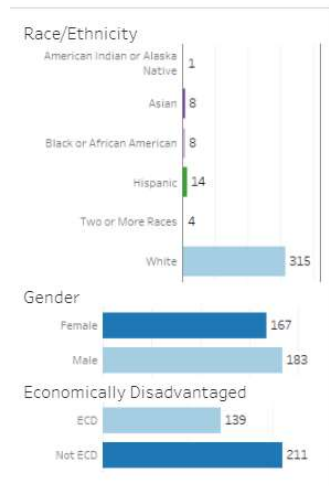
Great Neck School

Great Neck Elementary School was located in a neighborhood setting. At the time of the study, there were approximately 350 students at this K-5 elementary school, and Great Neck is one of five elementary schools in the district. There were three school-wide Title 1 programs in the district, and approximately 40% of Great Neck students were identified as economically disadvantaged. Demographic data for Great Neck is shown in Figure 11 below. The school received a three-star rating in the 2019 accountability report card and earned two out of the three possible points for ELA growth. As will be detailed next, Great Neck educators made decisions that supported the "whole child" by focusing on the academic and social emotional development of its students. The principal at Great Neck began in the 2019-20 school year, so I encouraged teachers to reflect on the leadership of both principals. Interestingly, both principals had strong instructional leadership, but the staff noted the

increased spirit and positivity that the new principal brought to the school. Teacher collaboration was noted as a strength by teachers who remarked that the school felt like “family.”

Figure 11

Demographic Information for Great Neck Elementary



Note. From Rhode Island Department of Education. (2019). *Report card*. <https://reportcard.ride.ri.gov/201819>

Vision

The principal shared with me that, as a staff, they recently revised the school’s vision, as this was her first year at the school. Their collective vision, as shared by the principal, was "to guide our students to become not just stronger learners, but become lifelong learners and to create them to be well-rounded individuals." Educators at Great Neck Elementary were not de-emphasizing academics; it was more that educators also prioritized students' non-cognitive skills as they recognized how these skills accelerated academic learning. "So it's more than just the educational piece; we want to make sure that they're ready, socially and emotionally." The desire to create a

love for learning, and belief that all students could learn created a foundation for educators to make decisions that would support student learning.

Creating a Love for Learning

The teachers that I met with also emphasized academics and social-emotional skills for students. Kathryn shared that it was important to her for "kids to have a love of learning." Lisa stressed that she wanted to foster this love of learning for each child so they felt connected to and empowered by their educational journey. "I look at education like educating the whole child...for kids to know the importance of education, that education is not only in the classroom but what education brings you; the love of education, the love of learning." Melissa immediately built off what Lisa shared, emphasizing that education was far more than what was happening in the elementary classroom. It was about creating a foundation for something much more significant. "I think of it as a bigger picture. It's this love of learning. It's what you do for the rest of your life." Wanting students to extend their learning beyond the classroom may be why teachers shared that they do whatever it takes to support the child, even if that meant reaching out beyond the classroom as well. Melissa shared "Sometimes educating [a student's] family for what the goal is" is what enabled that child to be a successful learner. Her commitment to ensuring that all students were learning was most important, as she explained, "I try to be a little creative or find the solution somehow, but if that's what it takes to get the job done, then that's what we have to do."

All Students Can Learn

The teachers all echoed this commitment to ensure that all students were learning. As Julie stated, "All kids can learn; you know it's just all different routes to get there." Her commitment was shared with positive enthusiasm, as she added, "I love all different ways of learning, and I like to change it up a little to do what it takes. Whatever it takes to get the job done." Simply said, whatever it takes for students to learn was part of the school's vision. All six teachers that I talked with shared this commitment and dedication to support all students and help them grow.

High Expectations

Alison shared that the school feels like a "family," and just "like our own family, we want to see them shine...We are going to make [the students] do the best that [they] can do." It is important to note that educators' commitment to supporting students to do their best extended into encouraging students to have ownership in their learning. As Alison shared, she fostered this independence, and with a smile, she shared that she "tell(s) them all the time, I'm not going to be here. I'm not going to follow you." Her smile's warmth revealed the love that she shared this message with her students; again, these students were part of her "family."

Fostering ownership of their learning also surfaced in my conversations with Lisa and Melissa. They thought it was more than just having a vision of academic excellence, but teaching a child what it felt like to be a learner. Lisa explained, "I say to my kids all the time, take pride not only in test results, doesn't it feel good, prideful. Not only this moment but just in general, yourself. I think we worked hard at it." Melissa nodded in agreement that they had dedicated efforts to help students become connected to their learning.

The dedication to connecting students to their education was a clear and consistent vision through all of my meetings. While the principal shared that they had recently refreshed their vision statement at the school, it was apparent that this was not a mere formality of paperwork. The educators with whom I met demonstrated a passion and commitment to educating the "whole child." In all three meetings, the teachers unequivocally stated, "...whatever it takes to get the job done."

Leadership

The leadership at Great Neck Elementary School had recently changed. The principal that had been there during the previous year (which was also the 2018-19 assessment year) had passed away. For this study, I met with the new principal and gained insight into the school's leadership, both current and past, from the teachers that I interviewed. Their comments suggested that while both principals shared decision-making and supported student learning, the staff felt that the new principal advocated for the needs of the school and was making an effort to build positive relationships with the staff. There was a clear strength of teacher leadership in this school. Teachers mentioned that they were active on the school's improvement team and took initiative to improve learning experiences for students.

Principal Leadership

ELA Focused. The teachers shared that the previous principal had a strong ELA focus and emphasized every grade's importance to build the skills and knowledge that a student would need to succeed. Lisa and Mary shared that this sense of connectedness was incorporated into many meetings. "We always joked...at these meetings, ...[the principal] said, 'This isn't a third-grade, this isn't a fourth-grade issue,

this isn't a fifth-grade issue -- This is a K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 issue." Kathryn also recounted that their former principal had brought a strong ELA focus to the school and believed that primary teachers needed to be connected to students' future learning. "We really wanted to get our kids ready, but the message was it starts early. These were where the weakness lies and what does that look like in each classroom to build. We kind of, that was a shift in our focus." Meetings held to understand the standards' progressions also shaped the building's tone around assessment time. As Lisa shared, the principal stressed, "It starts in the primary...when it was time to talk about testing, [primary teachers] weren't sitting there saying, 'Oh well, this isn't us.'" Lisa believed that teachers felt "it's about all of us, it's about building the foundation so that when [the students] do the testing the foundation is built."

Teachers also shared that both their former and current principals focused on student achievement. Kathryn felt that they "were always looking at the data," but she quickly elaborated that it was much more than a data check. "And not just the data, but always listening to, like our thoughts, because a lot of teacher observations don't necessarily show up in data." Kathryn felt that her principals heard her and that her opinions were valued. "So she wanted to hear that, you know they both want to hear the stories. They want to know our observations. I think they take our professional observations very seriously."

Support for Students. That both Great Neck principals valued teacher input resulted in a strong student support network. Kathryn shared, "[Both principals] want to support us. Nothing, you know, no one's going to fall through the cracks on either end...they want to find solutions for kids to do their best." Alison commented that

Kathryn summarized the principals' efforts well, by stressing that "No one is going to fall through the crack." Alison continued by sharing that while she only had a short experience with both principals, they were "in tune to whatever was going to help these kids. Again, what do they need, and how are they going to get it?"

The dedication and commitment that the principals showed to ensure that all students were learning surfaced in all three of the teacher meetings. Lisa felt that the former principal was open to listening to feedback and willing to make changes based on teacher input. "I feel that if I go in there and have an issue or an idea, as long as I have information to back it up...so I feel respected and supported." Melissa offered that there was a clear academic focus throughout the entire school as an example of the support from their former principal. "I would say the feeling of achievement, the feeling of success, and the feeling of pride that was kind of embedded in our school day...with the students is also a support." Courtney also felt that the former principal "did everything in her power to meet...our students' needs." As leaders, both principals shaped decision-making practices to support student achievement.

Advocating for School Needs. The teachers also highlighted other positive practices of their new principal. While they felt both principals wanted the best for students academically, they shared that the new principal could advocate their needs at a district level. Courtney shared that while it had only been a short time, the new principal has already "been an advocate and does really listen to us, takes our, you know, our feedback and ideas to heart and really goes to bat for us, when it's harder for us to go to bat with administration. So, she'll kind of like, take our input and bring it up the ranks."

Courtney and Julie explained that they felt that their building had not always received the same resources as the other schools in the district. Julie offered that as a school, "we were lacking in technology, and things the other schools [in the district] had." She shared her reflection from when she first transferred to the school. "I am going to lose all of the technology that I have learned," as she had previously worked in two other schools in the district. She felt that this school "really didn't have, from what I could see, what the other school that I had just come from...had had." Maintenance concerns of the school were brought up in the other two meetings as well, and as Courtney summarized, this lack of physical maintenance and resources impacted the school as she felt it was as if the building "kind of had a low self-esteem."

It is important to note that all three teacher groups noted positive changes that they attributed to their new principal. Julie shared that she "is working very hard to make our school equitable with the other schools." For example, "She is getting us new desks, and that sounds like a silly thing, but [the school] has never had new desks since 1970. We still have the same desks." As another example of the physical changes, I feel it is important to mention that when I met with the principal during remote learning, she shared that the school was being painted. At the time, I did not note it as something of significance, but after meeting with the teachers, I recognized the importance of these efforts to improve the school's physical appearance.

Building Relationships. Another practice in the school that the teacher felt was also a marked change was how the principal interacted with students and staff. As Alison explained, the current principal is "a bundle of energy. She's always positive

about everything." Julie felt that this positivity expanded the celebrations and recognitions in the building, extending it beyond just behavior; in the past, "there was nothing more than going beyond that...There was no celebration of the kids themselves." She shared that the behavior program had been expanded to reward more students, and the principal was often "taking selfies" with students and recognizing student and staff birthdays. Courtney summarized she thinks "there's more pride in the building overall."

In my conversation with the principal, she described the School Improvement Team's current work, which provided me insight into how she included teachers when making decisions to improve student learning. Using data, the team identified "our greatest weakness with math. So that became our goal for this year. And we talked about how we can improve teaching and learning in math", as that was their greatest need identified by the data. These conversations were collaborative and reflective. The principal explained that she shared instructional practices because she had found them "successful at my other schools, that worked" but she recognized they were not yet part of the school's instructional routines. "So I asked what they thought they needed in order to put some of those practices in place here. And they were clear about some professional development." The principal shared that she then worked to establish learning opportunities for her teachers in math practices. The principal's word choice of "our" and "we" provide insight into the collaborative, knowledge-building conversations around student achievement that were taking place at Great Neck School. This collaborative inquiry process is powerful in supporting student achievement.

Teacher Leadership

School Improvement. Both the principal and the teachers emphasized teachers' roles as part of the school improvement team. The principal shared that while the team was voluntary, "all different grade levels are represented on the team." Mary and Lisa also shared that they have "run the school improvement team for many years together and were on it for many, many years," and that the team had spent a great deal of effort improving student achievement. "We talked a lot about testing not only during that time frame but in general, how do we get kids to value, how do we get on board, they have to get on board." Again, the teachers shared that their work aligned with their vision of connecting students with the value of education. "We do a lot, well we talk a lot about letting the kids know the value of not only the testing, but just the value of education, and... pride."

Teacher Initiatives. While I was talking to the teachers, I sensed a deep commitment to their profession. Kathryn shared, "I just want [the principals] to know that...this isn't just a job for me. And... I'm truly invested in the families of the school and the kids." Melissa shared that this dedication and commitment began many years ago, as she felt that some of their principals were not strong leaders, which she felt fostered a strong network amongst the teachers at the school. "It started way back, and I think that's when the faculty became a village. We had to rely on each other...to lead it, to make progress, to make growth."

An example of this teacher leadership was shared by the principal and Courtney, who explained that just recently, "a group of teachers here saw a need in the area of early literacy. And they got together...three of my special ed. teachers and my

speech and language pathologist got together and started a... structured literacy pilot." The principal shared how the work of this group is now spreading in the district and that the district "actually took my speech and language pathologist away from me and put her in a different role where she is now actually helping other schools to learn...and bring this program to other schools in the district." As a special education teacher, Courtney was also excited about the initiative and work that the group had done. However, when I asked about this with the other teachers in the building, they could not speak about the initiative.

School Climate

As the teachers shared that the school's vision was to support students to learn by providing "whatever the student needs," they similarly described a school climate where the teachers are dedicated to fulfilling their vision. Educators at Great Neck talked a great deal about how positive the relationships were between staff members.

Sense of Belonging

Teachers highlighted several practices that focused on building students' sense of belonging. Kathryn described a feeling of "togetherness" in their school, pointing out that "we all want what's best for the students, the children that come through our doors and parents truly want to support us in that endeavor." Alison added that these efforts create "a sense of belonging" where even her students that struggle truly feel included. "They are excited about their school, you know."

Lisa felt that the school really was a "family" and that teachers worked to support the students, even "if it means helping the family and we've done that many, many, many times. Help them financially." Melissa and Lisa shared that the school

organizes many support drives, especially around the Christmas holiday. Melissa and Lisa's comments aligned with the other teachers that I met with as well, underscoring that teachers at the building viewed their profession as "more than going in and clocking in... we're going to do right by these kids."

Kathryn and Alison felt that this common goal to support students created a unique and special school environment. Alison, who has worked in several schools, spoke very positively about the school's feeling. "I really like [the school]. I like it; everybody is kind and friendly. We all have the same goal in mind." Kathryn agreed, affirming, "I mean, every teacher really has the students' best interest at heart, and we do have a supportive group of parents. And I think all those things added together make our school special. So, it makes it a great place to work, and it makes it a great place to learn."

Positive Staff Relationships

Multiple teachers shared that while they might have been apprehensive about coming to the school, as the school often "gets a bad rap in the district," once they arrived at the school, they chose not to leave because of their strong relationships with the staff. Alison and Kathryn shared, "We have a great staff." Lisa reflected that they could not "think of too many people who have opted to leave [the school]," and Melissa added, "We've had historically a staff that stays together." Although Julie lamented over losing some of the technology resources that were in her other school in the district, once she got to Great Neck, the staff relationships were so positive she "couldn't leave." She added with a large smile, "I loved the staff."

Their principal also felt the positive strength of these relationships. "I think that our biggest strength would be that we would definitely be there for one another. Everyone will be there to give time and support to a cause or an initiative when needed." Despite some of the challenges that surfaced during my conversations, all of the educators I met felt that their student-teacher relationships were very positive. The school's entire staff was dedicated to ensuring that students would be in a supportive environment to learn. The staff also stressed multiple times that this common goal unified and strengthened their relationships.

Professional Learning and Collaboration

Based on the strong relationships that the staff reported, it was not surprising to hear that teachers at the school felt a strong sense of collaboration throughout the school, as outlined in this next section of findings. Yet, teachers also felt that over the last several years, there had been a shift away from professional learning. The new principal was actively working to increase professional learning opportunities to align with teacher-identified needs.

Collaborative Planning

When asked about the school's strength, Alison answered without hesitation that the school is "collaborative." Kathryn immediately nodded in agreement, adding, "We are definitely a collaborative school. I think we try to be innovative as well. You know, try and be student-centered." Several teachers commented that the structure of having common time made collaborating with their grade-level partners much easier. Kathryn explained, "Our itinerants are here at the same time. So every day, [the other Kindergarten teacher] and I... know that we have that time to collaborate or sit and

meet and talk things through." Along with other teachers, Kathryn shared that working together was optional, as "there is nothing formally in place. You know, we used to have common planning time, where we would need to meet and take notes and send them to our principal. That doesn't exist anymore." However, teachers appreciated the schedule, as Julie noted that there are two times when the schedule allows grade-level teachers to meet daily. "It's a good schedule...so between when the kids are at recess... plus, we have that open block that we collaborate with." All the teachers that I talked to shared that they thought, "Collaboration does exist amongst grade levels...amongst the whole building."

One wish that the teachers brought forward was that there would be more time to collaborate with the intervention teachers who worked with their "struggling students." Kathryn and Alison shared that it was helpful when interventionists joined the monthly data conversations. Currently, information was shared via email or in passing, and there was not always time to problem solve or plan together. "You could have a conversation and a dialogue, rather than a quick two-second or an email. We could kind of go back and forth like, 'I'm seeing this. Are you seeing this?' So, I think it is a more in-depth conversation." They both felt that having "the time set aside...was really beneficial", but understood that there was a consequence of "losing instruction" as the interventionists would have to miss their scheduled time with students. However, even while sharing this story, Kathryn recognized and thanked Alison for her efforts as she added, "I feel like we communicate really well, you are always sending me copies of things, so I do feel like I have a good picture when I go [to the

data meetings]." This interaction provided a glimpse into the daily positive interactions between the staff.

The principal shared the structure of the data meetings at the school. There are two meetings per month, and one is "used for data meetings, where we're looking at data or doing some kind of professional development with them at that time." It is important to note that the principal recognized the need for interventionists and classroom teachers to collaborate and shared that she restructured the meetings, where they now alternate. "I try to do every other [structure] in the month. I lead one, and I let my interventionist and my special ed. teacher lead the meeting because they feel like they need that time with the teacher." She also commented that these meetings happen during the school day; so she, too, felt the time was a little compressed. "So it's only a 42-minute block, so you can imagine it's pretty fast-paced."

Sharing Lessons

Learning and sharing ideas was another example of collaborative effort reflected in all three of my conversations with teachers. Alison explained, "Everyone was open and sharing," adding that especially during this remote period of remote instruction. "I sent out some emails asking 'What do you do on your online lessons?', and everyone got right back to me." She emphasized that helping colleagues is commonplace at the school, "...that is that way it is." Lisa added, "We freely collaborate. You want to take my idea?... Sure, take it. We are about a family...." She also shared that they also welcome teachers into their classrooms to learn by watching colleagues teach. "Can you leave your door open so I can listen to your math lesson?"

We don't have a problem collaborating or sharing." Kathryn agreed, "If anyone ever needs anything, people jump in."

Shift in Professional Learning

Even though the principal mentioned trying to utilize the monthly meetings to increase the professional learning for teachers, all three groups of teachers mentioned that there had been a shift in professional learning over the last several years. From their perspective, it was not as consistent as before. Multiple teachers commented on the district's decision to eliminate designated professional development days and how they missed not having the structured time for learning that those days provided. They identified one day at the beginning of the school year, "but that's really about setup, I wouldn't say that is professional development." Another teacher shared that the professional learning opportunities "went by seniority," so often she "didn't have a chance" to attend. While Great Neck teachers recognized the challenges to providing structured professional learning opportunities, ranging from time away from students, to a lack of substitutes, and rising costs, they lamented professional learning was "better in the past." This was echoed in another teacher focus group that felt because the days were no longer embedded through the year, "we are pretty much on our own." The teacher did mention that the district was "very good at communicating things that are going on around the state," but confessed that "you get busy; you get so involved. It is hard to carve out professional development for yourself. It's hard."

One teacher noted inconsistencies that were emerging in their practices because all of the district teachers had not been trained in the school phonics curriculum. "Teachers have their likes and dislikes, they take, and they pick what they

want to do, and it's not always done with fidelity if teachers are not trained, and they're not monitored, and they're not given feedback." Another teacher shared that they "really haven't had much recently...I want to say the last three or four years." She asked the other teacher in her group if she forgot something that had been offered. The teacher responded that professional learning is more independent now and that she had "done a lot on [her] own."

On a positive note, the principal felt that she now had more autonomy with the school's budget, so she prioritized the school's needs. Besides changes in furniture that was mentioned earlier, she shared that she "was able to put money into a line for professional development, and I was able to tell the district exactly what I was going to do with money. So like what books I was going to be purchasing, what kind of PD I was going to be providing, that kind of thing." It is also important to note that she made this decision collaboratively with the staff. "So, I have had a year now to work with my teachers and discuss what kind of PD they want for the future." In summary, the teachers and the principal at Great Neck spoke of strong collaboration and shared practices at the school. Furthermore, the teachers and the principal were making decisions to increase educators' professional learning opportunities.

Data-Driven Instruction

Throughout my conversations, it was clear that student assessment data was used to plan students' instructional opportunities. The principal explained how they used universal monitoring tools to guide their decisions. "The teachers are monitoring math and reading at least once a month to monitor levels where the children are performing at." She also added that these were just one piece of data; teachers "also do

just normal classroom observations and things like that to determine need."

Throughout our conversation, it was apparent that the principal felt that teachers were then using this information to support learning for all students. For example, their recent data review highlighted the "greatest weakness with math" for the school, which led to conversations that involved designing action steps to "improve teaching and learning in math." Thus, data was being used to structure conversations to facilitate improvements in student learning.

The principal shared another example of how the school deliberately used data to improve student outcomes as she described recent efforts to support struggling readers. "The teachers were able to use some new assessments to do a deeper dive into the struggles of the children. They were able to really pinpoint specifically where their learning was lacking." It is important to note that this information was then used to "build a reading and literacy plan for the children and program so that they could fill in some of those gaps." Teachers also reported their regular use of data at the school, sharing that they met "twice a month" to review assessments. Alison added that these meetings were designed to make a plan of support for every single student. "That's exactly what it is, looking at each individual child and giving them what they need." Educators at the school used data to accomplish their vision of supporting learning for all students.

Instructional Practices

In addition to analyzing data, the teachers at Great Neck Elementary School described a number of student-centered instructional practices designed to enable all students to participate in purposeful dialogue and collaboration. They also worked to

align their schedules to ensure that students would not miss core instruction when being supported with math or reading intervention. The educators at Great Neck felt a sense of commitment to ensure that students in their classrooms were learning the identified grade-level standards and this commitment guided their design of motivating classroom learning experiences.

Student-Centered

There was a clear commitment to design student-centered classroom practices at this school. Kathryn shared that she believed that the entire staff was willing to change their instructional practices if it would support student learning. "We are willing to try anything as well, as long as it benefits our students as well." Julie added that she incorporates mindfulness practices into her classroom instruction to support students' increased needs. "I really try and put mindfulness into what we do, that breathing. It seems like I have more and more kids with behaviors than I ever did before, and I, by doing that all, you kind of balance them." Julie emphasized that SEL practices were incorporated throughout the day and not separate from academic learning. "A lot of emphasis on SEL and... really taking the time, like when we come back from recess and we do it in science." She felt that the intentional support of students' social-emotional competencies "really does make a difference for them when you do those kinds of activities, with all that emphasis on SEL. It really does need a prominent place in the classroom."

Lisa also emphasized the importance of designing a learning environment where all students felt safe enough to take risks. "And the risk-taking, I do that a lot in my class...you don't have to be right." One way she fostered risk-taking in her

classroom was by modeling that she is not always right, but she is always learning.

"Anytime I make a mistake, I say, see, not everybody gets the right answer. And so I laugh at myself..." She went on to emphasize that these behaviors have to be sincere.

"I think...when they feel like you care about them, and it's okay to not be perfect," that more learning happens. She and Mary both felt that creating an environment where students felt comfortable taking risks made it easier to find and celebrate positive learning experiences. "And I agree with Melissa; success breeds success. And if you can find something to make a child feel good, if a child feels successful, they'll want more. They'll want more, and they'll come back for more."

Melissa explained that designing student-centered learning opportunities required teachers to know the learning expectations. However, equally important, it was essential for a teacher to know the children they were teaching. "I think that good teaching is, you know what you have to teach, you know what...your goals are...but...to have good teaching, you need to know your class." Lisa agreed that knowing your students allowed a teacher to try different instructional strategies to support student learning. "But you've got to have enough resources to go to, to reach the children that are sitting in front of you, not only the children of the year, but the children of the moment." She elaborated that many students in the classroom display learning challenges that, in the past, may have been isolated to special education classrooms. However, she thought it was essential for teachers to know strategies for designing productive learning opportunities for all children. "To me, there is no more I want to be a special teacher, I want to be a regular teacher, that doesn't exist; you're a teacher in that sense."

Lisa and Mary felt that becoming a parent had changed their perspective and helped them become better teachers for all students. Lisa shared, "Then I had my two kids, and they became school age, and I, it made me a different teacher, having children made me a different teacher." Alison's comments about the school being a "family" connected to their genuine honesty of growing as a teacher after becoming a parent. Mary and Lisa laughed as they explained it was not always easy to meet individual student's needs. Teaching to support the learning of all students required a great deal of flexibility "and a lot of teaching styles...one for nine o'clock in the morning, and one for two o'clock in the afternoon."

Kathryn and Alison smiled that it was always difficult to "finagle" a time to pull students from a classroom, but Kathryn shared that she "generally use(d) that time for one-on-one with other students that might need support." She offered that using that time to "do assessments" "catch-up or [provide] extra support" for students who are not in intervention allows time for "the students who see [the reading teachers] to go to the reading room for time with the reading teachers." With intentional planning, Kathryn ensured that all students received grade-level instruction and intervention support.

Motivating Learning

Similarly, the teachers in the school worked to establish classroom practices that fostered student motivation and engagement. Julie explained, "Kids are all engaged, through different activities, doing different things; whether I am calling a guided reading group, or there might be another group on the rug, partner reading." Julie added that her math lessons were similarly designed to actively engage students;

"One group might be working with manipulatives; another group might be working with me at the back table." As Julie was explaining why she thought it was so important to design the classroom in this way, Courtney added that the groups are invested in their learning; "It is really application" as the students are "teaching each other" in her classroom.

Kathryn also explained how she intentionally designed learning opportunities for students to work in varied settings. Kathryn shared that by using "hands-on" learning experiences for her students, she tries to make learning "fun and hopefully engaging" for her students. She incorporates "a combination of group and small group instruction in [the] classroom." As an added benefit of incorporating different learning tasks, she explained that this design provided her time to support students' individual needs. "There's opportunities for me one on one with my students."

Kathryn smiled as she called her Kindergarten classroom "controlled chaos" because there were several groups of students often working on different learning tasks. She shared that students learned "very quickly...know how to navigate the classroom and how to navigate our routine and... a lot is happening; a lot is happening." Her patience to allow students to work through problems in the classroom became evident when she shared her recent experiences of transitioning to a video platform for instruction during remote learning. She smiled as she shared how she met with her students regularly during the pandemic, including once daily as a whole class. "We had one crazy meeting, but the next time we were right on, so it's a learning curve...I just love it." She added that her students also loved meeting virtually and

were "doing so great." This positivity about the productive struggles of learning transferred from her physical classroom to her virtual classroom.

The principal described that she also observed rich instructional practices at the school, and activities during which students are often collaborating. The principal noted that there was often "discussion with children, not so much lecturing, but with children, talking and sharing ideas." She shared that many lessons were universally designed and all students were encouraged to participate. "You're hearing all the different voices at one time and supporting all the other kids that way." She agreed that designing classrooms with this intentional collaboration was positive for students as they "were totally engaged." The principal explained that this intentional design brought out "lots of student voices" in the classroom. With a smile, she added that "It was a pleasure to sit and listen to...and it was incredible to listen to the conversations that the kids had when they broke into small groups or turned to talk or whatever." However, just as the teachers noted, she commented that while activities were designed to promote student talk and small group collaboration, teachers were still "still able to differentiate and work with small groups with differences, but just by physically moving myself around to the different teams that were working together."

From these data, it was apparent that teachers at Great Neck Elementary School designed learning opportunities with purposeful student interactions, which they believed fostered motivation and engagement. Additionally, they designed learning opportunities that integrated reading and writing into science and social studies instruction. Julie explained that second-grade teachers incorporated ELA standards throughout the day, "We bring [the standards] into science, we bring it into

different areas." The principal explained that ELA is fully integrated into social studies throughout the school. As an example, she shared how the fifth-grade teacher designed this integration. "So they'll do work with a shared text and then smaller texts. She uses more novels with them...she also embeds the writing. So whatever they're studying, they'll work on a writing piece to go along with that."

Aligned Instruction

The teachers and principal felt that the school's alignment happened in two different ways. Grades 3-5 were designed in a content model, and there was an ELA, Science, and Math teacher for each grade that taught all the students in the grade. In the primary grades, the teachers thought that alignment happened because they all had the "same materials" coupled with the day's structure, which, as Kathryn explained, allowed them "time to time to collaborate or sit and meet and talk things through." The principal affirmed that grade-level classrooms were aligned in their similar classroom practices and pacing of instruction, yet, not in a scripted way, as "some might be a little ahead or a little behind."

Family Relationships

While there was a clear commitment to connect with families, the teachers at Great Neck School shared that this was not always easy. One teacher felt that "every year it's a work in progress. Every year it's a little different." She sighed and shared, "It seems like every year there are more challenges." Another teacher lamented over the loss of parent-teacher conferences. She explained, "The district eliminated them actually. They gave us an hour a week on what they call, like family communication time. So we make ourselves available." Her frustration seemed not about the change

itself, but more about the impact of the change, explaining, "I don't think a parent really took advantage of that at all." She added that she "didn't have a parent all year ask to meet."

Despite these challenges, teachers also talked about some of their efforts to partner with families to support children's learning. Kathryn shared that as a Kindergarten teacher, she tried "to make a connection right on, because a lot of times this is kids' first school experience...I want the parents to know that... kids are safe, and I'm going to keep them safe. And I'm going to love them like my own, and I truly do." She shared that she reaches out to parents in a variety of ways, "whether it's through phone calls, or meetings or emails." She emphasized that she wants to "make a connection with each of those families." She added that these relationships extend well beyond the time she has with them in Kindergarten. "Like the kids in fourth grade that still bring me a Valentine. Like it's nice, you know, parents don't forget you." Courtney also shared about working to create strong relationships with parents. "We are here not only for the students but families, through their educational process with us. You know, we're a team."

Kathryn added that the parent group tried "to plan things that are, you know, affordable and family-friendly." However, some teachers felt that participation had decreased in recent years. Julie positively shared that this trend could be impacted and it was beginning to change under the new principal's efforts. "[The new principal] is doing a great job. She is communicating. She is constantly sending home notices." Overall, all the educators with whom I spoke valued family relationships.

Summary of Great Neck Elementary School

Overall, interview and focus group data revealed that Great Neck Elementary School prioritized both academic and non-cognitive/affective skills to support student learning. Both principals of Great Neck had a strong focus on ELA instruction and the teachers felt the new principal was working hard to develop relationships with staff and students. While collaboration within the school was strong, teachers lamented about the recent shifts in professional learning, and felt that they needed more opportunities for new learning. The new principal was already working to increase professional opportunities for educators. Classroom practices at the school were designed to be student centered and educators at the school felt that it was important to create environments that motivated students to learn. While strong family relationships were valued, the school shared that creating these relationships was a challenge.

Summary of Within- Case Findings

Using replication logic and pattern matching (Yin, 2018), all four cases of effective Title 1 schools, Stewart Elementary, Fairview Elementary, Seaview Elementary, and Great Neck Elementary, demonstrated strong similarities in the embedded units of analysis of *Vision, Leadership, School Climate, Professional Learning and Collaboration, Data-Driven Instruction, Instructional Practices, and Family Relationships*. All four schools shared a strong belief and commitment to student learning. Additionally, all four schools shared decision making at the school level, which appeared to increase educators' commitment to school initiatives and their efforts to support learning for all students. Aspects of strong teacher leadership were also evident at all four schools. Educators at all four schools worked to create a climate in which students and staff wanted to be part of, although it should be noted

that Great Neck educators felt that the climate of the school was improving under the leadership of the new principal. Collaboration was strong across all schools, with each school embedding time into their regular schedule for educators to meet to discuss how best to support students.

Further, all four effective Title 1 schools appeared to use data to understand and plan for student learning. While it was important for the schools to do well on the state assessments, the schools did not use this as a threat for students or educators. Data was reviewed regularly at these schools and teacher observations were included as a valuable form of data. All four schools shared a belief that instructional practices needed to be student-centered, and learning experiences were designed with an awareness of the need to promote academic, social, and emotional development. Additionally, all four schools ensured that academic supports were provided as part of grade-level instruction, which meant that they took steps to ensure that intervention did not supplant core instructional time. While all four schools shared that they valued family relationships, Great Neck educators expressed that working to connect with families is a current challenge.

A reported difference between the four schools was in the area of professional learning opportunities. Fairview and Seaview Elementary Schools had several days embedded into the educator's calendar for school-wide and district-based learning activities. Both schools mentioned that initiatives were supported with multi-year professional learning opportunities. In contrast, educators at Stewart Elementary School were expected to complete eight hours of professional learning yearly. Teachers' reflections on this were inconsistent, as some appreciated the autonomy to

select learning opportunities and other educators felt that it was not as helpful because it was an add-on to the school day. The principal at Stewart recognized the importance of professional learning, and was committed to ensuring that school-based meeting time was designated as opportunities for professional learning.

Notably, while structures differed, all three schools (Fairview, Seaview, and Stewart) did not view professional learning as an activity that only happened on designated days and times. These three schools mentioned ongoing and embedded opportunities for professional learning, from book studies to model lessons, as another indicator of their commitment to learning for both students and educators. Educators at Great Neck lamented about the changes over the years in professional learning, and were pleased that the new principal was actively making changes to increase learning opportunities in line with their needs.

Chapter Summary

This study was intentionally designed to provide convergence to the theoretical propositions about effective schools that served as embedded units of analysis. Using replication logic, I was able to characterize *which* practices were enacted by educators in four effective Title 1 schools, while also illuminating more precisely *how* the principal and teachers at each school collaboratively made decisions and employed instructional practices designed to foster student achievement. Yet, as a result of the pattern matching analysis of data within each case study, I saw hints of something much more profound than could be represented in the individual elements of any particular school and I wanted to know more. I believed that efforts to further explore the similarities and differences in leadership practices across the schools would allow

for a deeper and more concise understanding of how effective Title 1 schools build a culture of student success. Therefore, a cross-case synthesis was conducted to provide more generalizable conclusions that educators could draw on and apply to other contexts (Yin, 2018). The findings of this synthesis are shared in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

Findings of Cross-Case Analysis

The cross-case synthesis sought to answer the question of how educators in effective Title- 1 schools make decisions and design instructional practices to foster student achievement. These findings serve to address the current gap in understanding how the elements of effective schools combine and intersect to illuminate the daily practices of those who work and learn in these effective schools. This chapter draws on data from the preceding case studies to better understand how these forces were enacted to create a culture of effective schools. In turn, findings from this cross-case analysis offer answers to questions about how people in these effective schools make decisions and design instructional practices.

As explained in Chapter 3, Ritchhart's (2015) eight cultural forces of *expectations, language, time, modeling, opportunities, routines, interactions, and environment* were used to frame the cross-case analysis to understand how, if at all, effective school literature was replicated in practice. Findings relative to each cultural force will also be depicted in a figure designed to visually represent the indicators of practices in all four schools. Practices that were consistently mentioned as school-wide practices by all educators interviewed at the school are designated by three triangles in the respective cell for that practice in the figure. Practices that were occasionally mentioned as a school-wide practice by all educators interviewed at the school are designated by two triangles in the respective cell in the figure. Finally, practices that were mentioned by some educators interviewed at the school, but not yet recognized as a school-wide practice are designated by one triangle in the respective cell in the

figure. To ensure that the holistic view of each school would not be lost to the decomposition of variables, the chapter ends with a summative depiction of the cross-case findings that compares the collective findings relative to each cultural force for all four schools.

Expectations

As stated in Chapter 2, Ritchhart (2015) posited, “Expectations influence culture because they "operate as 'belief sets' or 'action theories' that influence our own efforts in relation to the achievement of desired goals and outcomes" (p. 38). Across all four schools in this study, when principals and teachers were asked about their school's vision, all participants answered from their hearts. Some laughed that they did not actually know what was documented as the vision, but they all clearly articulated their beliefs and expectations that drove their daily actions at the schools. Results of the cross-case analysis suggested all four effective Title 1 schools consistently revealed clear expectations that “All students can learn”, that collaboration positively influences student learning, and that a growth mindset for students and educators can facilitate school achievement. Data to support each of these coded patterns of expectations are detailed next.

Effective Title 1 Schools Expect That “All Students Can Learn”

All four schools had a vision that all students could learn, and equally important was the related belief that all teachers positively influence student learning. This ‘belief set’ fueled a determination to support student learning across the schools. For example, when asked to describe the school in a word, a Fairview teacher quickly replied, "determined, because we are determined to reach each student at their level

with their needs." This determination served to fuel the schools' decisions and instructional practices to ensure that all students were learning. This determination was an expectation of the Fairview principal as well: "All students can learn. If students are not learning the way we teach, we must change the way we are teaching." My conversations with educators from all four schools echoed this belief that all students can learn.

It is important to emphasize that all four of these schools also believed that teachers, in particular, could impact this learning. At Great Neck, for instance, teachers shared that as a school, they "are willing to try anything, as long as it benefits our students." Another teacher from that school emphasized that they would do "whatever it takes to get the job done." The principal of Seaview reiterated that as a school, they were willing to do "whatever it takes to make our students successful, and whatever it takes for our teachers to be successful because if they're not working hard in the classroom, our kids aren't producing." Again underscoring the vital expectation that all four schools believed all students could learn was the belief all teachers directly supported their learning and the expectation that educators would work to ensure that all students would learn. This unwavering expectation that all students could learn guided how principals and teachers made decisions and designed instructional practices, as student learning was always the focus of their actions.

Effective Title 1 Schools Expect That Collaboration Positively Influences Student Learning

The belief in the direct relationship between student learning and teachers' collaborative practices was also evident in all four schools. As the principal from

Stewart shared, accepting failure was not an option. "I think one of the things I expect...from my staff is when something's not working, reach out to the support professional...get other people involved." Whether the expectation came from teachers in the building or principals, there was a clear expectation that educators should continue to collaborate to solve problems of practice for student learning.

These expectations around collaboration impacted the interactions between teachers, which, in turn, influenced their classroom instructional practices. For example, when teachers worked together, they aligned their efforts and created deeper learning experiences for their students. A reading teacher from Stewart explained that when collaborating with the classroom teacher, she often selected texts to use during the intervention time aligned with the classroom's learning goals. She stressed that this collaboration resulted in more substantial learning than a typical "pull-out model," which she described as creating a feeling of "isolation."

Similarly, a teacher from Great Neck described how expectations to collaborate with colleagues fostered routines of sharing amongst teachers. "I think that comes from all of us wanting all of the children to have the same benefits." She explained that this collaboration created strong learning experiences for all students. Therefore, teachers willingly shared lessons and practices, and teachers actively asked for help designing a lesson. Teachers described, for example, the typical back-and-forth exchanges at their school when one teacher says, "You know, I'm going to need a good way to teach fractions this time," and another teacher responds, "I've done this." Elsewhere, a Great Neck teacher expressed, "We want all our kids to move up to the next grade level solid." This expectation to collaborate in their efforts to support

students appeared to be woven into the fabric of all four schools. Further, everyone at these schools believed they played a role in contributing to students' learning.

Effective Title 1 Schools Expect a “Growth Mindset” for Students and Educators

Connecting these two aligned expectations that all students can learn and all teachers can learn how to work together to design instructional experiences that positively impacted student learning was the belief of a growth mindset. Across all four schools, participating principals and teachers emphasized the importance of connecting effort to results, or having a growth-mindset; that is, one in which struggle does not mean failure but may require new learning that leads to growth (Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Paunesku et al., 2015). Interesting to note, two of the schools had recently participated in a book study involving Dweck's (2006) *Mindset*, and thus, their study of the concept of a growth-mindset was likely on their mind as something to aim for in their collaborative practices.

Teachers and principals in all four schools were proud to share that their students have grown academically throughout the years as a result of their collective beliefs and expectations. For example, a fifth-grade teacher from Stewart explained, "One of the benefits of my, of our scores, is the work that happens all the way up really shines by fifth grade." At Great Neck, a teacher remarked that students' achievement "takes all of us, not one of us." Another teacher at Stewart shared that this belief that all students can grow resulted in the principal and teachers having high expectations for everyone's learning. "It's just that her [the principal's] expectations and our expectations, and kiddos know, they act on those expectations, and she celebrates everything. She really does." Believing that ability is not fixed but possible

for everyone created high expectations for students and staff that appeared to facilitate academic achievement.

Besides celebrating student outcomes, believing all students can increase their learning impacted how educators reacted when students were not learning. A teacher at Fairview reflected on how this belief motivated her principal's efforts. "He is constantly looking for ways to motivate kids; how to get them interested in not just their scores, but the learning, period." The teacher went on to highlight the principal's efforts, adding that some are school-wide, but he will also work to support all students. "He will seek to find that child support, in some way, shape, or form. And that's not a whole group; that is an individual kind of thing. He will look to see what we can do." This commitment to making a learning plan for each individual was consistent across all four schools.

Another dimension of each school's expectation of a growth mindset was evidenced by how the four participating schools monitored students' data and made educational decisions based on data. Across all four schools, educators' belief that all students can learn drove them to continually reflect on classroom practices, which in turn empowered them to continue learning how to make classroom decisions that would increase students' learning. A teacher at Great Neck, for instance, shared how important it was to remain a learner as an educator. "When we come out of school, we are not perfect. We still make mistakes, but do I learn from it? Do I reflect on it? Do I seek out someone else, another resource to learn from it, and make me better?" A teacher at Seaview also mentioned their continual growth as an educator, sharing, "I

keep what's good, but then try to move forward with things that I think will be helpful and beneficial for my students."

These values and beliefs were consistent in all four schools. A Fairview teacher summarized these expectations, "I think everyone is expected to do their best in all areas academically, socially, as people." High expectations for student learning were ingrained in these schools and directly influenced how school leaders (principals and teachers) made decisions. This statement from Seaview's principal effectively summarized the expectations at all four schools: "It's a growth mindset, where all kids can learn and what they cannot learn we're going to support...it's never that they don't have it or can't do it. It's just not our culture." Across the four schools, statements like these clearly suggested that principals and teachers continuously reflected on instructional practices and student learning, and they continued to learn from this process.

Table 4 depicts the three practices of expectations revealed in interview and focus group data collected from all four participating Title 1 schools. All three practices (e.g., shared expectations that "All students can learn", shared expectations that collaboration positively influences student learning, and shared expectations of a growth mindset for students and educators) were consistently mentioned as school-wide practices by all educators interviewed at the school and are designated by three triangles in each respective cell in Table 4. These three positive expectations consistently served to form the foundation from which educators made decisions to support achievement in Title 1 schools.

Table 4

Expectations Revealed in Cross-Case Analysis of Four Effective Title 1 Schools

Force	Indicator	Stewart	Fairview	Seaview	Great Neck
Expectations	Shared expectation that “All students can learn”	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Shared expectation that collaboration positively influences student learning	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Shared expectation of a growth mindset for students and educators	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△

Language

A second set of common cultural practices revealed in data from all four effective schools was related to their intentional use of language. Ritchhart (2015) explained that language influences culture because of its hidden power “to subtly convey messages that shape our thinking, sense of self, and group affinity” (p. 61). In this study, all four effective Title 1 schools consistently used language to suggest a shared accountability for learning. Further, data suggested that efficacy increased among teachers and students at these schools because of who was empowered to do the talking as well as by the message of the words themselves. Findings of the cross-case analysis revealed that educators at all four schools used language to communicate the value of learning, as well as to provide voice to students as part of the learning process. In addition, educators in these four effective schools were empowered to share their professional opinions as part of the decision making process. Finally, language was used to foster a learning community that welcomed all to support the shared value of ensuring that all students could learn. Data to support each of these coded language patterns are detailed next.

Effective Title 1 Schools Communicate the Value of Learning and Facilitate Student Voice

Across all four schools in this study, teachers communicated their belief in students' future successes. For instance, a teacher from Stewart shared that when her students move on, she tells them that she will still connect with them to celebrate their continued learning. "I'll tell them when they're leaving second grade and going into third grade; I will still check on you. I want to see you growing."

In the classroom, teachers communicated the lesson's goal in ways that empowered students to have ownership of their learning. A teacher at Seaview shared that she "begin(s) each lesson with objectives or targets on the board." Using language to share the learning goals allowed students to understand expectations, which, in turn, provided them a purpose for engaging in planned activities. Teachers also used language to bring about more intentionality to learning. At Great Neck, for instance, one teacher explained how they tried to connect best efforts with more than just a score on a test, and they explicitly modeled certain attitudes about working hard and valuing learning. "We talk a lot about letting the kids know the value of not only the testing, but just the value of education, and I think pride. That's a big one that I say to my kids all the time, take pride not only in test results...but just in general, yourself." Another teacher added, "I'd like for kids to know the importance of education, that education is not only in the classroom but what education brings you, the love of education, the love of learning."

Across the four schools, educators used language not only to convey the importance of learning but also to communicate that they valued students' voices.

Further, these schools described classrooms where students were intentionally learning how to use language to convey their thinking. Fairview's principal was so proud to share how the Boston Schools Curriculum (Boston Public Schools, 2021) had strengthened language use among the Kindergartners at his school. "Just how they appear at the end of Kindergarten, you know, leading groups talking about their work..." He went on to explain that working with students to strengthen their communication skills was very important. Similarly, the principal of Great Neck smiled as she shared that the school's classrooms had "lots of student voices." She added, "It was a pleasure to sit and listen to, first of all, and it was incredible to listen to the conversations that the kids had when they broke into small groups, or turned and talked, or whatever."

As an educator from Seaview described her room, I could almost picture what was happening in these language-filled classrooms. "I put on my roller skates, and then I am going from student to student and group to group to see where they are, and [I was] more [like a] facilitator and the coach [versus talking at students]." This commitment to empowering students to collaborate and discuss their thinking and learning as part of the school's instructional practices was evident at Stewart, as well. "They sit in groups because every single thing they do, I want them talking to each other and getting feedback off of each other, and I, that's just a skill that they need for life."

Effective Title 1 Schools Value Professional Opinions

A second dimension of each school's use of language and communication practices revealed that teachers in all four schools felt that their principals listened to

them. A Seaview teacher described her principal as being "very respectful, open to new ideas. She's easy to talk to." A teacher from Great Neck shared that both of her principals wanted "to know our observations. I think they take our professional observations very seriously. And, you know, they want to support us." A teacher from Fairview felt the principal was always trying to improve student achievement; she explained that during student data meetings, the principal actively participated, "but not only to put his input into it but to take our expertise, our professionalism into account, when he is making those decisions."

Fairview's principal explained that empowering teachers to share their opinions was why student achievement increased. "We put key people in key places and gave them the ability to say, "[principal's name], you know what? I'm supposed to be doing this with all the kids, but this is why I don't think it's right for these kids." The principals expected that all teachers needed to share evidence, but once they did, it was important to "give the teachers the control of their own classroom to say this is where I wanted to go." Thus, analysis of data revealed the words and related actions of school principals in the four participating schools sought to intentionally increase teachers' efficacy by listening to teachers' opinions and offering them the opportunity to make informed changes in their instructional practices that would benefit students.

Effective Title 1 Schools Use Language to Foster a Sense of Community

A third pattern across all four schools was that the language principals and teachers used to describe how they interacted with each other appeared to promote feelings of collective efficacy in their schools. This language welcomed all to support the shared value of ensuring that all students could learn. These schools described

their learning community as a "village" and a "family." One teacher at Fairview described that their partnership extended beyond the school walls to include families. "You know we're a team, and you want it to be a supportive, safe, and loving environment where your student can truly thrive and do their best." Educators from all four schools intentionally used the word family to describe the supportive relationships that existed in their schools.

The fact that these schools used the words "family," "team," and "village" to describe their schools also encouraged educators to work together to support student learning. That is, their expectations that all students could learn and all teachers could positively impact learning yielded language that suggested school was about learning and growth, not perfection. The Fairview principal captured this belief in valuing progress toward the goal by sharing that it was critical "to give the teachers the ability and the okay to say, 'I don't know what to do with little [child's name], I have done everything. I don't know what to do'. The 'it's okay' has really helped out a lot of people and also allowed people to take those risks without being worried ..." It appeared that the principal's language of "it's okay" encouraged teachers to bring problems of practice forward so they could be solved collectively.

Table 5 depicts the three practices of language use revealed in interview and focus group data collected from all four participating Title 1 schools. All three practices (e.g., language used to communicate the value of learning and facilitate student voice, language used to value teachers' professional opinions and voice, and language used to foster a sense of community) were consistently mentioned as school-wide practices by all educators interviewed at the school and are designated by three

triangles in their respective cells in Table 5. That is, educators in these effective Title 1 schools consistently used language to create a culture that supported student achievement and teacher agency.

Table 5

Language Use Revealed in Cross-Case Analysis of Four Effective Title 1 Schools

Force	Indicator	Stewart	Fairview	Seaview	Great Neck
Language	Language used to communicate the value of learning and facilitate student voice	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Language used to value teachers' professional opinions and facilitate teachers' voice	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Language used to foster a sense of community	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△

Time

A third set of common cultural practices revealed in data from all four effective Title 1 schools was related to their intentional use of time. Ritchhart (2015) posited that time influences culture because it has both a quantitative and qualitative component. “Our allocations of time reflect our values. Our sequencing of events, construction of moments, and reflections on actions allow us to scaffold and draw a connecting thread through learning occasions to create unity” (p. 87). Across all four Title 1 schools in this study, the allocation of time was shaped to maximize students' learning opportunities, make ELA learning a priority, and provide collaborative planning time with grade-level partners. Additionally, principals at all four schools dedicated time to instructional leadership. Three schools reported time was consistently used to support teachers' new professional learning. Finally, time in these schools was dedicated to building the learning community's collective efficacy

through family outreach and fun activities. Data to support each of these common patterns in time allocation are detailed next.

Effective Title 1 Schools Allocate Time for ELA to be a Learning Priority

All four schools shared that time for ELA was a priority. The Seaview principal shared, "I think kids need time...to read at their level every day and get their core instruction at grade level. And then those kids are also supported almost daily with their interventionists. I think that's really paramount." The Fairview principal shared a similar priority. "It is much more important that they know how to read." A teacher at Great Neck shared that ELA was the main focus of everyone at the school. "I think we have, as a school, tried to come up with different teaching strategies and things that we really needed to hone in on...I feel it was everyone's focus at one point." An educator shared that the principal of Stewart also emphasized the importance of students learning how to read, simply stating that there was "a lot of focus on reading."

Students in these schools also had time to work on their individual learning needs. It is important to note that intervention time supplemented the grade-level instruction and did not supplant the instruction. These schools ensured that intervention was scheduled at a different time than the core lesson. Teachers at Seaview shared a commitment to have interventionists as a part of their ELA block and used small groups to support students. Additionally, at Great Neck, teachers shared that scheduling intervention to ensure students did not miss core lessons was difficult. However, they expressed that they were committed to ensuring that they found a time to safeguard so that students who received additional intervention

support did not miss grade-level instruction. "We finagle a time that works, and then I generally use that time one-on-one with other students...we kind of catch-up or extra support and then, the students who [the reading teachers] see go to the reading room for time with the reading teachers."

Fairview's principal was excited to share how he organized intervention blocks to maximize how the staff worked together to support student learning. He felt that no educator at the school should have under-utilized time, as all staff were educators and could support student learning in reading and math. He "created a program that [staff with unassigned time] go into the classroom and so, during Kindergarten intervention, the music teacher, who's phenomenal, you will see in the classroom working with a group of students [providing small group intervention such as letter identification]." The principal explained that staff with any unassigned time, such as the music teacher, would meet "with that Kindergarten teacher, or the team of Kindergarten teachers." Educators invested time to plan to support student learning, promoting learning as a priority.

This commitment to utilizing staff to create more time for small group learning was also evidenced at Stewart. The librarian shared that she works with a group of students to allow the classroom teacher to support small groups of students. "I take a group...into the library on a regular basis to do extra, so that the classroom teacher has more time with the kids who need her direct attention...and that's something that [the principal] is willing to try...that keeps our kids moving forward."

Effective Title 1 Schools Allocate Time for Collaborative Planning and Professional Learning

A third pattern from the cross-cases analysis was that time to dig into student data and then collaboratively plan for instruction was afforded to teachers at all four schools. This time was embedded into their school day and followed a cycle that teachers could anticipate. All of the educators in these four schools shared that they have regularly scheduled time to analyze student data, share observations, and collaboratively plan to improve achievement. As noted by a Fairview teacher, all educators at their school valued this time. "We are fortunate to have common planning times together..." A Seaview teacher shared that "we have plenty of time to analyze that data, and see what we can do, brainstorm how we can move forward, you know [support] the kids who are struggling." By structuring teachers' time to collaboratively plan students' learning opportunities, these schools prioritized their expectations that all students could learn. The collaboration allowed teachers time to improve student learning continually by sharing and aligning best practices.

While all four schools had time to collaboratively plan, Seaview, Stewart, and Fairview also noted that there was time to prioritize professional learning. A teacher at Fairview shared that "we have a lot of professional development days. We don't necessarily need to go [outside of the district]..." She went on to share that these days are a balance between those that are organized by the district, as well as "a lot of times teachers will provide training in areas that they are experts in..." In contrast, the teachers at Great Neck lamented that professional learning opportunities in the district were more plentiful in the past. "We don't have those days built into the calendar anymore...basically the beginning of the year, but that's really setup. I wouldn't say it is professional development. I mean, we are pretty much on our own." When schools

allocated time for professional learning, they also communicated that professional learning was a value of the school, which the teachers in this study appreciated.

Unlike the other three schools, there was no specific time preserved in the school year for professional learning at Great Neck School. The school's new principal had remarked that she and the staff had recognized this as a need and recently requested funds to increase professional learning opportunities, including texts for a book study.

Effective Title 1 Schools Allocate Time for Instructional Leadership

A fourth pattern related to time was that leaders in these four schools effectively managed their time to be able to regularly attend instructional meetings and support classroom instruction. A teacher from Stewart positively remarked that her principal "knows every single thing that I'm doing. She's at every team meeting." The Fairview principal was committed to making time to know what was happening in the school. "I go to the common planning times, grade-level meetings, and I'm in and out of as many classrooms as I can." The Seaview principal shared that she was in classrooms daily and regularly joined common planning meetings. The teachers of Great Neck shared that meetings were used to look at assessment expectations and articulate learning expectations across the grades. Importantly, these principals did not have fewer managerial tasks than principals at other schools; it's just that the principals at these four case study schools appeared to manage and allocate their time toward being an instructional leader, connected to the school's teaching and learning.

Effective Title 1 Schools Allocate Time for Family Outreach

A fifth pattern was that principals and teachers at all four schools all shared that they frequently spent time communicating with families beyond organized school events. A teacher from Seaview shared that his principal often offered to help build connections with families that were hard to reach, which allowed him to focus on classroom instruction. "If you'd like it to be taken off your plate. She can do the calling, and that saves us a lot of time, a lot of effort...So it saves a lot of time and it is very supportive." The Stewart principal shared how she created time for teachers to meet with parents by repurposing a faculty meeting and allocating Title I funds. "A lot of time goes into parent meetings...I started doing them when I got here. And we utilize some Title I funds, and then I trade-off with a faculty meeting... But we've built it now into our culture that you have to get the parents involved." Each of these comments suggest that allocating time to connect with families was a priority for the school.

At Great Neck, the school culture differed slightly in their use of time with families. Although individual teachers at Great Neck spent a great deal of time and effort communicating to families, it was less consistent that the school allocated time for systematic outreach to families. The district had recently removed the designated time for parent-teacher conferences and one teacher at Great Neck expressed that parents could not meet with teachers as easily as before.

Effective Title 1 Schools Allocate Time for Relationship Building

A sixth pattern among all four schools was that they used similar language to suggest their schools felt like a "family," and there was a great deal of "respect" and "togetherness" amongst the staff in the school. The principal of Fairview shared that

he regularly allocated time to ensure that the school had a positive feeling. "We have a climate committee. We meet every other month. And our sole purpose is to plan fun things to do." Seaview shared examples of their many celebrations of learning that happened in the school as well as in the community. Stewart stakeholders shared that their principal celebrated everything, including making efforts to celebrate teacher appreciation week remotely for the staff during the global pandemic. Teachers at Great Neck positively shared that celebrating learning with staff and students was a practice of the new principal; they indicated this was a welcomed change from the previous principal.

Table 6 depicts the six patterns in how time was allocated across all participating Title 1 schools to prioritize learning for students and educators, to create a positive feeling about the school through building relationships, and to outreach to families; all of which further characterized the values of these schools. Practices that were consistently mentioned as a school-wide practice by all educators interviewed at the school are designated by three triangles in their respective cells in Table 6. Practices that were occasionally mentioned as a school-wide practice by all educators interviewed at the school (e.g., allocated time for family outreach and allocated time for building relationships at Great Neck School) are designated by two triangles in their respective cells. Practices that were mentioned by some educators interviewed at the school, but not yet recognized as a school-wide practice (e.g., allocated time for professional learning at Great Neck School) are designated by one triangle in their respective cells. How time was allocated across the four schools also had a significant

impact on two other cultural forces in each school, including modeling and opportunities, as detailed in the next two sections.

Table 6

Use of Time Revealed in Cross-Case Analysis of Four Effective Title 1 Schools

Force	Indicator	Stewart	Fairview	Seaview	Great Neck
Time	Allocated time for ELA to be a learning a priority	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Allocated time for collaborative planning	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Allocated time for professional learning	△△△	△△△	△△△	△
	Allocated time for instructional leadership	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Allocated time for family outreach	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△
	Allocated time for building relationships	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△

Modeling

A fourth set of common cultural practices revealed in data across all four effective Title 1 schools was related to their intentional use of modeling as a way to enact their positive values, beliefs, and expectations. Ritchhart (2015) posits that modeling influences culture through what a group explicitly models and, equally important, what is implicitly modeled through daily actions. Across all four participating schools, there was an unwavering belief that all students could learn, and educators used the force of modeling to realize this belief. Educators modeled for students that learning is for everyone, including adults and children. They modeled that learning required effort, and that making mistakes was also part of learning. Modeling was also part of teachers' practices; teachers coaching and observing other educators as they taught in their classrooms was a regular practice at these schools.

Finally, these schools worked to model student learning for families, which served to highlight the importance of family involvement. The absence of time spent on professional learning and family outreach made it difficult for Great Neck for teachers to model instructional practices and emphasize the importance of family involvement. Data that provides evidence of these four dimensions of modeling are detailed next.

Effective Title 1 Schools Model that Learning is for All

Across all four schools, principals and teachers modeled that everyone could learn through their practices of inclusivity, differentiation, and high expectations for all learners. A teacher at Stewart shared that their school is "all-inclusive, like we try to work on every kid, every learner, no matter where they are -- we try and meet their needs." A teacher from Seaview shared that she collaboratively worked with her reading specialist because she liked "the children to see us working together, and we just don't want to have [the feeling] so these are the reading students [avoiding harmful perceptions]." All four schools called out their commitment to inclusion and small group instruction, modeling their belief in all learners. It is important to note that these schools also intentionally used time to ensure that all students had access to the grade-level lesson, modeling that needing support was typical and all students should be included in grade-level instruction.

Additionally, educators modeled that mistakes were a normal part of the learning process. A teacher from Great Neck explained that she encouraged her class to engage in "risk-taking," underscoring that "You don't have to be right; because sometimes I am wrong, I make mistakes." She emphasized that she calls attention to it when she makes a mistake, modeling that mistakes are expected in learning. "Anytime

I make a mistake, I say, 'See, not everybody gets the right answer.' And so I laugh at myself..."

In their efforts to support all learners, these schools modeled the importance of effort, not just achievement. A teacher from Stewart shared that they celebrated their students' efforts when taking state assessments, emphasizing to students "we believe in you" and the value in "show[ing] us your best." During assessments, all four schools emphasized to students that the most important part was trying to do their best, modeling for students that effort in learning was valuable. Because these schools expected everyone to learn to a high standard, intervention and differentiation became normalized. These schools regularly and intentionally modeled that there were many ways to learn and achieve -- further emphasizing their belief that everyone could learn and grow.

Effective Title 1 Schools Model Instructional Practices With Colleagues

A second dimension of modeling revealed in the cross-case analysis was that all four Title 1 schools shared instructional practices with colleagues. Two of these schools, Seaview and Stewart, specifically called out the opportunity to watch a teacher model a lesson. A teacher from Seaview indicated that he appreciated learning from fellow educators. "We also have the opportunity...to get subs in so we can go visit a colleague's room and see what they are doing. And spend an hour or two spreading the good work among their colleagues...which is nice." His comments reflected respect for his colleagues' teaching.

The principal and teachers at Stewart also valued teachers' opportunity to learn from educators' modeling. They shared that the reading specialist position had

transitioned away from being a reading coach, and instead emphasized direct service to students. "What has happened over time in the district though, they have made our literacy specialists interventionists." Nevertheless, they still actively worked to embed modeling into the school's routines. These efforts were appreciated as another teacher shared his reflection of one of the reading teachers, "She is a phenomenal teacher. She models lessons in our classroom. And I would just take notes." Teachers in these schools used time to collaboratively plan lessons and modeled instructional practices, allowing effective practices to be shared and aligned throughout the school.

While modeling was not expressed as a school-wide practice, like Stewart and Seaview, teachers at Great Neck School shared that they willingly opened the doors of their classrooms for one another; "You know, 'Come in, you want to walk in my room during writing?', 'Can I walk in?' 'Can you leave your door open so I can listen to your math lesson?'" Additionally, the Great Neck principal said that she was working on increasing regular opportunities for educators to model and learn new instructional strategies from fellow teachers. However, due to the transition to remote learning during the global pandemic, the principal explained how that plan had been postponed. "I had set up some time for [a teacher] to go into different classrooms to model with their children, with the other teacher's children...but that's gone this year as well. But, we can do this next year." The principal emphasized her efforts to ensure that modeling instructional practices would become part of their school culture. While Fairview educators spoke of many learning opportunities where they shared instructional practices (e.g., during lesson planning and book studies), the educators

that participated in the interviews and focus groups did not share practices of lesson observation.

Overall, the modeling of instructional practices helped teachers efficiently share best practices throughout the school, and it also served as an implicit model of learning for students. As a Seaview teacher stated, "You know the kids see that model, you know how we all get along, and we support each other, and you can see them doing that as well. It's just a great place to be."

Effective Title 1 Schools Model the Importance of Family Involvement

A third dimension of modeling revealed in the cross-case analysis suggested that three of the four schools capitalized on family interactions to model how families can play an important role in promoting their children's learning. The Seaview principal shared that they create learning opportunities for families during the summer. "Families are welcome to attend...we run it like a workshop model where the teachers introduce a lesson, then kids have time to work on an activity or skill." By inviting families to participate in these summer workshops, the school created an opportunity for teachers to model instructional practices for reading. In these lessons, teachers modeled explicit strategies that families could engage in at home, which implicitly communicated to families that they were an important part of their child's learning process. A Seaview teacher also shared that twice a year, they invited families into school for "Learning Looks," which also modeled classroom practices for families; again these practices highlight the importance of learning and including families as part of the learning process.

A Stewart teacher explained how educators at their school used meetings with families to discuss a student, and simultaneously "also coaching the parents" and helping them make decisions to support learning for their children. Modeling the importance of learning was evident in many of the school's interactions. The principal shared that their school-wide initiative of "bucket filling" focused on teaching students the importance of being kind; she added, "We're even doing the home component," making evident her belief about modeling for families the activities and learning that happens at school. Again, similar to Seaview, Stewart educators explicitly modeled the school learning of students and implicitly modeled that families were essential for strong learning.

Educators at Fairview also used modeling to strengthen the home and school connection. The reading teacher spoke of her efforts to connect with families to include them in their students' reading goals. "You need the parents to be aboard." She went on to explain that some parents are hesitant at first. "They don't, you know they're afraid...you know they don't answer phone calls, they don't answer emails. [she has] to catch them when [she] run(s) outside. I think that's a huge barrier. But once you can break it. I think that helps." Besides the daily commitment to model to families the importance of being involved in their student's learning, Fairview also made a significant commitment to their family nights. The principal shared that, in the beginning, family nights were mainly about establishing positive relationships. However, over time, they became more educational, including nights focused on academics, with opportunities for teachers to model instructional practices for families.

Table 7 depicts the extent to which three modeling practices were revealed in interview and focus group data collected from all participating Title 1 schools; that is, how frequently modeling was used in explicit and implicit ways to build a school culture that prioritized learning for all, to improve instructional practices, and to strengthen family involvement. Practices that were consistently mentioned as a school-wide practice by all educators interviewed at the school (e.g., modeled learning is for all) are designated by three triangles in their respective cells in Table 7. Practices that were occasionally mentioned as a school-wide practice by some educators at the school (e.g., modeled importance of family involvement at Great Neck School) are designated with two triangles in their respective cells. Practices mentioned by some educators interviewed at the school, but not yet recognized as a school-wide practice (e.g., modeled instructional practices with colleagues at Great Neck School) are designated with one triangle in the relevant cell.

Table 7

Modeling Revealed in Cross-Case Analysis of Four Effective Title 1 Schools

Force	Indicator	Stewart	Fairview	Seaview	Great Neck
Modeling	Modeled learning is for all	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Modeled instructional practices with colleagues	△△△	△△△	△△△	△
	Modeled importance of family involvement	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△

Opportunities

A fifth set of common cultural practices revealed in data from all four effective Title 1 schools was related to their intentional use of specific opportunities to promote learning and achievement. Ritchhart (2015) posits that opportunities influence school

culture because “the opportunities present will serve either to constrain or enhance the activity of both individuals and the group as a whole” (p.141). Differences in how these four schools allocated time (a cultural force discussed previously) also impacted the opportunities created for students, teachers, and families at the schools.

All four effective Title 1 schools created regular opportunities for students to learn foundational reading skills and intentionally designed opportunities for students to integrate ELA standards in science and social studies instruction. However, school-wide learning celebrations and new learning for educators were not evidenced at Great Neck, which was likely due to less time being allocated for professional learning, family outreach, and fun activities at the school. Individually, Great Neck educators made efforts to connect with families, and the school was working to increase opportunities to connect with families. However, when compared with the other three participating schools, evidence of shared systematic opportunities to connect with families were not as strong. Data that provides evidence of these four kinds of opportunities are detailed next.

Effective Title 1 Schools Create Opportunities to Develop Foundational Skills and Integrate ELA Standards into Science and Social Studies

One feature of opportunities that educators mentioned across all four schools was that the students who remained at each of their schools made gains. It appeared that as a result of the time afforded for learning at these schools, students were provided opportunities designed to support their ELA achievement. Notably, these four schools focused not only on developing students’ foundational reading skills, but

also on integrating learning opportunities focused on applying and teaching ELA standards in their science and social studies instruction.

During the focus group sessions across the four schools, I had the opportunity to meet with the reading teachers at Fairview, Stewart, and Great Neck. They all mentioned supporting students early. The Fairview reading teacher, for example, commented that if students began working with them in Kindergarten, their foundational skills would continue to improve throughout the next few years, and most likely, students would have a solid foundation to access text as they continued through the grades. "So I find that when we, for the most part, the K, 1, 2 that we're working with them.... they'll be pretty strong in 3, and they don't need as much support." A Great Neck teacher also emphasized the importance of early support and a focus on foundational skills. "It does start in Kindergarten, and it does follow through the younger grades, that by the time they are ready to take those standardized tests, those basic skills that are needed have been supported." Overall, all four Title 1 schools emphasized that they implemented a phonics program with fidelity, which provided students opportunities to gain foundational skills in reading.

Additionally, these schools actively planned opportunities for students to integrate ELA skills into science and social studies. Both Stewart and Fairview had adopted the Boston Schools Curriculum (Boston Public Schools, 2021) for their Kindergarten classrooms and remarked that the curriculum promoted integrating ELA skills throughout the day, as literacy instruction was incorporated into various components of the day across content areas. The Fairview teacher enthusiastically shared, "The Boston curriculum has allowed us to have a fully integrated program for

science and social studies...totally integrated with their Language Arts." This commitment to intentionally plan for integration was found across the grade levels at all four schools, particularly by their efforts to incorporate writing into their science and social studies instruction. The principal at Great Neck commented, "Social studies is embedded into ELA. So whatever they're studying, they'll work on a writing piece to go along with that." The fifth-grade ELA teacher at Seaview shared that he worked collaboratively with the science teacher, and she "has taken over any non-fiction writing." These schools intentionally designed opportunities for ELA integration because of their expectation that proficiency in ELA was a priority for students.

Effective Title 1 Schools Create Opportunities for School-wide Learning Celebrations

While all four schools made ELA a priority, three of the four schools (Fairview, Stewart, and Seaview) notably remarked on school-wide opportunities for students to have positive experiences with learning. Interview and focus group data revealed a clear commitment to making learning fun at these schools. For instance, the Stewart librarian shared how she encouraged reading at a school level with participation in the state's Children's Choice Book Award competition. To participate, students needed to have read three of the nominated titles, which the librarian had championed at the school. "I really encourage the kids to participate in that. I read two of the books to the kids myself, and then try and get them to read one more so they can participate in the voting. And now that we've been doing this for a couple of years, my participation has been increasing every year." She shared that because participation has increased, she decided to create a team of students committed to reading the list of

nominated titles. "And the kids were really proud of that. And really tried to be a member of the team..." Creating opportunities to have fun while promoting reading was valued at Stewart.

The Fairview teachers and principal also mentioned several ways they promoted opportunities to make learning fun. Educators shared celebrations like Dr. Seuss Day as well as a whole school book read-a-thon, during which students moved from room to room to read different parts of a book with different teachers. During the focus group sessions, the teachers were smiling as they described the day, sharing that "It is so engaging for students. They love it." The principal also emphasized the importance of creating these types of opportunities for students. "That's the other aspect about the schools is that kids have to enjoy coming to school. You have to have those fun events that they like to do." He recognized that learning was not always easy for students but he was committed to creating opportunities where learning was fun and he knew that "[kids] have to want to come to school." The teachers concurred that the principal's efforts to make learning fun were evident. "He's always a part of it. He is always front and center." Adding, the celebrations are "always for the kids."

In the focus groups at Seaview, teachers talked about their learning celebrations that took place on the school's front steps during town parades. Because of the school's location, a teacher mentioned that "we are like a centerpiece for the town." One of the celebrations that students looked forward to was the "Declaim competition," where they enacted famous speeches. The teachers emphasized that "parents are invited to all." Designing opportunities to have fun as a school with learning was valued by these schools, indicating their commitment to view the school

day through a child's lens. At the time of data collection, school wide celebrations like those revealed during the data collection at Stewart, Fairview, and Seaview, were not evident at Great Neck School. However, the new principal was actively working with teachers to increase ways to celebrate learning at their school.

Effective Title 1 Schools Create Opportunities for New Learning for Educators

A fourth feature of opportunities present across three of the four participating schools suggested that efforts made to support student learning also require efforts to support educator learning. Opportunities for teacher learning were revealed in the interviews at Fairview, Seaview, and Stewart. These opportunities were supported by the district as well as at the school level, creating school cultures that sought professional learning when faced with problems of practice.

At Fairview, the district had identified writing performance as an area of improvement and invested in opportunities to support educator learning in writing instruction. Fairview educators shared that they were part of a book study that focused on writing and that "there is a literacy component in each of the professional development days" and that "the last two years we've been looking at writing." These opportunities were intentional and substantial, allowing educators to grow their practices. Students also benefited from this focused instructional learning, emphasizing the direct and positive link that professional learning for teachers can have on student achievement.

Book studies as a form of professional learning were also mentioned several times in my meetings with Seaview. The teachers valued the opportunities to learn with their colleagues and then grapple with how to incorporate their new learning into

practice. "We'll pour over those books and have book discussions and implement it in class and then come back the next week and talk about that." It is important to note that teachers at both Fairview and Seaview found the book studies powerful because of their opportunity to participate and prioritize learning. As a teacher at Seaview shared, "So like I said, the building base, I find it the most rewarding and helpful because it's what we feel we need."

This sentiment of tailoring learning opportunities at the building level was also shared at Stewart. Notably, Stewart's collaborative learning opportunities were championed mainly by the principal. Yet, these opportunities did not have the same professional learning structure as Seaview and Fairview, where there were designated days for professional learning. Instead, teachers at Stewart were expected to attend eight hours of professional learning over the year on a multitude of topics, which did not appear to support coherent learning. Therefore, the principal viewed parts of every meeting and weekly communication as opportunities to share new professional learning designed to support student achievement. Teachers reported that they valued these opportunities, commenting that the learning helps with the "implementation...like blended learning, differentiated instruction, those things are done well. [Initiatives were] not so forced and done without the knowledge of [how to implement the initiatives]." The principal shared that she often used structured building meetings as a time for teachers to share best practices. While educators at Fairview, Seaview, and Stewart Schools all valued intentionally designed opportunities to learn together to support student achievement, these systematic efforts

were noted as a needed area of improvement by both the teachers and the new principal at Great Neck Elementary School.

Effective Title 1 Schools Connect with Families

While all four schools valued opportunities to connect with families, three schools (Stewart, Seaview, and Fairview) shared how they successfully created opportunities for families to connect with the school. In contrast, at the time of their interviews, educators at Great Neck shared that creating opportunities for families to connect with the school remained a struggle, but it was an area of renewed focus under the new principal, who was in her first year.

At Stewart School, the principal valued family involvement, and she worked to create opportunities for families to connect with the school. "A lot of time goes into parent meetings...we have parent conferences, we do them during the day, and we do them at night in the fall. And that's something that I started doing when I got here...But we've built it now into our culture that you have to get the parents involved." This same principal reported that in addition to formal meetings with parents, she also asks her staff to connect with families to share positive news. "Every year we've done something different; one year, everybody had to make a positive phone call home to every child, or send...I had given them postage pre-labeled envelopes. They did letters...and it's become part of their practice, right." It was quite apparent that the principal intentionally created numerous opportunities for families to be part of their child's learning.

At Seaview, educators shared that they too worked to connect with families through monthly activities and yearly celebrations. It is important to note that the

Seaview teachers also attend these monthly nights; "at all of those events, there are teachers that are present." Interesting to note, the teachers indicated that they have many families that come into the school to volunteer as well. It was interesting that instead of asking for specific needs from parent volunteers, they flipped the question to ask families to reflect on an interest or talent they could share with the school. "On the form, we will say share something that interests them, and some parents have very specific unique interests." By intentionally honoring families' diversity and knowledge, the school created valuable opportunities to connect and learn from families.

Fairview was also incredibly proud of its initiative to increase opportunities to welcome families into the school. The school had established a "Dad's Night", where they welcomed any family member that could attend, including moms and uncles. While they shared that the night started as "basically a barbeque," it expanded every year as they "made it a little bit more educational." Fairview served families that were economically disadvantaged, yet the educators were determined to create a welcoming environment for all. The teachers shared that this family night was a great success as it brought in all of their families. "So we started that. And just by doing that step, we got a lot of parents that we very rarely saw. They would come in. They feel more comfortable coming to school. We saw them more at conferences, much more...comfortable."

Overall, three of the four participating schools devoted resources to creating opportunities for families to be part of the school community. These systematic opportunities also fostered more informal connections. As one teacher from Fairview

shared, "Every year, you just see more and more parents and grandparents involved." These opportunities positively influenced the school community. In contrast, while individual educators at Great Neck all mentioned that they valued family relationships, opportunities to connect with families were not as strong. One teacher even shared that parent-teacher conferences had been removed from the calendar.

Table 8 depicts the extent to which the five practices of opportunities that educators created to foster an effective school culture were revealed in data from all four participating Title 1 schools. Practices that were consistently mentioned as a school-wide practice by all educators interviewed at the school are designated by three triangles in their respective cells in Table 8. Practices that were occasionally mentioned as a school-wide practice by some educators interviewed at the school (e.g., opportunities to connect with families at Great Neck School) are designated by two triangles in the table. Finally, practices mentioned by some educators interviewed at the school, but not yet recognized as a school-wide practice (e.g., opportunities for school-wide learning celebrations and opportunities for new learning for educators at Great Neck School) are designated by one triangle in the table.

Table 8

Opportunities Revealed in Cross-Case Analysis of Four Effective Title 1 Schools

Force	Indicator	Stewart	Fairview	Seaview	Great Neck
Opportunities	Opportunities to develop foundational skills	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Opportunities to integrate ELA standards in science and social studies	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Opportunities for school-wide learning celebrations	△△△	△△△	△△△	△

Opportunities for new learning for educators	△△△	△△△	△△△	△
Opportunities for educators to connect with families	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△

Routines

A sixth set of common cultural practices revealed in data from all four effective Title 1 schools related to their intentional use of specific routines designed to support learning and achievement. Ritchhart (2015) argued that routines influence behavior because they “represent a set of shared practices that constitute a group’s way of doing things”, and “routines become patterns of behavior for both individuals and the group” (p. 171). Across these four effective schools, they established routines in classrooms that supported students' social-emotional learning (SEL), routines that promoted collaborative inquiry among teachers to solve problems of practice, and routines that allowed for shared leadership whereby decisions were made collectively by principals and teachers in order to support the learning of all students. Data that provides evidence of these three kinds of routines are detailed next.

Effective Title 1 Schools Establish Routines to Support Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

While ELA was a priority across all four of these schools, interview and focus group data suggested that, like many schools across the country, there was growing concern about students' social-emotional health (Divecha & Brackett, 2020). These schools all described ways that they were working to support their students to develop academically and designated time and routines to develop social-emotional learning (SEL). Both Fairview and Seaview Schools purchased a formal SEL program and

invested significant amounts of professional learning time and instructional effort to support the program's implementation into their curriculum. Educators in the other two participating schools reported that while they did not have a formal program, they were making time to teach and establish supportive routines to develop students' social and emotional skills in their schools.

In all four schools, the expectation that "All students could learn" fueled the educators' academic instructional practices and their efforts to establish routines that developed students' SEL competencies. As one Great Neck teacher explained, "I really try and put mindfulness into what we do, that breathing...It really does make a difference for them when you do those kinds of activities, with all that emphasis on SEL, it really does need a prominent place in the classroom." A teacher from Stewart shared that she also establishes SEL routines in the classroom. "I start the year. It takes a ton of time, probably a month or two like teaching routines, through activities and stuff, but I do a lot of group work." She reflected on how she uses positive reinforcement to establish effective learning routines in the classroom designed to help improve behavior and learning -- "Because if they are not engaged, or working hard, then forget it. All the planning is out the window." This teacher believed that her students could learn academic content and recognized that classroom routines could help grow students' abilities to interact with each other. A Fairview teacher also shared this commitment to establishing routines of expected behaviors. "The amount of teaching that has to be spent on how to treat others with kindness. And it's okay if someone likes your answer and wants to write about that, too. It's okay."

Overall, teaching SEL competencies and honoring students' SEL needs were truly common practices throughout these Title 1 schools, both as part of instructional planning and during in-the-moment occasions when students demonstrated need. A Stewart teacher emphasized this dual practice in building SEL skills. "You know the classroom teachers get to have their morning lessons. They have morning meetings with them. But sometimes we're picking them up right after recess, and something just happened, so sometimes we need to start with that."

Effective Title 1 Schools Establish Routines for Collaborative Inquiry

A second common pattern across the four schools, again linked to their clear expectations that all students can learn, was that educators established routines that involved continuously evaluating their instructional practices to ensure student learning. Educators in these schools regularly used both achievement data and teacher observations to evaluate their teaching. More importantly, these evaluations did not happen in a silo but through collaborative problem-solving challenges when students were not demonstrating growth.

These inquiry-based routines of reaching out to other colleagues for help and support were evidenced in data collected from all four schools. Teachers also explained how these problem-solving conversations about teaching and learning sometimes took place during common planning time and "data days", and other times, they happened more naturally in unstructured settings. Fairview teachers, for example, smiled as they described their routines of working together to improve students' learning. "The other thing with the staff, they are so flexible. It doesn't just have to be common planning time; if I'm struggling with this student, I can talk to you

at any time and say... 'this isn't working, what do we do?'" Her colleague smiled and responded; "We worked together well this year, and it was nice to figure out what students need together and to have that extra person, 'cuz some students are different in different environments..." Similarly, at Great Neck, a teacher stated, "[the staff] freely collaborate...We are not about seeking praise for ourselves." Importantly, this routine appeared to be driven by the belief that all students can learn. Students could change, and teachers could and should adjust their instructional approaches to meet a student's needs.

Effective Title 1 Schools Establish Routines to Support Distributive Leadership

A third feature of established routines across all four schools was that principals routinely shared their thinking about school decisions with teachers in ways that strengthened distributive leadership. As a reading teacher from Stewart explained, "Her agenda is our agenda. And we know what she wants. respects, and we make sure that that happens." Similarly, the Fairview principal reported that when he first came to the school, he felt reading supports needed to change. By working with his reading teachers, the principal made his thinking visible, and in time he and the reading teachers made decisions as a team. "So the first couple years, the barriers were getting the teachers on board with the direction that the school is going in and looking at those kids who are struggling. Those first two years, I painstakingly went through [the student lists] with the...reading specialists..." He added that he focused the conversation on asking two questions: "who are you seeing?" and "why are you seeing them?" This routine enabled the principal to share future decision-making efforts around selecting students who would gain from additional reading support.

Another example of how these principals established routines of distributive leadership was evident at Seaview when the teachers and principal shared that they collaboratively decided on their professional learning book study. The collaborative language that the principal used to describe the selection is important to note. "We also have a book club twice a year for teachers. We're just getting ready to maybe select the next book..." By distributing the decision-making to the group, the principal made the process of reflecting on professional learning needs and interests a routine of all educators in the building.

The Great Neck principal had only been at the school for less than a year when I interviewed her, but when she discussed how the visions and professional learning priorities were being made, she continually indicated that they were collaborative. "We discussed and created together ...", indicating her commitment to shared leadership.

The teachers at these four participating schools all felt respected to make educational decisions to improve student achievement, increasing the principals' time to focus on teaching and learning. As a teacher from Stewart shared, "She supports by giving; giving when it is needed, and not trying to help more than is needed. So, in a roundabout way, I'm trying to say that she's really good at not micromanaging." These principals distributed leadership decisions as part of their practice, creating routines of reflective practices throughout the schools.

Table 9 depicts the three commonly practiced routines revealed in interview and focus group data collected from all four participating Title 1 schools. All three practices (e.g., routines to support SEL competencies, collaborative inquiry, and

distributive leadership) were consistently mentioned as school-wide practices by all educators interviewed at each school and are designated by three triangles in their respective rows in Table 9.

Table 9

Routines Practiced in the Four Effective Title 1 Schools

Force	Indicator	Stewart	Fairview	Seaview	Great Neck
Routines	Routines to support SEL competencies	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Routines to support collaborative inquiry	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Routines to support distributive leadership	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△

Interactions

A seventh set of common cultural practices revealed in data from all four effective Title 1 schools was related to the ways that people in each school interacted with each other. Ritchhart (2015) explained that interactions influence culture because they “form the basis for relationships among teachers and students, students and students, and teachers and teachers” (p. 199). In this study, these interactions have been extended to encompass relationships between the principal and families of the school as well. Inside these four effective schools, positive experiences and relationships were evident between and among all stakeholders. Data revealed three patterns of interactions wherein educators worked to create positive connections with students, there was a mutual respect between educators as team members, and educators actively worked with families to remove learning barriers for students. Data that provides evidence of these three patterns of interactions are detailed next.

Effective Title 1 Schools Foster Positive Connections

Across all four schools, educators recognized the link between building relationships and learning; thus, their interactions were intentionally designed to promote positive relationships with students. When asked about instructional practices, a teacher at Fairview commented on the importance of connecting with students. "I think that is where I can get students to show me their best is by connecting with them well." Another Fairview teacher commented, "I would say I'm passionate about teaching, but also about each child and how they are learning and how I can reach each of those children." These educators worked to understand their students as individuals and build positive interactions with all their students.

While these schools had structures and routines to support students, teachers also felt empowered to flexibly make decisions to support each child as an individual. The reading teachers at Stewart, for example, explained how one of them usually supported students in the primary grades and the other supported students in the intermediate grades. However, when something different was needed, they adjusted this structure. "I'll just keep [a student] for a couple of months at the beginning of the year because they're just not ready, whether it's emotionally not ready or academically not ready. And then I, you know, release them to [the intermediate reading teacher] by October or November..." Recognizing how difficult transitions can be for students, this teacher created a more positive experience for the student as they progressed through the year.

The teachers and principals in these schools recognized the power of building relationships with their students. A Stewart teacher commented, "We're all about

building relationships, especially where we teach because I didn't know how they could teach these kids if we didn't do that." This intentionality to building positive relationships was mentioned at all four of these schools. A Great Neck teacher acknowledged that knowing who you are teaching is just as important as knowing what you are teaching; "to teach, you know what your job is, you know where your goals are...but, to be a good teacher, you need to know your class." From the teachers' perspective at Fairview, students felt valued, which is essential for learning. "They feel cared for, they feel listened to, they feel supported. It is important." These educators worked to promote student equity, as they valued the individual relationships they had with students and designed classroom practices from the learner's lens.

The principals in these schools also sought to form positive relationships with students to know and connect with them as individuals at various times during the school day. Teachers from all four schools commented on how their principals knew all of the students in their school by name and they looked for opportunities to connect with students positively, whether celebrating learning achievements, taking selfies, or dancing down the halls.

Effective Title 1 Schools Create a Sense of Belonging

A second dimension of the interactions between educators across all four Title 1 schools was that they engaged with each other in ways that created the feeling of being part of a team. As I talked to the principal and teachers of these schools, you could feel the sense of community and connection that they had with each other. A Fairview teacher described their school as such: "You know, we're a team, and you

want it to be a supportive, safe and loving environment where your student can truly thrive and do their best." At Great Neck, the principal believed that the school's "biggest strength would be that we would definitely be there for one another." This sentiment was shared across schools. During the interviews, teachers and principals smiled as they discussed how they worked with other staff members to support each other in ways that appeared to foster their sense of belonging in each school community.

Teachers also commented that their principals' interactions with them were respectful, which instilled positive feelings about coming to work. At Stewart, the principal talked about their "bucket filling" initiative that was designed for staff and students. Seaview's teachers shared that their principal "is very friendly, very approachable and you just, I feel good every day coming into work, I feel, I want to get there. I want to go to work every day, I love it." The principal at Fairview reported, "The teachers have to enjoy what they're doing. They have to want to come to school." Therefore, he worked with his staff to create positive experiences, such as attending a professional sports game or volunteering serving meals, for educators to be a part of, both during the school day and outside. He thought that the staff became stronger when interacting with each other. At all four schools, these interactions created a positive community of educators; even while acknowledging that their school may have challenges, no one wants to leave. The sentiments of a teacher from Fairview echoed across all of my interviews at all four schools; "People just like to be there; it is a community. You feel like you are part of a community in that building."

Effective Title 1 Schools Support Families to Remove Learning Barriers

While these schools had formal opportunities to build relationships with families, a strength across all four schools also appeared to be the support and relationships that they built in their daily interactions with each family. These schools dedicated efforts to connect and support families beyond academic conversations. These schools regularly outreached to families to support various needs, removing barriers to learning.

A Fairview teacher described these efforts. "I feel like [the educators at the school] collect so many clothes for students and backpacks, and there's this huge support system in place for families that need help financially, with resources or different health care needs. I feel like there's a big support system at our school." A Seaview teacher described similar outreach efforts from "the nurse, and we call the 'psych-suite.'" He shared about a student in his class "needed a winter coat this year, and the way they did it was very discreet. But the nurse had like a beautiful brand new winter coat." These outreach efforts were mentioned at all four schools, from Thanksgiving Baskets, backpacks, and adopting a family for a holiday. A Great Neck teacher emphasized that they have supported families in many different ways, creating interactions that messaged, "we are going to do right by these kids." These interactions supported families and helped remove barriers of learning for students. Removing barriers was further evidence of their steadfast expectation that all students could learn, so whether using an app to translate for parent communication, offering adult literacy classes, or providing families with basic needs, these schools' interactions helped to establish positive home-school relationships.

Table 10 depicts the three interactions practiced across all four Title 1 schools. All three practices (e.g., interactions that created positive connections and a sense of belonging, as well as removed learning barriers) were consistently mentioned as school-wide practices by all educators interviewed at the school are designated by three triangles. That is, educators in these effective Title 1 schools consistently interacted in ways to build positive relationships.

Table 10
Interactions Built Positive Relationships in the Four Effective Title 1 Schools

Force	Indicator	Stewart	Fairview	Seaview	Great Neck
Interactions	Interactions created positive connections	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Interactions created a sense of belonging	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Interactions removed learning barriers	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△

Environment

The last cultural force with the potential to influence student achievement in the four participating Title 1 schools was related to how the environment was set up in each school. “The physical environment is the ‘body language’ of an organization, conveying values and key messages even in the absence of its inhabitants” (Ritchhart, 2015, p. 227). Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, aspects of the environment could not be fully explored, as most of my conversations with educators took place virtually in Zoom. Three of the four (Stewart, Fairview, and Seaview) principal interviews were conducted at the school building. As a visitor, I was greeted with smiles and all three schools appeared welcoming, were filled with colorful posters, and were noticeably clean, which was not an easy task in the northeast in

March, as schools constantly battle the mud and mess of winter. However, my brief visits were much too limited to be able to confidently characterize the nature of each school's environment.

However, early in the study, a few comments about the environment were noted in my conversations with Great Neck educators suggesting they felt their school environment was in need of improvements. Teachers and the principal commented on how old the school's desks were and how the school needed painting. Teachers also shared their frustrations for having less technology than other schools in the district. Over the course of my data collection, the principal explained that the school had been painted and that she had allocated funds for new furniture. A teacher also commented that the new principal treated everyone with respect, including the custodians, and that the school was noticeably cleaner. While I was never able to set foot into all of these schools, I feel that this limited data, indicating practices to maintain a welcoming and clean school environment should be shared as these practices speak to the educators' overall commitment to supporting students by positively influencing all eight forces to create an effective school culture.

Synthesis of Cross-Case Findings

The cross-case analysis served to better understand the emerging findings from the within-case study analysis. Synthesizing the within-case findings allowed me to delineate common factors that contributed to the schools' success and begin to build a theory of *how* effective schools operate (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008), and allow practitioners to bridge the findings from research into daily practices of schools.

The first purpose of the cross-case analysis was to have a greater understanding of the school culture in effective Title 1 schools. Educators that I interviewed mentioned a shared vision with noticeable consistency. Throughout my analysis and composition of the findings, I began to realize that the vision in these schools comprised their collective beliefs. Yet, their collective vision was more than a belief; the educators in these schools articulated that their vision of “all students can learn” had become their expectations, which influenced how they made decisions and designed instructional practices. This realization prompted me to find a framework that would help illuminate the culture in these schools as well as understand how efficacy was fostered.

During the within-case analysis, the inductive code of “collective efficacy” emerged. I returned to the literature on efficacy to help contextualize what I was noticing in my initial analysis and used the cross-case analysis to more deeply understand the practices in each school that appeared to influence collective efficacy. Bandura (1993) posited that there were three different levels in which self-efficacy operated to promote student learning, students’ beliefs, teachers’ beliefs, and the collective beliefs of the faculty. Because the unit of analysis in this study was schools, which included principals and teachers, as well as their interactions with students and families, the term “collective efficacy” was operationalized to reflect this study’s expansion of stakeholders. By looking more deeply across the patterns observed in the four schools revealed common practices of how these schools fostered student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy throughout the school.

Overall, I determined that the common school-wide practices used to foster a culture of success in high-performing Title 1 schools can be characterized by each school's shared expectations; the intentional use of language, time, and modeling; and a set of common opportunities, routines, and interactions. Collectively, these school-wide practices were designed to increase learning and foster positive relationships for students, educators, and families. Perceived through the lens of social learning theory, the school-wide cultural practices in these effective Title 1 schools appeared to foster self-efficacy among multiple groups of individuals in the school community. The following synthesis of these commonalities serves to further answer the research questions of this study; namely, to more precisely specify how principals and teachers in effective Title 1 schools make decisions and design instructional practices that foster student achievement. Dimensions of culture are bolded for emphasis.

Overall, findings from the cross-case analysis suggested all four participating effective Title 1 schools established clear **expectations** that all students could learn, that all educators could positively influence learning, and that a growth mindset inspired students and educators to do their best. These common expectations seemed to operate like a north star, guiding joint decision-making at each school and grounding how teachers designed their classroom practices. Student learning was at the forefront of their decisions, and educators believed that the only way to ensure student learning was through collaboration. Educators in these effective Title 1 schools continually monitored student learning, which, in turn, served to support students and unite teachers across different grade levels. Because of these shared

expectations, classroom practices were continually evolving to support student learning.

Language, a second dimension of each school's culture, was used to foster student efficacy and achievement in two critical ways. First, language in these schools was used to convey messages of belief about the value of learning and the belief that all students were capable of growing and learning. This language was designed to empower students in their own learning. Second, just as language was used to empower student learning, teachers were similarly empowered to share in their schools' decisions, because their professional opinions were valued by principals. Language in these effective schools helped to move their collective beliefs forward, as students believed they could learn, and teachers believed they could, and would, do whatever it takes to promote learning. Through positive messaging and the empowerment of voices, language served to facilitate self-efficacy for students, teachers, and the collective efficacy in these schools.

Allocation of time, modeling, and opportunities are three more inter-related dimensions of culture that characterized the ways in which high-performing Title 1 schools promoted a positive culture and student achievement. Three of the effective schools (Stewart, Fairview, and Seaview) prioritized **time** for student learning, collaborative planning, professional learning, instructional leadership, outreach to families, and building positive relationships. Educators' decisions around time allocation served to create positive school-wide practices, which directly linked to what the school collectively modeled and to opportunities the school created. That is, educators in these effective schools **modeled** their expectations that all students could

learn and that teachers working together could grow to meet their students' needs. Educators intentionally made decisions to model that learning was about growth, effort, and sharing practices. Additionally, these schools modeled the importance of family involvement through their efforts to connect families with students' learning. Student achievement was intended to be a collaborative effort inside the school building as well as beyond the school walls.

Educators in these effective Title 1 schools also worked to create a culture in which learning **opportunities** were intentionally planned to increase students' learning and achievement with ELA instruction aligned to the standards. Students were provided with explicit opportunities to focus on fundamental skills in the early grades and educators at all grade levels designed intentional opportunities to integrate ELA standards into science and social studies instruction. Furthermore, educators in each school were regularly provided opportunities for new learning in line with their needs and interests. These effective Title 1 schools created numerous opportunities for positive connections to learning through school-wide learning celebrations and school-wide opportunities to connect with families.

However, at the time of this research, decisions regarding how Great Neck School allocated **time** revealed important differences in professional learning, family outreach, and time spent building relationships that also implicated what the school was able to model and the opportunities that they created. First, Great Neck educators shared that designating time for professional learning was not yet a school-wide practice. The decision to not designate time for professional learning adversely impacted educators' opportunities for new learning and the modeling of instructional

practices. Second, practices that allocated time for family outreach were only occasionally mentioned by some educators at Great Neck School. Inconsistent school-wide practices concerning time for family outreach impacted the school's ability to consistently model the importance of family involvement as well as their ability to create opportunities to connect with families. Third, allocating time for building relationships was occasionally mentioned as a school-wide practice by some educators at Great Neck, but providing opportunities for school-wide learning celebrations was not reported as a consistent school-wide practice.

Finally, the underlying culture in these participating effective schools was revealed in how school leaders designed routines and interactions to promote student achievement. With respect to common routines, educators in all four effective Title 1 schools intentionally created **routines** throughout their schools that supported students' academic and socio-emotional growth. SEL routines fostered positive and productive learning environments for all students. Data-driven routines of collaborative inquiry to improve student achievement were common practices in all four schools, and principals routinely shared decision-making with educators; these routines reflected efforts to distribute leadership, which in turn, served to strengthen accountability.

Last, the **interactions** that occurred in all four of these effective Title 1 schools helped to cultivate positive relationships between all stakeholders. The shared expectation that all students could learn appeared to fuel educators' commitment to build positive connections with students so they could know them more as individuals. School-wide practices designed to foster positive relationships were at the core of

these schools, and teachers shared how these interactions created a sense of belonging. Educators’ expectations for student learning underscored their efforts to remove learning barriers by continually supporting students and families.

In summary, principals and teachers in these effective Title 1 schools collectively made decisions and designed classroom practices that led to student achievement; by regularly implementing a common set of positive school-wide efforts, they helped to build an effective school culture. In turn, these school-wide cultural efforts appeared to foster student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and the collective efficacy of all those within the school, which positively impacted their beliefs and motivation to ensure learning for all.

Table 11 reveals this connection between the influences of culture, school-wide practices, and efficacy. Common practices associated with each cultural force are listed in the middle column as indicators of that force. Findings from this study revealed that the consistent school-wide use of one or more of these practices appeared to foster student efficacy, teacher efficacy, or the collective efficacy of the school community, as depicted in the third column.

Table 11

Cross-Case Analysis Revealing How Culture Influences the Practices in Effective Title-1 Schools That Foster Efficacy

Force	Indicator	Efficacy
Expectations	Shared expectations that “All students can learn”	Student
	Shared expectations that collaboration positively influences student learning	Teacher
	Shared expectations of a growth mindset for students and educators	Collective
Language	Language used to communicate the value of learning and facilitate student voice	Student
	Language used to value teachers’ professional opinions	Teacher
	Language used to foster a sense of community	Collective

Time	Allocated time for ELA to be a learning a priority	Student
	Allocated time for collaborative planning	Teacher
	Allocated time for professional learning	Teacher
	Allocated time for instructional leaderships	Collective
	Allocated time for family outreach	Collective
	Allocated time for building relationships	Collective
Modeling	Modeled that learning is for all	Student
	Modeled instructional practices with colleagues	Teacher
	Modeled importance of family involvement	Collective
Opportunities	Opportunities to develop of foundational skills	Student
	Opportunities to integrate ELA standards in science and social studies	Student
	Opportunities for school-wide learning celebrations	Student
	Opportunities for new learning for educators	Teacher
	Opportunities for connecting with families	Collective
Routines	Routines to support SEL competencies	Student
	Routines to support collaborative inquiry	Teacher
	Routines of distributive leadership	Collective
Interactions	Interactions built positive connections	Student
	Interactions created a sense of belonging	Teacher
	Interactions removed learning barriers	Collective
Environment	Due to COVID, consistent data was unavailable	

Comparison of Cross-Case Analysis to Student Perception Data

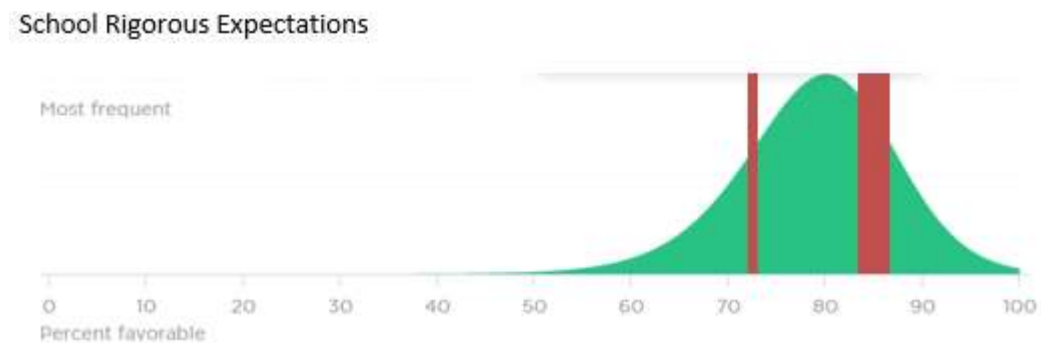
Data from SurveyWorks served as a final data source with which to more holistically understand relationships between cultural forces and school-wide practices that foster efficacy. While the state used attendance and suspension data as a school quality measure for accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), SurveyWorks data provided a view of school climate and culture from the perspective of students. Because the original research design included classroom observations that were never collected due to the pandemic, student perception data were particularly helpful to triangulate findings from principal interviews and teacher focus groups. Including SurveyWorks data in the analysis also made it possible to compare data from the four participating schools with other elementary schools in the national dataset population of over 800 schools (see Figures 12, 13, 14, and 15). Items selected

for analysis aligned with four categories of student perceptions most relevant to this study: *School Rigorous Expectations*, *School Teacher-Student Relationships*, *School Climate*, *School Engagement* (see Appendix G, H, I, and J for questions from the survey).

First, Figure 12 shows the 2019 student perception data for questions aligned to the category of School Rigorous Expectations, or “How much students feel that their teachers hold them to high expectations around effort, understanding, persistence, and performance in class” (Panorama Student Survey, 2021). The national data set, represented in green, comprises all elementary schools in the data set, with a mean of 80 percent. Students at Stewart, Fairview, and Seaview Elementary Schools answered questions pertaining to School Rigorous Expectations favorably. The three schools’ scores were 86%, 83%, and 83%, respectively. Because of the close proximity of scores, all three schools are represented by the thick red bar on the graph. To better understand how these schools compared with each other and the national data set, I also used percentile scores in the comparison, with scores from students at Stewart, the highest-ranking school, ranking in the 90th percentile, and scores from Fairview and Seaview both ranking in the 70th percentile. In comparison, Great Neck School fell below the mean of the national data set with favorable student perceptions of the school’s rigorous expectations falling at 72% or the 20th percentile. Great Neck School is represented by the thin bar on the left of the distribution.

Figure 12

SurveyWorks Data 2019 Student Perceptions of School Rigorous Expectations

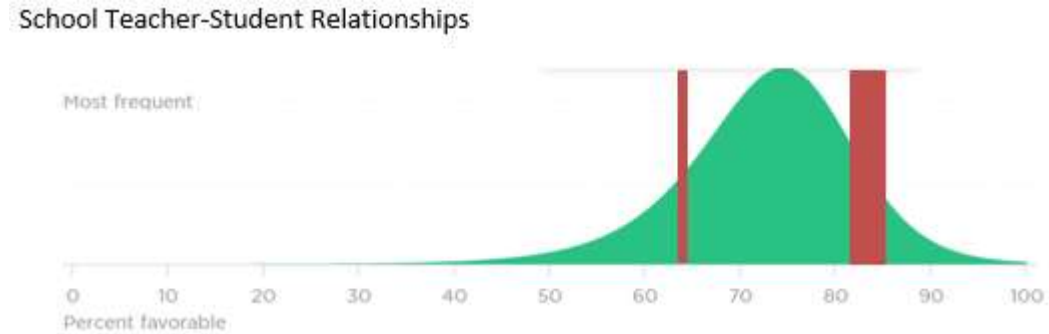


Note. Adapted from Panorama Education. (2019). *School summary results*. <https://secure.panoramaed.com/ride/understand>

A second category of survey items related to this study was Teacher-Student Relationships. Figure 13 shows the 2019 student perception data for questions aligned to the category of School Teacher-Student Relationships, or “How strong the social connections are between teachers and students with and beyond school” (Panorama Student Survey, 2021). The national data set, represented in green, comprises all elementary schools in the data set, with a mean of 75 percent. Students at Stewart, Fairview, and Seaview answered questions pertaining to School Teacher-Student Relationships favorably, with scores of 85%, 84%, and 81% respectively. The three school scores are represented by the thick red bar on the right, with a range of 90th-70th percentile. Great Neck School fell below the mean of the national data set represented by the thin bar on the left of the distribution, with favorable student perceptions of teacher-student relationships falling at 63% or the 10th percentile.

Figure 13

SurveyWorks Data 2019 Student Perceptions of School Teacher-Student Relationships

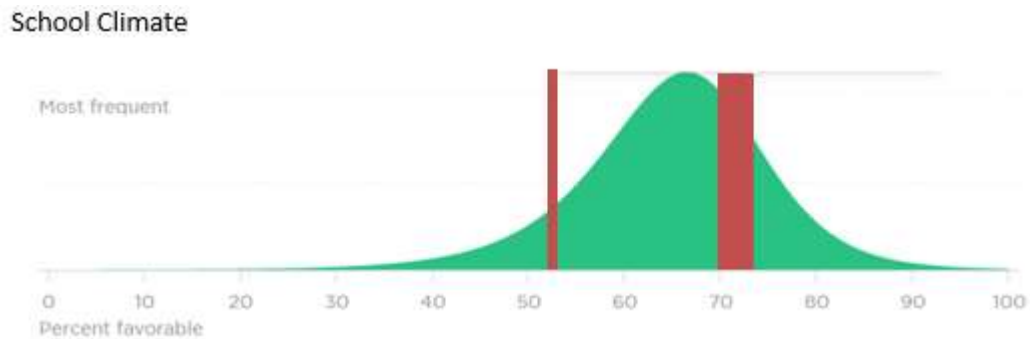


Note. Adapted from Panorama Education. (2019). *School summary results.* <https://secure.panoramaed.com/ride/understand>

The third category of items related to this study was School Climate. Figure 14 shows the 2019 student perception data for questions aligned to the category of School Climate, or “Perceptions of the overall social and learning climate of the school” (Panorama Student Survey, 2021). The national data set, represented in green, comprises all elementary schools in the data set, with a mean of 65 percent. Students at Stewart, Fairview, and Seaview answered questions pertaining to School Climate favorably, with scores of 73%, 75%, and 70% respectively. The three school scores are represented by the thick red bar on the right, with a range of 90th-70th percentile. Great Neck School fell below the mean of the national data set represented by the thin bar on the left of the distribution, with favorable student perceptions of the overall school climate falling at 52% or the 10th percentile.

Figure 14

SurveyWorks Data 2019 Student Perceptions of School Climate

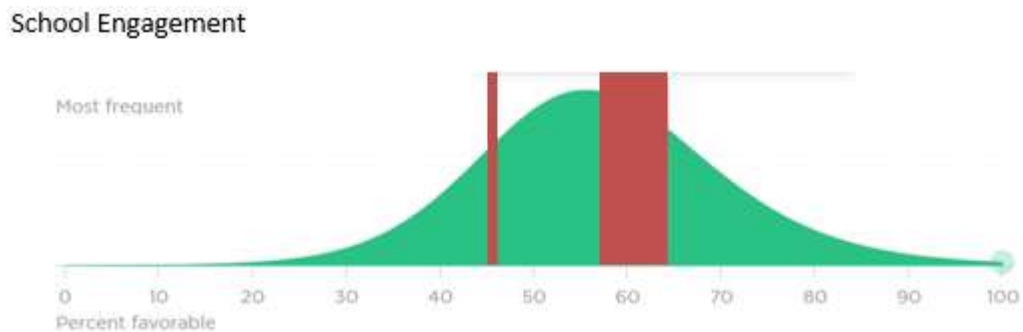


Note. Adapted from Panorama Education. (2019). *School summary results.*
<https://secure.panoramaed.com/ride/understand>

The final category of items related to this study was School Engagement. Figure 15 shows the 2019 student perception data for questions aligned to the category of School Engagement, or “How attentive and invested students are at school” (Panorama Student Survey, 2021). The national data set, represented in green, comprises all elementary schools in the data set, with a mean of 58 percent. Students at Stewart, Fairview, and Seaview answered questions pertaining to School Engagement favorably, with scores of 64%, 59%, and 58% respectively. The three school scores are represented by the thick red bar on the right, with a range of 60th-50th percentile. Great Neck School fell below the mean of the national data set represented by the thin bar on the left of the distribution, with favorable student perceptions of school engagement falling at 46% or the 10th percentile.

Figure 15

SurveyWorks Data 2019 Student Perceptions of School Engagement



Note. Adapted from Panorama Education. (2019). *School summary results.*
<https://secure.panoramaed.com/ride/understand>

Looking across the four schools, students from Stewart, Fairview, and Seaview reported positively, and above the national average, on questions regarding *School Rigorous Expectations*, *School Teacher-Student Relationships*, *School Climate*, and *School Engagement*. Thus, positive student perceptions at these three schools are aligned with findings from principal interviews and teacher focus groups in the present study, which highlighted school-wide practices related to these survey categories that may play a role in positively fostering efficacy. This data further indicates that students at these three schools held positive beliefs around their school abilities and motivation to learn at school. In contrast, students from Great Neck School did not report the same positive perceptions of their school’s practices in SurveyWorks

Initially, the distribution of student perception data was difficult to reconcile when I compared it to findings revealed during principal interviews and teacher focus groups in Great Neck’s case study narrative. That is, the educators with whom I met appeared to share a deep commitment to ensuring that all students in their school were

learning and they believed that working collaboratively could positively influence student achievement.

However, differences in the consistent use of school-wide practices revealed in the cross-case analysis may explain why students' perceptions at Great Neck School fell below students' perceptions at the other three schools in this study as well as below the mean of the national SurveyWorks data set. Educators at Great Neck Elementary School reported many positive school-wide practices of effective school culture in their shared expectations, use of language, routines, and interactions; conversely, other practices relating to their use of time, modeling, and opportunities for learning had just recently been established under the new principal's leadership, or, in some cases, recognized as an area of need.

Because the unit of analysis of this study was schools, which included principals and teachers, as well as their interactions with students and families, it is important to return to a more holistic view of the four schools, to examine how the principals and teachers' decisions relative to each of the cultural forces intentionally created school-wide practices that appeared to influence not only student efficacy, but also teacher efficacy and collective efficacy, as depicted in Table 12. Practices that were consistently mentioned as school-wide practices in principal interviews and teacher focus groups are designated by three triangles, school wide-practices that were occasionally mentioned are designated by two triangles, and practices that were not yet shared as school-wide practices are designated by one triangle.

The inconsistency of school-wide practices at Great Neck School in the areas of time, modeling, and opportunities provides additional evidence of the importance of

school principals and teachers intentionally collaborating to make decisions and design instructional practices intended to promote a culture of student success. Allocating time for professional learning was not yet shared as a consistent school-wide practice, designated by one triangle, which influenced teachers' opportunities to model instructional practices and opportunities for new learning. However, fewer learning opportunities for teachers may have also negatively influenced students' opportunities for learning and their efficacy as learners.

Another example of the interconnected nature of schools can be seen in school-wide practices which allocated time for family outreach. Because allocating time for family outreach was only occasionally shared as a school-wide practice at Great Neck School, designated by two triangles, educators' collective abilities to model the importance of family involvement and create opportunities to connect with families (both coded as related to collective efficacy) were also shown to be inconsistent school-wide practices. While the school-wide practices in Table 12 are labeled as linked to student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy, it is important to note that collective efficacy in this study represents the principals and teachers, as well as their interactions with students and families. This broader understanding of who is included in the collective efficacy of a school suggests that inconsistent school-wide practices with the potential to influence collective efficacy may also, by definition, influence student and teacher efficacy.

Table 12*Cross-Case Analysis Revealing How Culture Influences the Practices in Effective Title-1 Schools That Foster Efficacy*

Force	Indicator	Efficacy	Stewart	Fairview	Seaview	Great Neck
Expectations	Shared expectations that “All students can learn”	Student	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Shared expectations that collaboration positively influences student learning	Teacher	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Shared expectations of a growth mindset for students and educators	Collective	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
Language	Language used to communicate the value of learning and facilitate student voice	Student	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Language used to value teachers’ professional opinions	Teacher	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Language used to foster a sense of community	Collective	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
Time	Allocated time for ELA to be a learning a priority	Student	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Allocated time for collaborative planning	Teacher	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Allocated time for professional learning	Teacher	△△△	△△△	△△△	△
	Allocated time for instructional leaderships	Collective	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Allocated time for family outreach	Collective	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△
	Allocated time for building relationships	Collective	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△
Modeling	Modeled that learning is for all	Student	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Modeled instructional practices with colleagues	Teacher	△△△	△△△	△△△	△
	Modeled importance of family involvement	Collective	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△

Opportunities	Opportunities to develop of foundational skills	Student	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Opportunities to integrate ELA standards in science and social studies	Student	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Opportunities for school-wide learning celebrations	Student	△△△	△△△	△△△	△
	Opportunities for new learning for educators	Teacher	△△△	△△△	△△△	△
	Opportunities for connecting with families	Collective	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△
Routines	Routines to support SEL competencies	Student	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Routines to support collaborative inquiry	Teacher	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Routines of distributive leadership	Collective	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
Interactions	Interactions built positive connections	Student	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Interactions created a sense of belonging	Teacher	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
	Interactions removed learning barriers	Collective	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
Environment	Due to COVID, consistent data was unavailable					

Chapter Summary

This chapter first applied Ritchhart’s (2015) eight forces of culture to examine how each was used to intentionally design positive practices that supported student learning and achievement in each school. The cross-case comparison revealed similarities and differences in how these schools enacted the forces of culture, which in turn, shaped how educators worked with each other, with their students, and with families in their school community. To triangulate the findings, these findings were also compared to students’ perceptions as evidenced through SurveyWorks

Similarities among the schools' intentional use of the eight forces revealed the inner workings of the culture in four effective Title 1 schools. Chapter 6 presents a discussion of these findings and implications for practice and policy.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

This qualitative multiple-case study investigated the decisions and practices of effective schools to illuminate and understand how these effective Title 1 schools fostered student achievement. While components of *what* works in schools have been well researched, very few qualitative studies have used the school as the unit of analysis to understand *how* identified components are enacted in practice and how those components connect and intersect in the lived practices of the school.

The four cases in this study were purposefully selected to predict similar results (Yin, 2018), which would in turn, offer researchers and practitioners a deeper understanding of effective Title 1 schools. Schools all have a unique context and successful schools combine components of what works to create a more significant whole than their pieces. For this reason, throughout the phases of case review and cross-case analysis, efforts were made to ensure that the embedded units of analysis did not distract from the holistic nature of each school. In this final chapter, I first briefly summarize the qualitative findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 and present a hypothetical model of efficacy in effective schools grounded in three propositions that are supported with relevant literature and findings gleaned from the cross-case analysis. Then, I discuss implications and limitations of these findings as well as recommendations for classroom practice, policy reform, and future research. By considering these implications, we can begin to address ESSA's call for more holistic school accountability measures.

Summary of Findings From Case and Cross-Case Analysis

"All students can learn. If students are not learning the way we teach, we must change the way we are teaching." - Fairview Principal.

This multiple case study sought to understand how principals and teachers in effective Title 1 schools make decisions and design instructional practices to foster student achievement. The simplicity and power of this quote from the Fairview principal encompass the values, beliefs, and expectations of these four effective schools. Findings from the within-case analysis revealed that these four effective Title 1 schools embraced an asset-based lens (Ladson-Billings, 2015) to design school-wide practices and make decisions that were, first and foremost, best for children.

Collectively, educators in these effective schools championed a growth mindset for their students and educators. Leadership practices strengthened the shared decision-making evidenced at the four effective Title 1 schools. Educators' strong commitment to collaboration and professional learning allowed them to solve problems of practice and better support student learning. All four schools recognized the importance of students' academic achievement as well as SEL competencies and all four schools worked to foster learning environments that were safe, welcoming, and motivational for their students. Educators at these four effective Title 1 schools used data to guide their decisions in support of learning in these schools. Furthermore, all four effective Title 1 schools recognized the importance of family involvement. Findings of the within-case study revealed how principals and teachers in effective Title 1 schools fostered motivation to learn (for all learners) by designing purposeful opportunities, collectively supporting learners to accomplish these

opportunities, and promoting a shared belief about the important role each opportunity has in a school's overall culture of learning.

The cross-case analysis, which served to synthesize findings from the case analysis and further illuminate shared and unique patterns of practice across the four schools, revealed how educators made decisions around the eight forces of culture (Ritchhart, 2015) that influenced the consistency of school-wide practices, and in turn, appeared to impact student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and the collective efficacy of the school. The cross-case analysis revealed that principals' decisions regarding the use of time in school impacted educators' ability to create opportunities and model positive school-wide practices designed to foster student efficacy.

By using schools as the unit of analysis (which represented principals and teachers, as well as their interactions with students and families), it was possible to illuminate the holistic culture of each school within which particular school-wide practices were designed to promote school-level achievement by emphasizing dimensions of student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy.

A Hypothetical Model of the Interconnected Relationship of Efficacy in Effective

Title 1 Schools

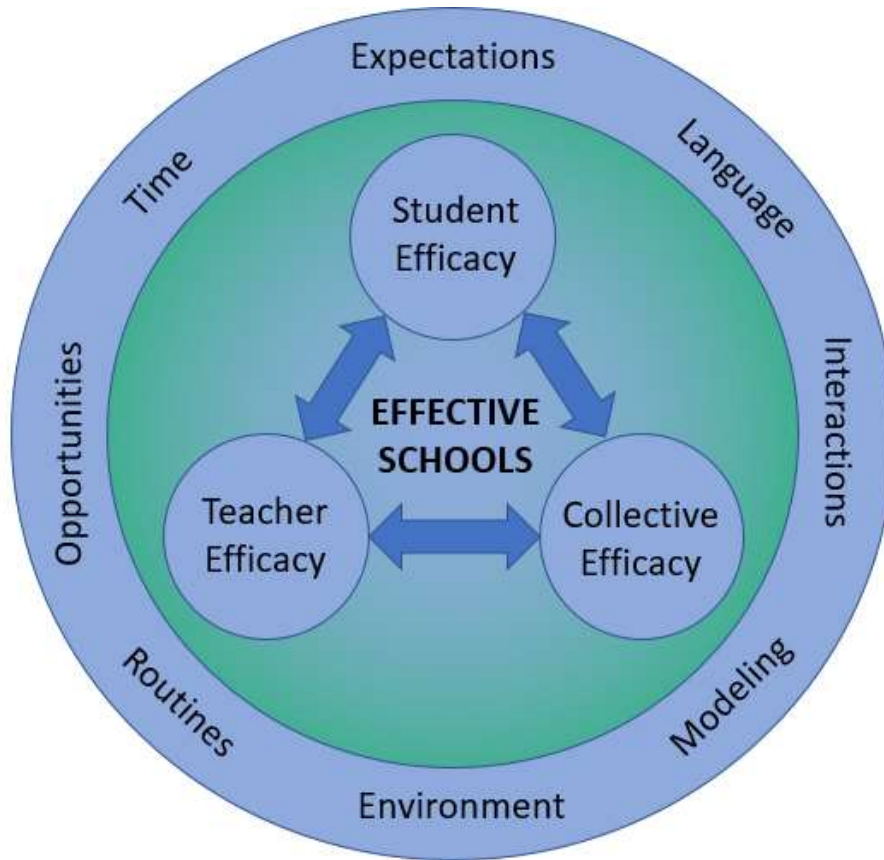
Findings from this study reveal how each school's decisions influenced the culture of their school, which in turn, instilled a set of common school-wide practices designed to promote efficacy throughout the school community. Furthermore, findings suggest that student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and the collective efficacy throughout the school are not separate; rather, they relate to each other in important ways. Similar to the positive feedback relationship of learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978),

there appeared to be signs of an inter-relationship between sources of student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy within each school.

Figure 16 attempts to capture the complex nature of how self-efficacy can grow among students, teachers, and the collective group in each school community as educators make decisions and interact with each other in the context of eight dimensions of school-based practices that work together to promote a culture of student success. While this hypothetical model serves as a visual representation of how effective Title 1 schools work, in the sections below, I first present a story shared by educators at Stewart Elementary to illustrate this hypothetical model in practice. Then, I elaborate further with details about each type of self-efficacy, as depicted in the model.

Figure 16:

Hypothetical Model of the Interconnected Relationship of Efficacy in Effective Title I Schools



Example of the Interconnected Relationship of Efficacy in Schools

During the teacher focus group sessions at Stewart Elementary School, a reading teacher shared the success story of a student who initially struggled to achieve grade-level standards. Educators at the school worked with the student and her parent to set a goal for her to read proficiently. Using data, the reading teacher and classroom teacher collaborated to design learning opportunities to support the student’s growth in reading. By the end of the school year, the young learner had made many gains.

However, according to school-based data, the young learner still qualified for reading intervention support as she transitioned to the next school year. Thus, the learner began working with a new intermediate-level reading teacher and a new classroom teacher.

Throughout the second year, her teachers continued to collaboratively decide what the young learner needed most to meet grade-level proficiency while also ensuring that the student had access to grade-level instruction and support. This collaboration included regular communication with the parent to share progress and to develop the child's next reading goal. When the young learner demonstrated grade-level proficiency on a formative assessment, there was a pause in the learner's typical school day to call home to celebrate.

The teacher described how the celebration of this young learner's achievement spread throughout the school. The child's walk to the office to call her parent included congratulatory stops at all of her previous teachers' classrooms. The principal, office staff, and current and past teachers cheered for her accomplishment. Her classmates could not help but join in the enthusiasm sparked by her success. Her parent was thrilled to get the phone call and join in the school-wide celebration of her daughter's school success. According to grade-level standards, the young learner had successfully exited the intervention program as an accomplished reader.

This story illustrates how sources of student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy may have positively influenced each other as educators made decisions and interacted with each other to promote student achievement. In this situation, *teacher efficacy* appeared to increase as this problem of practice was shared

by many educators. Together, the educators at the school worked with the learner's parent to generate an appropriate learning goal. As the shared goal was followed up with collaborative effort toward meeting the goal, the learner's success became a collective accomplishment for the student, educators, and family. These successful collaborative efforts may have positively influenced the *collective efficacy* among those involved. Furthermore, when teachers publicly recognized how learning goals can be reached with effort and thoughtful strategies, other students in the school may have also benefited from this impromptu celebration in ways that positively influenced *student efficacy*.

While this story is only a snapshot of the daily practices within one of the participating Title 1 schools, it illustrates how school decisions may be woven together with shared expectations to create an effective school culture, which in turn, sparks new opportunities to positively impact student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy. A theoretical rationale for how interrelationships among these three types of efficacy may evolve in school is provided next. Recent research has indicated that collective efficacy may have a greater correlation to student achievement than a students' economic demographics (see Hattie & Donoghue, 2016; Goddard et al., 2020). A deeper understanding of efficacy in schools is critical for practitioners to be able to bridge research into practices that create successful learning environments for all students.

Four Sources of Efficacy

To understand the complexities behind the proposed model of the interconnected relationship of efficacy in Title 1 schools, it is important to first recall

how efficacy can be influenced by different people in the school community. As discussed in Chapter 2, Bandura (1993) posited that there are four sources of self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, where learners have opportunities to master tasks; vicarious experiences, where learners share in the successful accomplishment of others; social persuasion, where learners are encouraged by others; and affective processes, in which learners strengthen their ability to cope with challenges and increase their positive feelings about engaging in a task. Figure 17 presents a visual model of how these four overlapping sources can serve as the foundation for how self-efficacy develops as individuals interact with each other in any social setting.

Figure 17

Bandura's (1993) Four Sources of Self-Efficacy



Next, I use Bandura's (1993) four sources of efficacy to frame and discuss three important propositions informed by findings from this study: (1) Effective Title

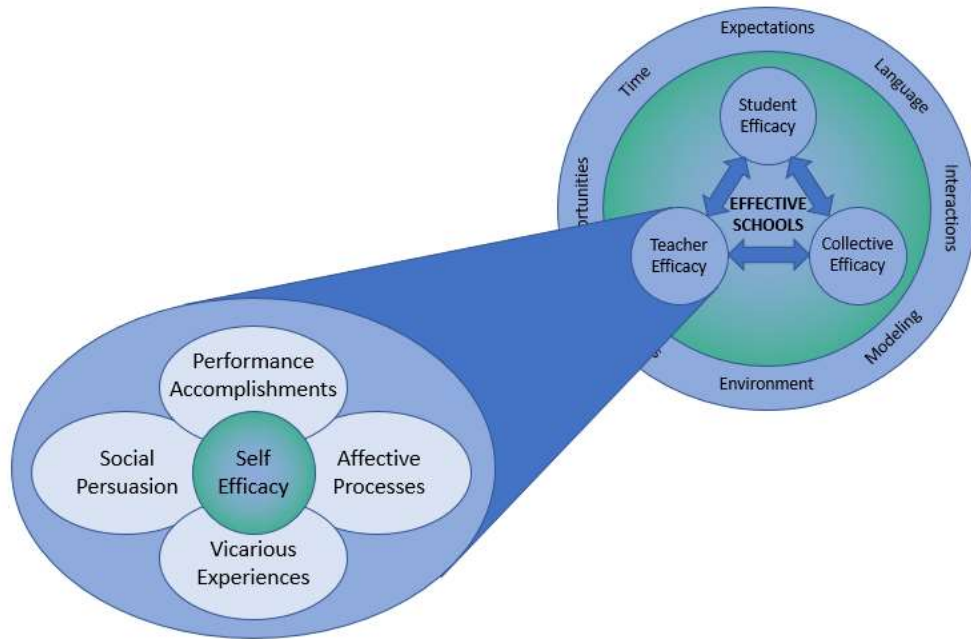
1 schools create a culture that positively influences teacher efficacy; (2) Effective Title 1 schools create a culture that positively influences collective efficacy; and (3) Effective Title 1 schools create a culture that positively influences student efficacy. These three propositions provide a deeper understanding for the role of efficacy in creating schools that support the learning of all students. In the following sections, each proposition is supported with relevant literature and findings gleaned from the cross-case analysis.

Proposition One: *Effective Title 1 schools create a culture that positively influences teacher efficacy.*

As stated in Chapter 3, Klassen et al. (2011) defined *teacher efficacy* as “the confidence teachers hold about their individual and collective capability to influence student learning” (p. 21). This definition combines individual teachers’ beliefs and the collective beliefs of teachers, which most closely aligns with my efforts to remain cognizant of the holistic nature of schools during my analysis of each case. While some studies have linked teacher efficacy with student achievement (Klassen et al., 2011; Zee & Koomen, 2016), less is understood about how these constructs are connected. Findings from the cross-case analysis begin to shine light on how the decisions made by educators in effective Title 1 schools may work to support four sources of teacher efficacy (see Figure 18).

Figure 18

Hypothetical Model of the Four Sources of Teacher Efficacy



In line with this hypothetical model, findings of this study suggest school-wide practices that leverage one or more cultural forces in effective Title 1 schools have the potential to positively influence the four sources of teacher self-efficacy. First, school-wide practices in effective Title 1 schools created opportunities for teachers to share in performance accomplishments, which appeared to strengthen teachers' beliefs in their capabilities to support student learning. Second, school-wide practices created opportunities and modeled the successes of educators, which allowed teachers to vicariously share in the positive experiences of others. Third, the shared expectations and instructional leadership at effective Title 1 schools appeared to foster acts of positive social persuasion amongst teachers. Finally, the school-wide practices of these effective Title 1 schools appeared to strengthen teachers' affective processes by creating opportunities to build strong collaborative relationships and develop positive

feelings about engaging in the work of supporting all learners. Table 13 provides further evidence of how indicators of school wide-practices may influence the four sources of teacher efficacy.

Table 13

School-wide Practices Influence on the Four Sources of Teacher Efficacy

Source of Efficacy	Practices	Evidence
Performance Accomplishments	Language used to value teachers' professional opinions	Educators were encouraged to share in decision-making about students' needs as well as their own professional learning needs, which allows them to share the success of those decisions.
	Allocated time for collaborative planning	Time dedicated to collaborative planning increases teachers' abilities to design effective instructional opportunities.
	Allocated time for professional learning	Time for professional learning allows teachers a deep understanding of evidence-based strategies to support their classroom practices.
	Routines to support collaborative inquiry	Educators established routines of looking at data and intentionally planning for classroom instruction, which strengthens teachers' beliefs that they positively impact learning, as they have data that their decisions and actions matter.
Vicarious Experiences	Allocated time for collaborative planning and established routines of collaborative inquiry	Educators planned with colleagues, which increased teachers' individual mastery and allowed for successes of best practices to be shared.
	Modeled instructional practices with colleagues	Modeling lessons provide teachers opportunities to learn from other educators.
	Allocating time for professional learning and creating opportunities for new learning for educators	Providing educators opportunities to learn new approaches and strategies increases their awareness and confidence to support learning for all students.
Social Persuasion	Routines of distributive leadership	Routines of distributive leadership shared successes of the school amongst other teachers.
	Shared expectations that "All students can learn"	The shared expectation that all students could learn was supported by the related belief that all teachers could positively impact student learning.
	Shared expectations of a growth mindset	Collectively these schools believed that all teachers could support learning, which switched the focus from perfection to progress, offering teachers positive encouragement.

	Shared expectations that collaboration positively influences student learning	The shared expectation that teachers' collaboration increases student learning provided encouragement for educators to support learning for all students.
	Allocating time for instructional leadership	By making teaching and learning a priority at the school, principals were able to positively encourage educators' practices.
Affective Processes	Interactions created a sense of belonging	Educators felt valued and appreciated for the opinions and efforts to support student learning.
	Allocating time to build relationships and Opportunities for school-wide learning celebrations	Educators made time to build positive relationships with their students and other colleagues, and create opportunities for students to have fun with learning as a school, which created a positive feeling.
	Creating a welcoming environment	Educators created a welcoming environment creates where educators want to be.

Proposition Two: *Effective schools create a culture that positively influences collective efficacy.*

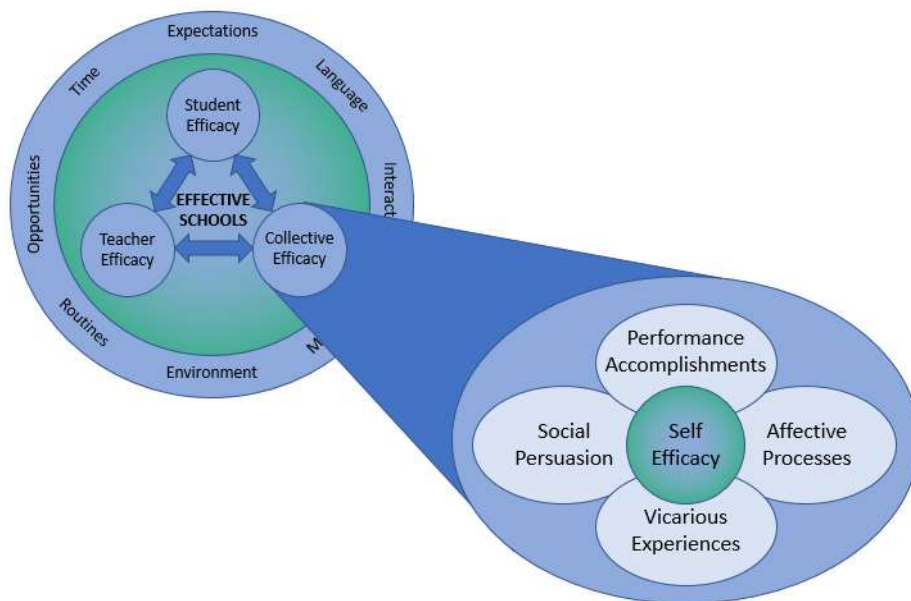
Many researchers currently define *collective efficacy* as interchangeable with teacher efficacy (Donohoo et al., 2018; Hite & Donohoo, 2021; Goddard et al., 2020; Klassen et al., 2011; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Based on school-wide practices revealed in data from the present study that modeled the importance of family involvement, collective efficacy appeared to encompass more stakeholders than only teachers. A growing body of literature supports an asset-based model of education that connects academic learning goals with the learning students do outside of the school setting (NASEM, 2018). This research-based finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) definition of *collective efficacy* as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p. 477).

The notion that collective efficacy includes multiple stakeholders beyond teachers reflects the growing research on the importance of connecting schools and families (Ladson-Billings, 2015; NASEM, 2018; Wood & Bauman, 2017). This

collection of research also acknowledges the importance of parental efficacy that Bandura (1993) stressed in his original work on the impact of efficacy and student achievement. Findings from the present study illuminate how the decisions of educators in effective schools support collective efficacy, as influenced by four sources modeled in Figure 19.

Figure 19

Hypothetical Model of the Four Sources of Collective Efficacy



In line with the hypothetical model depicted in Figure 19, a second key finding of this study is that school-wide practices in effective Title 1 schools appeared to positively influence four sources of self-efficacy linked to the collective efficacy of all stakeholders of the school. First, school-wide practices in effective Title 1 schools created opportunities for families to share in performance accomplishments, strengthening families' beliefs and capabilities to support their children as

students. Second, school-wide practices created opportunities for families to share in the successes of their children, allowing families to vicariously share in positive experiences. Third, the shared expectations of a growth mindset, high standards, and the language used to create a sense of community in effective Title 1 schools fostered acts of positive social persuasion for school learning amongst families. Finally, the school-wide practices of effective Title 1 schools appeared to strengthen affective processes for all stakeholders by creating strong relationships and developing positive feelings about engaging in the work of supporting all children to be learners. Table 14 provides further evidence of how indicators of school wide-practices influenced the four sources of collective efficacy.

Table 14

School-wide Practices Influence on the Four Sources of Collective Efficacy

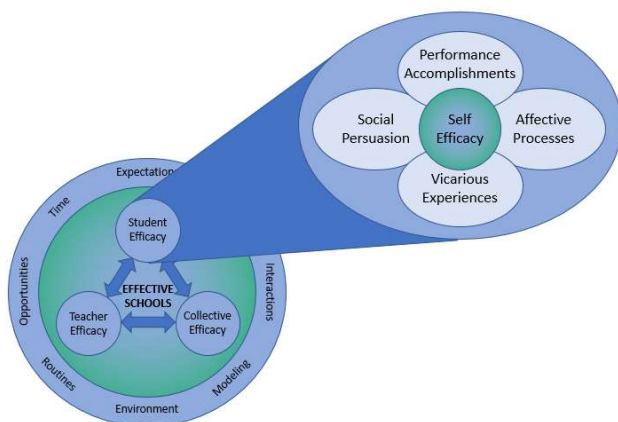
Source of Efficacy	Practices	Evidence
Performance Accomplishments	Modeled importance of family involvement	Modeled importance of family involvement, including families in students school success.
Vicarious Experiences	Opportunities for connecting with families	Opportunities for connecting with families, allowed families to share in positive school experiences.
Social Persuasion	Shared expectations of a growth mindset for students	Educators shared their high expectations for students, encouraging families to support their students' efforts in learning.
	Educators shared their high expectations for students, encouraging families to support their students' efforts in learning. Language used to foster a sense of community	Using the language of "village" or "family" to describe the school, encouraged positive interactions with all stakeholders to foster learning. These schools included families in their child's education, which elevated the importance of school learning.
Affective Processes	Opportunities for connecting with families	These schools created opportunities for families and educators in the school to have fun together, fostering positive feelings.
	Interactions removed learning barriers	Working with families to remove learning barriers, the schools positively increased families' feelings about school.

Proposition Three: *Effective schools create a culture that positively influences student efficacy.*

Bandura (1977, 1993) explained how self-efficacy connects a learner's beliefs with their motivation to initiate a task and their persistence to complete a task when faced with a problem. However, as we shift to examine how these effective Title 1 schools positively impacted students' efficacy, it is important to recognize that Bandura noted that efficacy is much more than the "incantation of capability" (1993, p. 145). Bandura wrote that believing in oneself is a complex process, influenced by the learner's extrinsic environment and intrinsic beliefs. The dual influence in Bandura's claim emphasizes that academic instruction cannot be separated from the learning environment created by the school. Efficacy is not a fixed state but one that can be positively or negatively influenced by others. Findings from this study illuminate how the principals, teachers, and families worked together to create a culture that positively supported student achievement and student efficacy, as influenced by four sources modeled in Figure 20.

Figure 20

Hypothetical Model of the Four Sources of Student Efficacy



First, school-wide practices in the four effective Title 1 schools created opportunities for students to share in performance accomplishments, increasing their beliefs and capabilities as a learner. Educators shared expectations that ELA learning was a priority and they created opportunities for students to develop foundational skills and integrate and apply ELA standards throughout their school day. Educators also created authentic opportunities for students to teach other students through classroom discussion and purposeful collaboration. These four school-wide practices may have served as a source of performance accomplishments, thereby strengthening student efficacy.

Second, educators in these effective Title 1 schools enacted school-wide practices that provided vicarious experiences for students. Educators modeled for students that mistakes and effort were part of learning. Students shared and celebrated their learning with others. Third, school-wide practices of shared expectations and their use of language inspired instances of positive social persuasion. These effective

Title 1 schools communicated that learning was valued and that all students could learn with effort and successful strategies.

Fourth, school-wide practices increased students' affective processes. Routines that supported students' SEL competencies encouraged students to help in cultivating a positive learning environment for everyone. While engaged in educators' planned interactions, students built positive connections and relationships with others, which appeared to help to strengthen their feelings about school. Educators' decisions to design school-wide learning celebrations and model the importance of family involvement positively connected home and school experiences. Finally, educators at effective Title 1 schools created a welcoming environment where students felt a sense of belonging. Table 15 provides further evidence of how indicators of school wide-practices influenced the four sources of student efficacy.

Table 15

School-wide Practices Influence on the Four Sources of Student Efficacy

Source of Efficacy	Practices	Evidence
Performance Accomplishments	Allocated time for ELA learning to be a priority	Students had time to master ELA standards and were provided support when needed. Expecting all students would have time to access the core prevents learning gaps caused when students are systematically denied grade-level learning opportunities. Students then have the access and opportunity to master grade-level standards by layering supports when needed.
	Opportunities to develop foundational skills	Students are provided systematic opportunities to develop foundational skills in reading.
	Opportunities to integrate ELA standards in science and social studies	Integration opportunities increase students' abilities to master standards in authentic learning opportunities.
	Language used to facilitate student voice	Classrooms, where students' voices are valued, provide authentic opportunities for students to explain their thinking with others, increasing mastery.

Vicarious Experiences	Language used to facilitate student voice	When students explain their thinking to others, they used language that shares their learning with others.
	Modeled that learning is for all	Inclusion practices modeled student learning for other students. Purposefully modeling that mistakes and learning challenges allow all students to learn perseverance.
	Opportunities for school-wide learning celebrations	Highlighting the successes of learning accomplishments allows other students to believe that they too can succeed.
Social Persuasion	Shared expectations that “All students can learn”	Learning expectations influenced all other forces of cultures. The educators in the schools shared the clear belief that all students could learn and created a collective expectation to support learning through their explicit and implicit behaviors.
	Shared expectations of a growth mindset for students	Educators and families share their high expectations for students, encouraging students to put effort into learning.
	Language used to communicate the value of learning Shared expectations that “All students can learn”	Educators’ language communicated why learning would be valuable in students’ future. Learning expectations influenced all other forces of cultures. The educators in the schools shared the clear belief that all students could learn and created a collective expectation to support learning through their explicit and implicit behaviors.
Affective Processes	Routines to support SEL competencies	Supporting students’ awareness and growth in SEL competencies creates a positive learning environment for students by helping them gain awareness of their emotions and the emotions of others.
	Interactions built positive connections Allocating time to build relationships and Opportunities for school-wide learning celebrations	Taking time to connect with students creates positive feelings about school for students. Educators made time to build positive relationships with their students and create opportunities for students to have fun with learning as a school, which positively supports how students feel about school.
	Modeled importance of family involvement	Educators include families as part of students’ learning, which modeled the importance of family involvement and positively connected home and school experiences for students.
	Creating a welcoming environment	Educators created a welcoming environment where students want to be.

Stepping back to view this hypothetical model of efficacy in its entirety, these three propositions can be used to characterize the complex ways in which school leaders in effective Title 1 schools (principals and teachers alike) make decisions and

design instructional practices to foster student achievement on state reading assessments. Evidence from this cross-case analysis not only confirmed the large body of research on *what* makes schools effective (Au et al., 2008; Bryk, 2010; Sebastian et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2003); multiple phases of qualitative within-case and cross-cases analyses also uncovered *how* these effective practices come to life in different school contexts. In particular, the proposed model of school efficacy charts a path forward for how principals in Title 1 schools can work collectively with teachers and families to enact particular school-wide practices designed to promote school-level reading achievement by emphasizing dimensions of student efficacy, teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy.

Implications

Findings from this multiple-case study along with the hypothetical model of the efficacy in effective Title 1 schools have several implications for practitioners, policymakers, and future research. Student achievement does not have to be predicated by a family's economic status. Future work informed by these ideas can pave the way for schools to be more effective by creating school cultures intentionally designed to support three levels of efficacy.

Implications for Practitioners

This study has three implications for practice. As discussed next, qualitative findings from this study underscore the importance of Title 1 school leaders who intentionally prioritize time for collaboration and professional learning, create student-centered learning environments, and promote efficacy with families.

Prioritize Time for Collaboration and Professional Learning

The first implication of this study is that it underscores the importance of prioritizing time for collaboration and professional learning for all educators in Title 1 schools. Research has documented the importance of teacher expertise for student achievement (Lyon, 2015; Taylor et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2003). Expert teachers understand student cues and almost intuitively decide how to support learning by coaching, questioning, and allowing students to do the thinking and learning. However, in order for teachers to become this intuitive with their teaching practices, they must intentionally work to develop their knowledge of content and pedagogy. The teacher from Seaview laughed as she described the business of her classroom, comparing her quick movements to guide students as similar to navigating the space on roller skates. The results of hours of unit planning and learning that she dedicated to becoming an expert practitioner inform her fluid and flexible decision making and should not be overlooked. If we want all children to have opportunities to learn from expert teachers, findings from this study add to the body of research that indicates job-embedded opportunities for teacher collaboration and new learning are essential.

Notably, all four participating Title 1 schools embedded time for collaboration into their school year. These efforts are consistent with research that concluded professional learning and collaboration were a unifying thread in the highest performing school systems around the world (see Jensen et al, 2016). Because professional learning and collaboration are so intertwined, it is often difficult to label the activity as one or the other. However, the present study revealed that when teachers were not afforded time for new learning, it negatively impacted subsequent opportunities for teachers to become expert practitioners. As one Great Neck teacher

shared, it was not that she was unwilling to engage in professional learning, but a teacher's school day passes quickly and time for professional learning often gets sacrificed if it is not prioritized. This study underscores the need for Title 1 school leaders to intentionally plan for professional learning opportunities, as these opportunities can influence teacher efficacy and student learning.

When new learning is not afforded to practitioners, it can negatively influence their efficacy. In addition, professional development has the most impact on student achievement when educators articulate areas of need (Coburn, 2006; Gravani, 2012). Research findings by Coburn and Gravani further reinforce the important practice of shared decision-making as evidenced in participating Title 1 schools. Teachers in this study participated in ongoing book studies during which they learned and implemented new strategies and reflected on how to apply those strategies in practice. These shared experiences appeared to positively impact teachers' efficacy by providing educators with authentic, in-the-moment opportunities to solve problems of practice. Teacher efficacy is a growing area of interest in education (Daniels, 2017; Hite & Donohoo, 2021; Katz & Shahar, 2015), and this research serves as a thoughtful reminder that developing teacher efficacy through professional learning and collaboration should be on the minds of school and district leaders.

Importance of Student-Centered Learning Environments

Findings from this study also highlight the important work involved in creating student centered learning environments. Social-emotional learning for students cannot be viewed as an add-on to the academic curriculum. Teachers in this study recognized the importance of teaching students how to be ready to learn by building necessary

skills for successful collaboration and communication. The growing attention for educators to create learning environments that are safe, welcoming, and have a growth mindset for all students (Ko & Sammons, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2015; NASEM, 2018) underscores the need for students to have learning experiences that increase their ability and motivation for future learning. Dewey (1938/2015) shared the importance of creating quality learning experiences, and, almost eighty years later, findings from the present study echo this same core idea.

While educators in this study recognized the importance of teaching the “whole kid,” they also described how they designed learning experiences to intentionally facilitate SEL competencies as well as knowledge aligned with content standards. Two schools reported their adoption and integration of the Boston Schools Curriculum (Boston Public Schools, 2021) into the disciplines, which participating teachers suggested fostered deep and motivating learning opportunities for their students. One teacher shared that she would never teach any other way!

The importance of designing deep learning experiences (Hammond, 2020; Noguera, 2018) that provide all students opportunities to think deeply about engaging and motivational content is well documented in the literature (Coiro et al., 2019, Fullan et al., 2018; NASEM, 2018). Yet, many teachers in this study lamented that current curriculum materials make this type of teaching much too challenging. Many educators shared that often, topics in their reading series did not align to the science and social studies topics they were expected to teach; consequently, designing learning opportunities to foster students’ integration and application of knowledge and skills across the day required a great deal of time and effort. Upper grade teachers, in

particular, tried as much as possible to integrate instruction across the disciplines and design engaging learning opportunities for students to apply new knowledge. They suggested curricula like the Boston Schools Curriculum used in their school's Kindergarten classroom would make it much easier to accomplish these goals.

Findings from this study highlight the need for students in Title 1 schools to have regular opportunities for deep learning, where teachers shift from providing content knowledge that must be mastered to emphasizing instruction that develops students' skills as learners and prepares them to participate in the world in which they live (Fullan, 2018; Noguera, 2018). Regular opportunities for deep learning provide students with a purpose for reading and writing, increasing their motivation and engagement in literacy activities. Relatedly, findings from this study point to the need for curricula and professional learning opportunities that facilitate teaching for deep learning. If we want all students to be in effective schools, educators need to promote student-centered environments where all students have regular opportunities for deep learning.

Importance of Building Efficacy with Families

Recent policy supports family involvement, and findings of this study further emphasize the need for principals and teachers to create school-wide practices that build collective efficacy with families. Under ESSA, states and schools must seek input from families on their education plans (Darling-Hammond, 2016). While ESSA acknowledges the importance of family involvement in schooling, research is still evolving to understand effective models of family engagement (Wood & Bauman, 2017). Other research shows that when schools adopt an asset-based model of

learning, school learning can be connected with out-of-school learning experiences to support student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2015; Hammond, 2015; NASEM, 2018).

Findings from the present study suggest that collaborative work with families not only has the potential to positively influence collective efficacy, but it may also increase teacher and student efficacy. That is, if schools and families have strong relationships, they can collaboratively face and solve problems when students struggle in school learning activities. Bandura (1993) posited that when educators work positively with families to address students' learning challenges, these collaborative experiences help reduce anxiety and stress regulating avoidance behaviors. Educators that increase school-wide practices associated with positive affective processes (seen in Tables 13, 14, and 15) may serve to positively influence parent and teacher efficacy, and ultimately, student efficacy. While ESSA insists that funds are spent for parent and family engagement, the practices of engaging families cannot be seen as an afterthought for schools. Educators in this study considered partnering with families as an important expectation in their school's culture.

Implications for Principals and District Leaders

While all three implications of practice discussed for practitioners also hold true for principals, findings from this study introduce two additional takeaways for principals and district leaders. First, this study suggests that time for collaboration and professional learning should be afforded to all practitioners, including principals. This means that district leaders should ensure that all principals, and especially those in Title 1 schools, have opportunities for collaboration and job-embedded professional

learning. Principals in all four schools shared efforts to stay abreast of up-to-date practices in educational and organizational practices. However, only one principal shared that the district also supported these efforts. The importance of school principals leading in ways that promote student achievement and foster a positive school climate is well documented by previous research (Coelli & Green, 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008, 2020). Under ESSA, funds can be used to support principal leadership and this study provides further evidence of the importance of professional learning for developing effective leaders.

A second takeaway for principals and district leaders is to consider how findings from this study might evolve into a self-reflection framework for school improvement. Details provided in Tables 12, 13, 14 and 15 could be used to develop a reflection tool to formatively guide discussions around how to intentionally promote the efficacy of all stakeholders in the school community. These three tables specify school-wide practices with the potential to influence four sources of efficacy for students, teachers, and the collective school community, thereby enabling leaders to facilitate improvement in Title 1 schools through an asset-based learning framework. Through this lens, students, teachers, and families alike are valued for what they bring to the classroom, rather than being characterized by what they lack, and a growth-mindset is afforded to all. Data in the tables also highlight the importance of consistent school-wide practices as more effective than practices enacted by some educators but not yet consistent across key stakeholders at the school. This rubric would likely be of great benefit to leaders in other Title 1 Schools as they reflect on their own positive practices and make informed decisions about how best to incorporate into their school

culture other school-wide practices likely to facilitate student achievement and efficacy in their school community.

Implications for Policymakers

The first policy implication of this study highlights the need for change in school accountability policies. Measurement systems shape school priorities. Under NCLB, school accountability systems were limited to student achievement, and this narrow conception about school success had negative consequences for both states' abilities to accurately share information about school quality as well as the instructional practices that were prioritized. ESSA added new measures of school quality into states' annual reporting criteria (Darling-Hammond, 2016), and this study highlights the need for policy and practitioners to use a more holistic framework for school accountability reporting.

At the time of this study, the state's expanded framework for elementary schools consisted of the five categories: (1) overall achievement on the state ELA and math assessment, (2) growth on the state ELA and math assessment, (3) proficiency on the state assessment for English Language Proficiency, (4) performance of low-performing subgroups (e.g., students receiving special education service or students who are economically disadvantaged), and (5) a school quality measure that included students who scored in the exceeds category on the state test, absenteeism, and suspension rates.

While this accountability report card, in accordance with ESSA (2015) regulations, is greatly improved from the previous report card under NCLB (2001), which was limited to achievement on state assessments, all five measures are still

associated with the state assessment, which is still too narrow of a focus for determining overall school quality. In fact, SurveyWorks data indicated that students from Great Neck School did not perceive measures of school quality as favorable compared to students from the other three schools. Nevertheless, Great Neck educators also mentioned that the new principal was making concerted efforts to improve the climate and relationships in the school. Yet, because the state does not currently incorporate SurveyWorks data into school accountability report cards, those additional school climate indicators were not prioritized in school improvement plans. Findings from this study can inform efforts linked to new school accountability policies by providing a framework with which to design a more holistic accountability system that no longer separates reading achievement from school-wide practices that promote students' efficacy as learners.

Additionally, if state policymakers used a more holistic framework, grounded in the information from Tables 12, 13, 14 and 15, they too could engage schools and districts in formative discussions around how to intentionally promote the efficacy of all stakeholders in the school community. Chapter two closely documents how policies that framed school improvement and reading achievement in deficit-based thinking were established at the peril of schools supporting students from economically disadvantaged families (Afflerbach, 2015; Almasi et al., 2006; Colburn, 2004; Edmondson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2015). Deficit-based policies do not provide educators and school communities opportunities to design improvement for their schools, as these policies prescribe courses of action rather than offering educators choice and agency.

This study indicates the importance of providing educators more agency with which to determine what topics they need to learn more about in order to improve student learning. Educators in this study were afforded the agency to make decisions around areas of school improvement and this resulted in aligned instructional practices that fostered student achievement. Moreover, principals in this study shared decision making with teachers, which created shared accountability for student learning. Schools are complex and have unique settings. If policymakers want to ensure that all students have opportunities to be in successful schools, they need to have more holistic frameworks in which school-based educators can share in the decision making with policy makers to create a culture of shared accountability.

Limitations

While findings from this study have important implications for the educational community, there are also several limitations of the work provided here. First, only a handful of teachers from each school participated in the focus groups and all teachers were volunteers. Therefore, when interpreting any findings, it is important to be mindful that the volunteers potentially represent teachers that have a positive perspective of their school, as I was collecting data during the school closures of COVID-19, in which many teachers across the country were reporting burn-out. To increase the validity of teacher data I took several steps. First, questions in the principal interviews were designed to elicit global perceptions about the practices of all teachers in the school, not only those who participated in the focus groups. This allowed me to triangulate comments from both principals and teachers to draw conclusions about teacher practices in the school. Second, I used focus groups to

minimize extreme answers, as there was at least one other educator from the school in each focus group conversation. Finally, to minimize potential influences of a principal's position, I separated the teacher groups from the principal and also kept teachers' participation confidential.

Second, data collected from teachers and principals was self-reported data. A strength of self-reported data is it allows for nuanced answers to surface (Danner et al., 2018). Indeed, in this study participants were given ample opportunities to describe their own experiences and beliefs about school practices. I also took several steps in designing the study to increase the trustworthiness of these self-reported data. First, selection criteria ensured that only schools deemed as effective by their performance on statewide reading assessments would participate in this study, which enabled me to focus on practices that would allow a deeper understanding of *how* effective schools make decisions and design instructional practices. Second, I used multiple data sources to triangulate self-reported perceptions of teachers with those of the principal at each school. Finally, member-checking was employed to ensure that I accurately represented participants' self-reported perceptions. Further, because I was not able to observe any instruction or talk informally with students about their perceptions of the school (due to all classes being held online), I turned to SurveyWorks to provide student perception data in line with school-wide practices already shared by teachers and principals; and indeed, similar patterns emerged.

Future research should consider how classroom observational data may reveal evidence of practices similar to or different from those revealed in self-reported data. In addition, a study of all ten categories of student perception data available in the

SurveyWorks database would likely provide a more nuanced understanding of how student perceptions of their school are related to the educational decisions and instructional practices occurring in Title 1 schools. Additionally, because fostering collective efficacy surfaced as an important practice in effective schools, researchers may also consider expanding data collection efforts to also consider perceptions from families, using SurveyWorks data or focus groups.

Third, it should be acknowledged that all four schools in this study were located in the same state, and the percentage of students from economically disadvantaged households in any one school was not higher than 65%. While all four schools were Title 1 schools, only Stewart Elementary School represented students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds; the other three participating schools served students that were mostly white. Thus, the beliefs and school-wide practices identified by participants in this study may be different than those shared by educators in Title 1 schools in other states made up of more racially diverse populations or schools with a higher percentage of students from economically disadvantaged families. Future work should certainly focus on what these difference, if any, may be.

However, to increase the analytic generalizability (Yin, 2018) of my findings, I constructed rich and detailed descriptions of how each group of educators perceived their school's practices as evidenced in my within-case and cross-case analysis. Each school had a unique context and through pattern matching, I was able to illuminate how schools accomplished common goals in different ways (i.e. family outreach). These detailed descriptions increase the transferability of my findings, as

principals and teachers in other Title 1 schools might refer to this study as a resource for ideas to improve daily practices at their schools.

Findings from my study suggest that schools can indeed make a positive difference, while also recognizing that there are a multitude of other factors that may also be considered to improve educational outcomes of students attending Title 1 schools. Title 1 Schools are often situated in communities with low economic wealth and schools alone cannot solve the physical and social disadvantages for students and families that occur as a result of minimal financial means. Efforts similar to those made by political leaders and partners associated with the Harlem Children's Zone (2021) project, with a mission "to end intergenerational poverty" (Harlem Children's Zone, 2021), have begun to shed light on the promising possibilities for students when leaders and community members envision more global practices that support the entire community, such as increasing opportunities for adult workshops, family health clinics, and youth violence prevention efforts. Therefore, interpretations of this study are limited solely to the impact that Title 1 schools can have.

Finally, while I took steps to ensure that these findings are credible and trustworthy, my role as the researcher cannot be forgotten. I am an active practitioner who grapples with improving schools' effectiveness daily. I have spent many years working in and with Title 1 schools that demonstrated, what I believed to be positive practices which were often not captured in their accountability report cards. To monitor my beliefs and potential biases, I kept a reflective journal throughout the study and wrote analytical memos after transcribing all of the data. Additionally, I shared all of the details of my case study protocol, including the questions I designed

to structure principal interviews and teacher focus-groups. Importantly, the design and analysis of this study was heavily informed by a large body of research around effective schools (Au et al., 2008; Bryk, 2010; Sebastian et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2003), as well as theory and research into how culture influences schools (Ritchhart, 2015), and how perceptions of efficacy contribute to a school's ability to foster student achievement (Bandura, 1993). As a researcher, I took steps to include details from multiple examples of school-wide practices, further increasing the transferability of sharing *how* effective schools enact school-wide practices that promote efficacy.

Implications for Future Research

Perhaps most important, findings from this qualitative study of four effective Title 1 schools were consistent with those reported in a recent study titled, *Principal Efficacy Beliefs for Instructional Leadership and their Relation to Teachers' Sense of Collective Efficacy and Student Achievement* (Goddard, Bailes, and Kim, 2020). The purpose of this quantitative study was to measure the impacts of school principals' sense of efficacy for instructional improvement. Data was collected from 95 schools in one Midwestern state, and using a scale to measure principal's efficacy as well as a scale for teacher efficacy, correlations were conducted on the relationship between principal efficacy and teacher efficacy as well as the relationship to student achievement. Their findings suggested principals' efficacy beliefs positively influenced teachers' efficacy beliefs which, indirectly, influenced student achievement. Notably, the authors write, "To our knowledge, these are the first results to find evidence of a marginally significant indirect link between principal efficacy beliefs and student achievement..." (Goddard et al., p.18). The authors recommend

further research to confirm and understand this relationship. Thus, my study provides additional insights into how future research involving the efficacy of school leaders might be conceptualized and designed to support learning in this field.

In particular, my study proposes a new hypothetical model of three interconnected levels of efficacy that are likely to play a role in positively influencing student achievement in Title 1 schools. This hypothetical model attempts to capture the complex nature of how self-efficacy can grow among students, teachers, and the collective school community as educators make decisions and interact with each other to promote a culture of student success. Now, additional research is needed to further explore the three propositions stemming from this model as well as how these practices work together to influence culture and efficacy in effective schools. Possible studies should explore effective school-wide practices across schools in different contexts and communities. This study was conducted with four Title 1 schools, and while the size of the districts varied, relative to large districts in the United States, they were all fairly small, with the largest district in this study serving just over 10,000 students. Findings from schools situated in larger districts and in different states will increase educators and policymakers' understandings of the roles that districts and states play in supporting school-wide practices that foster efficacy. Additionally, by using this new hypothetical model to compare practices of effective Title 1 schools with practices of Title 1 schools that have lower achievement scores, additional studies can strengthen our understanding of the interconnected relationship of efficacy and school achievement across different contexts. Furthermore, the information in Tables 12, 13, 14, and 15 could be used to create survey questions

allowing for a much larger sample size, providing quantitative data on a larger scale from which to make generalizations to inform educational policy intended to improve school quality.

Concluding Thoughts

The dedicated professionals who participated in this study of effective Title 1 schools shared that “*It takes a village to raise a child.*” As that African proverb suggests, education requires people in communities to work collaboratively to build relationships and include children in experiences that will help them grow in positive ways. These educators worked daily to ensure that their “village” provided efficacious learning experiences for learners of all ages. Unfortunately, recommended practices from previous research that outlines what works in individual classrooms is not transferring to the decisions and designs to ensure equity within schools. Moving forward, findings from this study provide a clearer picture of *how* to design schools using school-wide practices that promote efficacy for students, teachers, and the collective school community.

APPENDICES
Appendix A
Principal Consent Form

THE
UNIVERSITY
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IRB
Consent Form for Research

Julie Coiro, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Wendy Amelotte, Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education
Literacy and Leadership Practices in Effective Schools

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STUDY TITLE

Examining the Literacy and Leadership Practices of Effective Schools.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Principal Investigator: Julie Coiro, Ph.D. Office: (401) 874-4872 Email: jcoiro@uri.edu

Secondary Investigator: Wendy Amelotte, Ph.D. candidate Cell: (401) 644-6708

Email: wkamelotte@gmail.com

You are being invited to take part in a research project described below. The researcher will explain the project to you in detail. You should feel free to ask questions. If you have more questions later, Julie Coiro, the person mainly responsible for this study (401-874-4872, jcoiro@uri.edu), will discuss them with you.

Description of the project:

You are being invited to participate in a study designed to explore how principals and teachers have brought effective practices to life in schools and classrooms.

Key Information:

- An interview, done virtually, lasting about one hour

Cont. Appendix A

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

IRB Consent Form for Research

Julie Coiro, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Wendy Amelotte, Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education
Literacy and Leadership Practices in Effective Schools

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- A request of any documents that might help describe your school, i.e. master schedules, vision statements, or school newsletters.
- Information in this study remains confidential
- All data will be collected by June 30, 2020
- You may quit this study at anytime

What will be done:

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview lasting approximately one hour. The interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you and will be conducted via Zoom, a virtual meeting computer application interface. The researcher will also ask that you share documents that help describe the school community and actions that the school has taken to be effective. Examples might be master schedules, school handbook, agenda from a curriculum meeting, or a school communication to families. The interview will be recorded using the Zoom recording feature. Throughout the study, you may choose not to answer any questions and may refuse to complete any portions of the research for any reason. Data collection will not extend past this current school year and will end by June 30, 2020.

Risks or discomfort:

There are no anticipate risks or discomforts associated with this study other than you may not wish to answer a particular question. However, you may refuse to answer any question you do not wish to answer.

Confidentiality:

Your part in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name, nor will it identify your school or district. You will choose a pseudonym on all data. All transcripts and shared documents will be kept in a password-protected computer or locked file cabinet in the researcher's locked office at the University of Rhode Island. Audio recordings will be erased once transcribed. Identifiable data will only be made public with participant signed consent.

Decision to quit at any time:

The decision to take part in this study is up to you. You do not have to participate. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize you. If you wish to quit, simply inform Wendy Amelotte (401-644-6708, wkamelotte@ gmail.com) of your decision.

Cont. Appendix A

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

**IRB
Consent Form for Research**

Julie Coiro, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Wendy Amelotte, Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education
Literacy and Leadership Practices in Effective Schools

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Rights and Complaints:

If you are not satisfied with the way this study is performed, you may discuss your complaints with Julie Coiro, anonymously, if you choose. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island: (401-874-4328) or the International Review Board: (401) 874-4328 / researchintegrity@etal.uri.edu.

You have read the Consent Form. Your questions have been answered. Your oral agreement means that you understand the information and you agree to participate in this study.

_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature of Researcher and Person Obtaining Oral Consent
_____	_____
Participant Consent: Yes	Typed/printed name
_____	_____
Date	Date
Your agreement to participate below means that you agree to allow your interview to be recorded	
_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature of Researcher
_____	_____
Typed/printed Name	Typed/printed name
_____	_____
Date	Date

Please sign both consent forms, keeping one for yourself.

Appendix B Teacher Consent Form

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

IRB
Consent Form for Research

Julie Coiro, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Wendy Amelotte, Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education
Literacy and Leadership Practices in Effective Schools

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STUDY TITLE

Examining the Literacy and Leadership Practices of Effective Schools.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Principal Investigator: Julie Coiro, Ph.D. Office: (401) 874-4872 Email: jcoiro@uri.edu
Secondary Investigator: Wendy Amelotte, Ph.D. candidate Cell: (401) 644-6708
Email: wkamelotte@gmail.com

You are being invited to take part in a research project described below. The researcher will explain the project to you in detail. You should feel free to ask questions. If you have more questions later, Julie Coiro, the person mainly responsible for this study (401-874-4872 jcoiro@uri.edu), will discuss them with you.

Description of the project:

You are being invited to participate in a study designed to explore how principals and teachers have brought effective practices to life in schools and classrooms.

Key Information:

- A virtual focus group lasting between 40-60 minutes
- A request of any documents that might help describe your school, i.e. master schedules, vision statements, or school newsletters.
- Information in this study remains confidential
- All data will be collected by June 30, 2020
- You may quit this study at anytime

What will be done:

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group lasting approximately one hour. The focus group will be scheduled at a time that is most convenient for the group and will be conducted via Zoom, a virtual meeting computer application interface. The researcher will also ask that you share documents that help describe the school community and actions that the school has taken to be effective. Examples might be common plan time minutes or a school communication to families. The focus group will be recorded

Julie Coiro, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
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School of Education
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using the Zoom platform. The researcher will ask up to three participants from the focus group to also agree to have their classroom be observed. The observation will be scheduled at a time that is preferred for the teacher and when English Language Arts standards are being taught. At the end of the classroom observation, a \$50.00 gift card will be offered for your efforts. Throughout the study, you may choose not to answer any questions and may refuse to complete any portions of the research for any reason. Data collection will not extend past this current school year and will end by June 30, 2020.

Risks or discomfort:

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with this study other than you may not wish to answer a particular question. However, you may refuse to answer any question you do not wish to answer.

Confidentiality:

Your part in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name, nor will it identify your school or district. You will choose a pseudonym on all data. All transcripts and shared documents will be kept in a password-protected computer or locked file cabinet in the researcher's locked office at the University of Rhode Island. Audio recordings will be erased once transcribed. Identifiable data will only be made public with participant signed consent.

Decision to quit at any time:

The decision to take part in this study is up to you. You do not have to participate. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize you. If you wish to quit, simply inform Wendy Amelotte (401-644-6708, wkamelotte@gmail.com) of your decision.

Rights and Complaints:

If you are not satisfied with the way this study is performed, you may discuss your complaints with Julie Coiro, anonymously, if you choose. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island: (401-874-4328) or the International Review Board: (401) 874-4328 / researchintegrity@etal.uri.edu.

Cont. Appendix B

**THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND**

**IRB
Consent Form for Research**

Julie Coiro, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Wendy Amelotte, Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education
Literacy and Leadership Practices in Effective Schools

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You have read the Consent Form. Your questions have been answered. Your agreement to join the meeting and oral confirmation means that you understand the information and you agree to participate in this study.

Participant provided verbal consent: YES

Person Obtaining Verbal Consent:

Print Name

Signature of Person Obtaining Verbal Consent

Your oral agreement means that you agree to allow your interview to be recorded.

Name of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Typed/printed Name

Typed/printed name

Date

Date

Cont. Appendix C

instruction. All activities will be scheduled at times most optimal for the school.

Where and When: The research will be conducted in the three Rhode Island elementary schools between January 2019 – June 2019.

How long: Principal Interview: approximately 60 minutes; Teacher Focus Group: approximately 60 minutes

Compensation: Refreshments will be provided during the focus groups.

Benefits: You and your school will receive a descriptive report at the end of the study with insights gained across all three schools. Your experiences will also be used to increase Rhode Island's understanding of the ways that effective schools operate, which will help educators bring effective practices into their unique contexts.

Interested?

Contact Wendy Amelotte, a doctoral student in the School of Education at URI:
wkamelotte@gmail.com

Appendix D
Principal Interview Questions

Instructions

The purpose of this interview is to gather information about your experience as the principal of the school, and to gain insight into any of the instructional practices or organizational decisions that support the high levels of student achievement that your school has attained. All questions have been developed by the researcher.

1. Background Information: <i>Please tell us a little about yourself as an educator.</i>		
1	Can you tell me briefly about your career in education?	<i>Getting started</i>
2	How long have you been the principal of this school?	<i>Getting started</i>
3	What is your teaching philosophy?	<i>Getting started/ Vision</i>
4	Can you tell me about your vision for your school?	<i>Vision</i>
2. School Context: <i>Please tell me a little about your school and how it is organized within the district.</i>		
5	Can you tell me about your relationship with district administration?	<i>Vision</i>
6	Can you explain the budget process for your school? Backup: Do you have funds to support the initiatives that your school has determined important? How are funding decisions made for new initiatives?	<i>Vision</i>
7	Has the district done anything specific to support student achievement at your school?	<i>Vision/ Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice</i>
8	What learning communities or professional development opportunities have you been active in over the last few years? Backup: How, if at all, has the district supported your growth as a leader?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice</i>
3. School Context: <i>Please tell me a little about the population of students and families that you serve.</i>		

Cont. Appendix D

9	Can you describe the relationship that your school has with families? Backup: How do you share information to families about their child's learning and school events?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice/ Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
10	Can you describe the relationship that your school has with the community?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice/ Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
11	How, if at all, do you feel your needs as a school differ being a school-wide Title 1 school?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice/ Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
12	What would you describe as a strength of your school community as a whole? Is there anything you would wish for in this regard?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice/ Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
4. Instructional Practices: <i>Please tell me about the teaching practices and curriculum at your school.</i>		
13	Can you describe what kind of teaching and learning you would like to see happening in classrooms? Backup: How, if at all, is this vision shared by your staff?	<i>Vision/ Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
14	Can you describe your involvement with the instructional practices of the school?	<i>Vision/ Collaborative School Community and Professional Capacity/ Student-centered Learning Climate</i>
15	Can you explain how curriculum and materials are selected?	<i>Vision</i>
16	How does your school monitor student learning?	<i>Deliberate Use of Data</i>
17	How does your school support struggling readers?	<i>Deliberate Use of Data / Student Centered Learning Climate</i>

Cont. Appendix D

18	Why do you think that your school was so successful on the statewide ELA assessment?	<i>Possible link to any/all identified themes</i>
19	Can you tell me about literacy instruction at your school?	<i>Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
20	Can you tell me about science and social studies instruction at your school?	<i>Student Centered Learning Climate</i>

Appendix E Teacher Focus Group Questions

Instructions:

The purpose of this focus group is to gather information about your experiences as teachers and to gain insight into any of the instructional practices or organizational decisions that support the high levels of student achievement that your school has attained.

Guidelines:

Introduce myself and explain that I am doing research on the practices of effective schools. This session will be recorded, but no names will be used. This is a discussion; therefore, agreement does not have to be reached about the questions that I ask. There are no right or wrong opinions, as everyone is entitled to their point of view. Please be open about your experiences and opinions, as I want to hear it all. Only I will have access to the recording.

I ask that you keep the information that others shared confidential.

(All questions have been developed by the researcher. Primary Questions are marked with a designation of an asterisk (*); all other questions have been developed as additional questions intended to be used if a follow-up question is needed.)

1. Background Information: <i>Please tell us a little about yourself as an educator and the school.</i>		
1*	Can you tell me how long you have been in education, and how long at this school?	<i>Getting started</i>
2*	In a word, how would you describe the school?	<i>Getting started</i>
3*	In a sentence how would you describe your teaching philosophy?	<i>Getting started/ Vision</i>
2. School Context: <i>Please tell me a little about your school and how it is organized.</i>		
4*	Can you tell me about your relationship with the principal?	<i>Vision/ Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice/Leadership</i>
5*	How, if at all, does the principal support student achievement at your school?	<i>Vision/ Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice/ Leadership</i>
6*	What is the vision of the school?	<i>Vision/Leadership</i>

Cont. Appendix E

7*	What is one of the best things about working at this school?	<i>Possible link to any/all identified themes</i>
8*	What is something that you would change about working at this school?	<i>Possible link to any/all identified themes</i>
3. School Context: <i>Please tell me a little about the population of students and families that you serve.</i>		
10*	Can you describe the relationship that your school has with families? Backup: How do you share information to families about their child's learning and school events?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice/ Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
11*	How, if at all, do you feel your needs as a school differ being a school-wide Title 1 school?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice/ Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
12	What would you describe as a strength of your school community?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Practice/ Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
4. Instructional Practices: <i>Please tell me about the teaching practices and curriculum at your school.</i>		
13	Can you describe what kind of teaching and learning you would like to see happening in classrooms?	<i>Vision/ Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
14*	Can you explain how curriculum and materials are selected?	<i>Vision</i>
15*	How does your school monitor student learning? Backup: Do you do anything additional in your classroom?	<i>Deliberate Use of Data</i>
16*	How does your school support struggling readers?	<i>Deliberate Use of Data / Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
17*	Why do you think that your school was so successful on the statewide ELA assessment?	<i>Possible link to any/all identified themes</i>

Cont. Appendix E

18*	Can you tell me about literacy instruction at your school?	<i>Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
19*	Can you tell me about science and social studies instruction at your school?	<i>Student Centered Learning Climate</i>
20	What kinds of challenges and barriers have you encountered to improve student achievement?	<i>Possible link to any/all identified themes</i>
21	How have you addressed these challenges?	<i>Possible link to any/all identified themes</i>
4. Professional Development: <i>Please tell me about the professional development activities at the school.</i>		
22*	Please describe the type of professional development you have received related to literacy? Backup: Have you received any other professional development that you believe contributes to your student achievement?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Capacity</i>
23	Can you describe teacher collaboration at your school, including how often teachers plan together? Backup: Is there anything specific to your daily or weekly schedule that supports you having time to meet with colleagues?	<i>Collaborative School Community and Professional Capacity/ Deliberate Use of Data</i>
Wrap-Up		
24*	Is there anything else that you would like to add?	<i>Possible link to any/all identified themes</i>
25*	Do you have any questions?	
Follow-Up: Thank you so much for participating!		
26*	Please do not hesitate to follow-up if you think of anything later. If we have some follow-up questions later, what is the best way to contact you?	

Appendix F Personal Introduction

Hi All,

Thank you for taking the time to read this and please have lunch on me! I truly recognize the stress that emergency remote learning has brought to educators and families. My name is Wendy Amelotte, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the URI/RIC program.



I have been in education for over twenty years and feel that schools are a critical factor for so many children. My dissertation is examining the literacy practices in effective schools, to help others understand how to support children, especially children from families who are economically disadvantaged. After talking to some educators at Stadium, I believe that you may share insights that will help other educators and students!

I am hoping that you would be willing to spend about an hour talking to me about Stadium, as it was one of the most effective elementary schools in the state last year!

Unfortunately, I was hoping to meet in person, but of all the challenges balancing school, work and my family over the last four years, I never anticipated this unfortunate scenario. I am attaching two possible times that may work for you to join a focus group of educators from your school using a Zoom platform. You would only need to attend one meeting. I am attaching two possible times that may work for you to join a focus group of educators from your school using a Zoom platform. You would only need to attend one meeting.

The first is Monday, June 1st at 2:30 pm, and here is the [information](#) to join.

The second is Thursday, June 4th at 2:30 pm, and here is the [information](#) to join

While I cannot offer refreshments virtually, I want to thank you for your time and offer you a **\$15 Panera gift card to enjoy lunch** at a later time.

Please email me if you are able to attend or have any questions, wkamelotte@gmail.com

This information will be kept confidential and your participation is completely voluntary.

Thanks again,
Wendy

APPENDIX G

**QUESTIONS FROM SURVEYWORKS SCHOOL RIGOROUS
EXPECTATIONS**

Grades 3-5

Question	Response Options				
How often do your teachers make you explain your answers?	Almost never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
When you feel like giving up, how likely is it that your teachers will make you keep trying?	Not at all likely	Slightly likely	Somewhat likely	Quite likely	Extremely likely
How much do your teachers encourage you to do your best?	Do not encourage me at all	Encourage me a little	Encourage me some	Encourage me quite a bit	Encourage me a tremendous amount
How often do your teachers take time to make sure you understand the material?	Almost never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
Overall, how high are your teachers' expectations of you?	Not high at all	Slightly high	Somewhat high	Quite high	Extremely high

From Panorama Education. (2019). *User guide Panorama student survey*.
<https://panoramaed.com>

APPENDIX H

QUESTIONS FROM SURVEYWORKS SCHOOL TEACHER-STUDENT

RELATIONSHIPS

Grades 3-5

Question	Response Options				
How respectful are your teachers towards you?	Not at all respectful	Slightly respectful	Somewhat respectful	Quite respectful	Extremely respectful
If you walked into class upset, how concerned would your teachers be?	Not at all concerned	Slightly concerned	Somewhat concerned	Quite concerned	Extremely concerned
When your teacher asks, "how are you?", how often do you feel that your teachers really want to know your answer?	Almost never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
How excited would you be to have your teachers again?	Not at all excited	Slightly excited	Somewhat excited	Quite excited	Extremely excited

From Panorama Education. (2019). *User guide Panorama student survey*.
<https://panoramaed.com>

APPENDIX I

QUESTIONS FROM SURVEYWORKS SCHOOL CLIMATE

Grades 3-5

Question	Response Options						
How often do your teachers seem excited to be teaching your classes?	Almost never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always		
How fair or unfair are the rules for the students at this school?	Very unfair	Somewhat unfair	Slightly unfair	Neither unfair nor fair	Slightly fair	Somewhat fair	Very fair
How positive or negative is the energy of the school?	Very negative	Somewhat negative	Slightly negative	Neither negative nor positive	Slightly positive	Somewhat positive	Very positive
At your school, how much does the behavior of other students hurt or help your learning?	Hurts my learning a tremendous amount	Hurts my learning some	Hurts my learning a little bit	Neither helps nor hurts my learning	Helps my learning a little bit	Helps my learning some	Helps my learning a tremendous amount

From Panorama Education. (2019). *User guide Panorama student survey*.
<https://panoramaed.com>

APPENDIX J

QUESTIONS FROM SURVEYWORKS SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Grades 3-5

Question	Response Options				
How excited are you about going to your classes?	Not at all excited	Slightly excited	Somewhat excited	Quite excited	Extremely excited
How focused are you on the activities in your classes?	Not at all focused	Slightly focused	Somewhat focused	Quite focused	Extremely focused
In your classes, how excited are you to participate?	Not at all excited	Slightly excited	Somewhat excited	Quite excited	Extremely excited
When you are not in school, how often do you talk about ideas from your classes?	Almost never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
How interested are you in your classes?	Not at all interested	Slightly interested	Somewhat interested	Quite interested	Extremely interested

From Panorama Education. (2019). *User guide Panorama student survey*.
<https://panoramaed.com>

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