Successful CAHSEE Scores: The Role and Responsibilities of School Site Leaders

by

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Successful CAHSEE Scores: The Role and Responsibilities of

School Site Leaders

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DEDICATION

To God from whom all blessings flow. Thank you for never forsaking me and always reassuring me with your words – “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11). To my beautiful wife Yovana and adorable son Chase, who have been my rock and constant companion throughout this doctoral program. Your calm and loving spirit provided me with a sense of peace. To my sister, an entrepreneur and risk-taker; thank you for your love and support. To my parents, for your sacrifice, unconditional love, instilling in me the importance of education, to never settle for second best, and relentlessly pursuing all available tools to prepare me for this journey. To my mother, my cheerleader, my inspiration, who encouraged me to never settle for mediocrity; To my father, for modeling each and every day what it means to be a God-fearing man, husband, father, and provider; who is always there for me.
ABSTRACT

Secondary school principals in California face increased pressure to ensure students will successfully complete the math portion of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). Passage of the test is a graduation requirement. Also, student passage rates are included in school accountability profiles. While the responsibility for passing high school exit exams inevitably falls on the individual student, principals are responsible for improving and sustaining the achievement of their students on these exams. With the high stakes associated with high school exit exams, principals are expected to influence high passage rates and high graduation rates.

This qualitative case study investigated how school administrators and their staff in one Southern California charter high school endeavored to ensure that their students; including a high percentage of Black and Hispanic students passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE on the first administration.

Considerable attention has been paid to the leadership of principals and their impact on student achievement. This study more specifically examined the leaders’ roles in developing and promoting success in mathematics for Black and Hispanic high school students. The qualitative study examined one urban charter high school in Southern California in which high percentages of Black and Hispanic students passed the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) on the first administration. In particular, the study examined how the administrators influenced changes that resulted in strong math performances for these two demographic groups of students.

To better understand the administration’s role in promoting the successful performance of students who passed the math portion of the CAHSEE, interviews were
conducted with three administrators, four teachers, including the math department chair, a support teacher, and a focus group consisting of 11 students who passed the CAHSEE on the first attempt of the purposefully selected public charter high school.

The results of the qualitative study (FCHS), indicated that principal leadership, behavior, and their practices play a significant role in student achievement.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighing the Merits of High School Exit Exams</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California High School Exit Exam</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Leadership</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Problem</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass Rate Gap between White and Minority Students</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of the CAHSEE on Subgroups</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Not Learning the Skills Assessed</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Impact of Academically Unprepared Students</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Methodology</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the Study</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons Many High School Students Are Unprepared for College and Careers</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Student Preparation for College Level Mathematics</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement Loss Associated with the Transition between Elementary,</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle, and High School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Alignment between High School and Post-Secondary Education</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Expectations</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training and Instruction</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Principal Leadership on Student Achievement</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal, Teacher, and Student Support</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo Creek Elementary School</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Models and Principal’s Leadership</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotter’s Change Theory</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewin’s Change Theory</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns-Based Adoption Model</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First and Second-Order Change</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional and Transformational Leadership Style and Change</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional Leadership</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Leadership and Shared Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Empowerment</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAHSEE Intervention Programs</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3—METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Research Questions</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Significance</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site and Sample Selection</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group and Interviews</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Methods</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and Validity</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizations/Limitations</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Further Research</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4—RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RESULTS</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Selected Site and Participants</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator 1</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator 2</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator 3</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4/Student Support</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essence of Rigor</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching and Mentoring</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stamina</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in Culture: Personal Relationships</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students as the Center of Focus</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships of Equal Voice</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Expectations</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom to Collaborate to Improve Instruction</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-Taking</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal Administrator/Teacher/Student Learning</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Capacity</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5—SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Problem</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 189

APPENDICES

A  Sample Lesson Plan ........................................................................................................ 208
B  IRB Permission Consent Letters .................................................................................. 212
C  Interview Questions ........................................................................................................ 215
D  Certificate of Transcript ................................................................................................. 222
E  Franklin Charter High School CAHSEE Results Compared to District, County, and State Results .................................................................................................................. 223
F  A Structure to Instruction that Works ............................................................................. 224
G  Franklin Charter High School Expectations .................................................................. 225
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Seven Stages of Concern with Corresponding Expressions of Concern Outlining CBAM .......................................................... 54

Table 2. Leadership for Second-Order Change and Correlation between 21 Responsibilities ..................................................... 58

Table 3. Comparable CAHSEE Passing Rates for FCHS, District, County, and California .............................................................................. 113
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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

A vision without a plan is just a dream. A plan without a vision is just drudgery. But a vision with a plan can change the world.

-R. J. Marzano, T. Waters, & B. A. McNulty

The mission of the public school system is to ensure all students have the requisite skills for college and the workforce (Ali & Jenkins, 2002). Schools face a demand from employers, universities, and the general public to produce high school graduates who possess the skills to obtain post-secondary credentials, navigate through society, and compete in the 21st century job market. A study conducted by the Arkansas State Department of Education (2006) found that a majority of employers in Arkansas report that less than half of recent high school graduates who apply for jobs with their company lack the basic acceptable writing and math skills.

In California, schools face pressure to improve the learning results of Hispanics and African Americans. This is due in part to the fact that in the year 2000, 75% of African Americans and 80% of Hispanic high school graduates failed to meet admissions criteria for the University of California (UC) or the California State University (CSU) system (Ali & Jenkins, 2002; California Department of Education, 2006a). Nationally, 25.7% of African Americans and 22.8% of Hispanic students are enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum (Ali & Jenkins, 2002).

To address the need for better student performance, many states have developed exit exams that have required students to pass those exams in order to obtain a high school diploma (Katz & Murphy, 1992; Zau & Betts, 2008). Jacob (2001) explained that “The exit exams are generally criterion-referenced exams that focus on basic reading and
Unfortunately, large numbers of students are not passing high school exit exams. Failure is problematic for students, schools, and for society in general (Center on Education Policy, 2003).

In several states across the nation, high school students must pass an exit examination in order to graduate from high school. In California, students must pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). Student and school accountability provisions attached to exit exam passage rates push principals to maximize efforts to improve student performance on these tests, especially when students fail on the first attempt. The percentage rates of Black and Hispanic students who pass the exit exams is at a lower level compared to White and Asian students. This adversely influences graduation rates for Black and Hispanic students. Also, this adversely influences school accountability ratings that consider the scores of each racial/ethnic group of students.

Although the Center on Education Policy reports the failure rate, some schools and districts are succeeding at getting Black and Hispanic students to pass the exit exams; yet, there has not been sufficient rigorous study of the practices leaders have put in place to influence such improvement. Nor has there been sufficient study of how leaders have managed to bring about these changes. This study investigated how one public charter high school principal in Southern California initiated, promoted, and sustained change that resulted in successful interventions that ensured students passed the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) on the first administration.

**Background**

In this era of increased accountability (as evidenced by public demand for stringent graduation requirements that better predict preparedness for college and careers, attention to significant variations in state, student, and school achievement, the push for
core national standards, and growing pressure from business leaders) the California Department of Education created the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) to bolster the academic performance of public high school students in the areas of mathematics, reading, and writing (California Department of Education, 2006b). The CAHSEE was first mandated as a graduation requirement for the class of 2006. Students in this class could not receive their high school diplomas unless they passed both the math and English sections of the test, even if they met all graduation requirements outlined by the California Department of Education (California Department of Education, 2006a).

**Weighing the Merits of High School Exit Exams**

State Departments of Education are weighing the advantages for instituting exams like the CAHSEE. As students make the transition from high school to college and the workforce, higher education institutions and employers are growing increasingly skeptical about the value of the high school diploma and whether students have attained the knowledge base needed to succeed in college and compete in the 21st century job market (Achieve, Inc., 2005). In response, states have enacted exit exams as a requirement for high school graduation. In California, students must be able to demonstrate, through their performance on the CAHSEE, minimum competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. These requirements set higher standards for high school graduation while holding school systems and students more accountable for meeting the state’s academic standards (Reardon & Kurlaender, 2009).

There is much debate about the value of exit exams, their impact, as well as their ability to assess student achievement accurately. As part of the minimum competency
testing (MCT) movement of the 1970’s, the exams were implemented to test students’ basic reading and math skills. Proponents claim these exams identify student weaknesses and strengths, promote improvements in student achievement and school performance, clearly define goals and expectations, and legitimize the high school diploma (Jacob, 2001). When the passage of an exit exam is a graduation requirement, the diploma signifies to employers and institutions of higher learning that the graduate possesses a level of basic skills.

Opponents of high school graduation exit exams raise concerns. One of which is that the tests are ineffective in raising students’ skills and academic achievement (Jacob, 2001). Catterall (1987) found that exit exams have minimal effect on high-achieving students who are taking advanced courses and are expected to pass the exam easily. In fact, the general student population is marginally impacted because most exit exams assess students on basic eighth and ninth grade skills (Jacob, 2001).

For example, students subject to the CAHSEE may not be motivated to work any harder in the eleventh and twelfth grade because the exit exam does not assess those grade-level standards. One might conclude that students required to take the CAHSEE are not required to learn more than earlier cohorts of students who were not subject to exit exams because the exit exams do not assess eleventh and twelfth grade standards (Reardon & Kurlaender, 2009).

Scant evidence suggests the CAHSEE improves students’ academic performance. Reardon and Kurlaender’s (2009) findings suggested that the CAHSEE requirement has failed to raise student achievement based on California’s grade-level standards. For example, students who were subject to the CAHSEE; particularly low-achieving students
whom the CAHSEE may have motivated to work harder in school, learned no more between 10th and 12th grade than similar students who were not required to pass the CAHSEE. Instead Reardon and Kurlaender (2009) found that the CAHSEE disproportionately impacts minority students and students in the bottom achievement quartile. Such findings should spur researchers and principals to investigate the appropriate interventions that will assist students to pass the CAHSEE.

Critics warn that the advent of graduation exams has led to the narrowing of the curriculum at the expense of higher order thinking skills, while increasing the dropout rate (Airasian, 1987; Airasian & Madaus, 1983; Archer & Dresden, 1987; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1987; Serow, 1984). A study of 1,200 California students conducted by MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, and Hemsley (1990) found a correlation between students who were classified as learning disabled and/or exhibiting low achievement levels, failing the high school exit exam, and dropping out of high school. Additionally, Catterall (1987) discovered that students who initially failed the high school exit exam are less inclined to complete school.

Jacob (2001) found that students who were required to take an exit exam have a 10.1% chance of dropping out of high school by their senior year, as opposed to 8.5% for students who are not subject to exit exams. Moreover, Jacob (2001) found that “high school exit exams will indeed primarily impact low-achieving students who disproportionately come from economically disadvantaged and racial minority groups” (p. 117). In fact, bottom quintile students in states that have exit exams as a graduation requirement are 25% more likely to drop out of high school than bottom quintile students in non-exit test states (Jacob, 2001).
California High School Exit Exam

The purpose of the CAHSEE exam was to ensure that California students were held to high standards and that graduates mastered minimum basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics (Zau & Betts, 2008). Results from the exam are also used to make school accountability determinations, as required by the No Child Left Behind Act (Zau & Betts, 2008). The CAHSEE results serve as an accountability measure to ensure that increasingly large percentages of high school students have mastered at least basic skills (Zau & Betts, 2008).

The exit test graduation requirement for California seniors was enacted in 1999 by the California state legislature. The legislature’s intent was to hold students to high standards and ensure that students possess minimum basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. The California State Board of Education required the class of 2006 to pass the CAHSEE to graduate from high school.

The CAHSEE includes two assessments; English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The ELA section assesses students on 10th grade-level standards (and below) and includes 79 multiple-choice questions, along with a 2 ½ page essay based on a prompt. The CAHSEE is scored on a scale from 275 to 450, and students must earn a minimum score of 350 points on each exit exam to earn their high school diploma (Reardon & Kurlaender, 2009). The mathematics section consists of 92 multiple-choice questions based on state content standards in grades six and seven, as well as Algebra I. Students take the assessment for the first time in their sophomore year. Students who fail to meet the passing score may retake the section(s) of the CAHSEE they have failed (Reardon & Kurlaender, 2009; Zau & Betts, 2008).
Due to the high stakes of the CAHSEE for seniors, in the spring of 2006 the courts debated whether to cancel the exam. A lawsuit was filed in Alameda County Superior Court, in which the plaintiff, Valenzuela, sued the State Superintendent of Education, Jack O’Connell (Valenzuela v. O’Connell) claiming that students were required to know CAHSEE standards despite the fact that they had not been taught the material and that their teachers lacked the proper credentials to teach. In May 2006, the judge agreed with the plaintiffs and ruled in their favor. However, the California Department of Education filed an appeal and won a stay, paving the way for the California State Board of Education to require the class of 2006 to pass the CAHSEE to graduate from high school (Zau & Betts, 2008).

**Principal Leadership**

Principals have to shoulder the responsibility of getting their students to attain established benchmarks in core academic subjects such as mathematics and English language arts. Administrators play a key role in promoting student learning. A growing body of evidence suggests that there is a correlation between a principals’ leadership and students’ academic performance (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Empirical research shows that a principal’s ability to promote school wide learning accounts for 25% of student academic performance (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Hallinger and Heck (1996) investigated the indirect effects of a principals’ leadership on student learning. They found a small but significant direct effect of a principal’s efforts on improved learning climate, as well as a moderate indirect effect of principals’ instructional efforts on student learning outcomes. Hallinger and Heck (1996) concluded that a principal’s ability to influence student learning encompasses
collaboration, high expectations for all stakeholders, teacher professional development, and the allocation of resources.

Too many students are not passing high school exit exams, especially in mathematics. This is problematic because students need to learn the mathematics content in order to perform well in college and careers. It is also problematic, because exit exam failure increases the likelihood that students will drop out of school (Reardon & Kurlaender, 2009). The problem is most acute for Black and Hispanic students.

**Significance of the Problem**

The urgency to produce high school graduates who know more is based, largely on employers’ needs for a workforce with more advanced skills (The Education Trust-West, 2010). American students lack the skills to take advantage of 21st century opportunities (ACT, Inc., 2009a). For example, a study of graduates interested in high-growth fields such as management and marketing revealed that 27% of those students met the science requirement for the College Readiness Benchmark (ACT, Inc., 2009b). For those same students seeking to enter the field of education, 36% of ACT-tested graduates met the College Readiness Benchmark for mathematics (ACT, Inc., 2009b).

**Pass Rate Gap between White and Minority Students**

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) (2003) produced a report entitled “State high school exams: Put to the test,” which revealed that there were significant gaps between White students and African Americans, Hispanics, and English language learners on high school exit exams. Consideration of the 12 states upon which the report was based, the disaggregated performance data revealed that African Americans, Hispanics, and English language learners experienced lower passing rates than White students in reading and math.
In Georgia, the pass rate gap in mathematics between White and Black students was 17% and 9% for Hispanic students. For English language learners the difference in the pass rate in comparison to their White counterparts was 26% on the math test and 49% on the English language arts test.

In the state of Massachusetts, the gap in the pass rate between White and Black students, White and Hispanic students; and White and ELL was just as pronounced in comparison to other states. White students outperformed Blacks by 36% on the math test and 28% on the English/language arts test. For Hispanic and ELL the gap was approximately 41% on the math test. The cumulative pass rate (the percentage of students who eventually pass the exit exam by the time of their graduation) in the aforementioned states revealed that there were still substantial gaps in the pass rates between White students and Blacks, ELL, and Hispanics.

According to the report from the Center of Education Policy (2003) in the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) the passage rate gap was just as disconcerting. White students in the class of 2008 had a passage rate of 84.2%, whereas compared to 47.4% for Black students. Hispanic students had a passage rate of 47.7% and only 16.4% of ELL students passed. From 2006 to 2008 the pass rate gap for SDUSD students at the end of grade 10 remained relatively unchanged. The pass rate gap between White and Blacks over three years decreased by 1.1%. Between White and Hispanic students the pass rate gap decreased by 3.5%. Additionally, the pass rate gap between Whites and ELL students decreased by 2.3%. In the class of 2006 one in 10 California students (41,758) failed the CAHSEE and did not receive their high school diploma whether they met all other graduation requirements or not (California Department of Education,
In their analysis of CAHSEE failure rates in the San Diego Unified School District, Zau and Betts (2008) made the following determinations:

Officials estimated that regardless of the CAHSEE requirement, 40% to 80% of the students who failed the CAHSEE would not have received a high school diploma in June 2006 because they had not fulfilled the other requirements, including maintaining a grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.0, passing 44 credits, and finishing specific course sequences in math, science, and other areas. The implication is that the CAHSEE is a binding constraint on perhaps 2 to 6 percent of the district’s seniors. (Zau & Betts, 2008, p. 9)

The Impact of the CAHSEE on Subgroups

The passing rate on the CAHSEE for the class of 2006 initially was 90.4%. The passing rate rose to 90.7% in the spring of 2007. This leaves 9.3% of the student population who failed the CAHSEE. A closer examination of the CAHSEE failing rate revealed some sobering statistics for the students of San Diego Unified School District. For those students who failed to complete all graduation requirements by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, only a third of these students re-enrolled, leaving over 60% of the remaining students disengaged from the San Diego Unified School District. Of the students who re-enrolled in the 2006-2007 school year, 12.1% took the CAHSEE and 3.1% achieved a passing score. This low second-attempt pass rate poses a challenge to principals and their staffs, as they endeavor to exert their leadership to ensure students pass the CAHSEE, graduate from high school and expand their post-secondary opportunities (Zau & Betts, 2008).
Low-achieving students required to take the CAHSEE have a substantially lower graduation rate when compared to students who were not required to pass the exit exam to graduate from high school (Reardon & Kurlaender, 2009). In fact Reardon and Kurlaender (2009) found that the graduation rate of students in the bottom-quartile was 15 percentage points lower when subject to the CAHSEE requirement in comparison to similar students who were not subject to the exit exams.

A closer examination of the CAHSEE scores revealed that the exit exam disproportionately negatively impacted the graduation rates of female, African-American, Asian, and Hispanic students achieving in the bottom quartile and they experienced a lower passing rate than White students (California Department of Education, 2006a). In 2005, students identified in the bottom quartile and not subject to the CAHSEE requirement had a 50% graduation rate. For the class of 2006, which was required to pass the CAHSEE to graduate, the graduation rate was 35% (Reardon & Kurlaender, 2009). Reardon and Kurlaender (2009) also found that upon the implementation of the CAHSEE as a graduation requirement in 2006, minority students in the bottom achievement quartile experienced a 15% to 19% decrease in graduation rates, while White students in the same achievement band experienced no effect. Specifically, Black students in the bottom quartile, subject to the CAHSEE, were 19% less likely to graduate from high school. For Hispanic and Asian students subject to the CAHSEE, the graduation rate decreased by 15 and 18 percentage points respectively in comparison to similar achieving students in the class of 2005, who were not subject to the CAHSEE.

Female students in the bottom quartile experienced a 19% decrease in their graduation rate when subjected to the CAHSEE requirement. The negative impact of the
CAHSEE on low-achieving female students was twice as large when compared to their male counterparts. Dee and Jacob (2006) revealed that on average, states with exit exams experience an average graduation rate decrease of 2%, with minority students and low socio-economic students bearing the brunt of this impact.

Reardon and Kurlaender (2009) estimated that due to the CAHSEE, 3.6% to 4.5% (18,000-22,500 students per year) of all California high school students in each cohort, regardless of their academic achievement level will not graduate. A closer look at the statewide trends of the CAHSEE from 2005 to 2006 revealed that the class of 2006, which was subject to the CAHSEE saw their graduation rate decline by four percentage points in comparison to the class of 2005, which did not have to take the CAHSEE as a graduation requirement.

Kurlaender, Reardon, and Jackson (2008) found that a student’s performance in elementary and middle school is a strong indicator of their ability to pass the CAHSEE. In addition, Zau and Betts (2008) found that a student’s performance from grade 4 through middle school is as strong a predictor of passage on the CAHSEE as it is in grade 9. For example, student’s math test scores and their academic grade point average (GPA) in elementary and middle school are stronger predictors of a student’s success rate on the math portion of the CAHSEE than their math scores in high school. Kurlaender et al. (2008) recommended that in order to improve upon the CAHSEE performance of minority and female students, the state of California, in conjunction with local school districts and state agencies, must secure CAHSEE funding to target resources, innovations in interventions, and evaluation for low-achieving students prior to the 10th grade. The funding would help the students learn the skills assessed.
Impact of Not Learning the Skills Assessed

Students who lack the core courses required for college admission are at a competitive disadvantage for both post-secondary education and the workforce. The consequences of a low-level curriculum are far reaching, disadvantaging students within the college admission process and rendering them less competitive for the high skilled jobs characteristic of our current economy (Achieve, Inc., 2005).

In an era when technological change and increasing international competition have dramatically lowered the relative wages of less-skilled workers in the United States, a student who barely passes a high school exit exam pitched at the grade 8 level in math and the grade 10 level in English Language Arts would be foolish to think that such a minimal set of skills is insurance against the vagaries of the labor market. (Zau & Betts, 2008, p. xv)

High school graduates who do not possess high-level skills are less employable. The American Management Association (1999) found that the failure rates on employer-administered tests that measure the literacy and mathematics skills of potential employees have increased from 18.9% in 1996 to 35.5% in 1998. These failure rates are attributed to a workplace that is more and more technical and skill-driven, in which students are not prepared, given the low-rigor curricula in which a majority of high school graduates have been enrolled (Ali & Jenkins, 2002). The Arkansas Department of Education (2006) found:

High school graduates are not being prepared to succeed. There are gaps between the education received in high school and the overall skills, abilities and work habits needed for the demands of post-secondary education and the
workforce. Currently, as many as 39% of recent graduates now enrolled in college and 46% in the workforce say there were significant gaps in their preparation. Seventy-six percent of employers in Arkansas report that less than half of the recent high school graduates who apply for jobs in their company lack the necessary quality writing skills and the ability to do basic math. More than 60% of the employers are not satisfied with the ability of recent high school graduates to read and understand written instructions and materials. Raising academic standards and graduation requirements, building a stronger curriculum and measurement systems are just some of the needed steps to assist the present capabilities of high school programs. (Arkansas Department of Education, 2006, p. 3)

According to The League for Innovation in the Community College (2007), two-thirds of new jobs will require some postsecondary education. In addition, high school standards have not kept pace with the global economy students will be entering after graduating from high school (Achieve, Inc., 2005). Since the preparation for the workforce and the preparation for college are closely aligned, the aforementioned survey produces a heightened sense of urgency.

The large numbers of students requiring remediation is posing challenges for colleges due to the formal course work required to prepare students for college level mathematics (Greene, 2008). Nationwide, one in five college freshmen are enrolled in a minimum of one remedial course. In New Jersey 78% of freshmen are enrolled in remedial math.
The creative, innovative, and productive fabric of America is dependent on the level of education of its graduates. In order to bolster American competitiveness in the 21st century the development of technical skills is essential for economic and national security (Achieve, Inc., 2005). All too often high school students obtain their diploma and realize they are ill-equipped for college-level math or the workforce (ACT, Inc., 2009b). For example, in California, education, health care, and computer science are driving the economic engine and include some of the fastest growing careers that require college degrees. Additionally, blue collar jobs such as plumbers, mechanics, electricians, and construction workers now require advanced college work in the areas of math and physics. The business community has increased the proportion of college-educated workers possessing bachelor’s degrees and that demand will only continue to increase as California attempts to remain economically competitive both nationally and internationally. As career and technical education continue to require advanced degrees, state and school district leaders must ensure that their students possess the knowledge, critical thinking and problem-solving skills to succeed in college and enter a career that provides a living wage (The Education Trust –West, 2010).

Students who have to take remedial courses are less likely to graduate from college. Research indicates that students who are in need of remediation are at greater risk of not completing their degree (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). Nationally, 54% of students who require no remediation graduate with a bachelor’s degree, 45% of students’ graduate if required to take one remedial course, and only 18% graduate if they are required to take three remedial courses (Achieve, Inc., 2005). The ramifications of not graduating from college are exemplified by the fact that 66% of newly created jobs
will require a minimum of a college education (The League for Innovation in the Community College, 2007).

Future success for students in college-level math will require the implementation of rigorous standards, streamlined curricula, professional development, teacher collaboration, quality assessments, and the use of student’s data to improve teaching and learning. It is the responsibility of both the administration and the staff to provide the necessary skill level development and the structure of math development. It is also imperative that the students participate fully so they are not unprepared.

**Economic Impact of Academically Unprepared Students**

The lack of student preparedness for college-level classes costs U.S. taxpayers, universities, and students between $1 billion and $2 billion to provide remediation at post-secondary institutions (Achieve, Inc., 2005). Underprepared high school graduates requiring remediation cost businesses and colleges $16 billion per year in lost productivity. In Michigan, employers spend as much as $40 million annually to teach workers basic skills and knowledge such as how to read, write, and perform basic math operations that students should have mastered in high school (Achieve, Inc., 2005).

A students’ earning potential over their lifetime is impacted, as well. High school graduates earn substantially more than non-graduates (Chaplin & Lerman, 1997). A high school graduate has the option to pursue post-secondary education and bolster their career choices in this technologically advanced, globally competitive job market (Swanson & Chaplin, 2003). Individuals who have attained higher levels of education receive higher salaries, and are more marketable to perspective employers (Swanson & Chaplin, 2003). A student who graduates from college and graduate school with a professional licensure
has the potential to earn upwards of $71,606 annually. On the contrary, a high school dropout earns on average $11,864. The evidence is clear that principals who recognize the need for, and provide their students with the appropriate interventions will recognize increased student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

This study provides a valuable point of departure for educators as they attempt to prepare each child, in each classroom, in each school for the math section of the CAHSEE, postsecondary education, and the workforce. By investigating the role the administration plays in getting students to pass the mathematics section of the CAHSEE, this study may help administrators and other stakeholders consider how they might support students in learning critical skills and attaining a passing score on the CAHSEE.

**Overview of Methodology**

This qualitative study investigated the administration leadership strategies for preparing high percentages of African American and Hispanic students to pass the CAHSEE on the first attempt. In an attempt to gain an understanding of the administration’s role in promoting successful interventions for African American and Hispanic students who passed the math section of the CAHSEE on the first administration; one public charter high school in a large urban school district in Southern California and the administration with a strong record of student achievement on the math CAHSEE along with their math department chair, and other relevant support staff in the high school were identified and studied. The school selected for the study was one in which at least 20 African American and 20 Hispanic sophomore students participated in the administration of the 2010-2011 CAHSEE. In the school selected, the percentage of African American and Hispanic students who passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE was higher than the average for all high schools in the selected school district,
San Diego County, and the state of California. Thus, the school selected offered a unique opportunity to learn about the practices that contribute to the success of African American and Hispanic students on the math portion of the CAHSEE.

The study employed a qualitative case study through which interviews with the following subjects took place: the school principal, other school administrators, relevant mathematics teachers at the school, and the providers of extra support related to mathematics (e.g., math tutors). In addition to conducting these interviews, a focus group consisting of Black and Hispanic students who recently passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE was convened. These interviews lead to the identification of relevant documents (artifacts) such as lesson plans, curriculum materials, school plans, school mission and vision, school motto, and teacher expectations that further illuminated the factors that influenced their student’s success mathematics section of the CAHSEE.

Finally, the researcher observed freshman and sophomore mathematics classes in the school through the use of a formal observation protocol. All of these data was analyzed through qualitative data analysis strategies using the process of triangulation to identify important trends, issues, and themes. Through this research, I hope to contribute to the body of literature concerning the roles the administration plays in improving the achievement of Black and Hispanic youngsters. The generally positive nature of the study poses minimal risks to subjects; however, to ensure the protection of subjects, data will be reported anonymously.

Structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions were conducted with the principal, math department chair, and relevant support staff of the selected public charter high school. Interviews were conducted formally using a pre-determined interview
guide. The interview questions and appropriate follow-up questions were used to (1) identify the practices that influenced the success of African American and Hispanic students on the mathematics section of the CAHSEE, and (2) identify the administrations role in promoting those practices. For example, upon interviewing the school administration and staff, obstacles were identified that originally impeded student performance in mathematics. The researcher followed up with questions that attempted to identify which strategies were implemented to ensure that those barriers were addressed and led to success on the CAHSEE. The researcher investigated how the staff and the administration were able to influence and sustain change and what type of leadership characteristics were associated with assisting students in passing the math CAHSEE on the first administration. Once the qualitative data was coded and analyzed by the researcher it provided a rich description of the administrations role in influencing their teachers to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student achievement. The categories and properties that identified the concepts related to the research questions bring an understanding of the phenomenon and what occurs to promote the high passage rate of the CAHSEE in the area of math.

This study builds upon a substantial literature that addresses the leadership of principals in improving academic achievement. Principals have to shoulder the responsibility of getting their students to attain established benchmarks in core academic subjects such as mathematics and English language arts. Administrators play a key role in promoting student learning. A growing body of evidence suggests that there is a correlation between a principals’ leadership and students’ academic performance (Leithwood et al., 2004). Empirical research shows that a principal’s ability to promote
school wide learning accounts for 25% of student academic performance (Waters et al., 2003). Additionally, two studies, by Hallinger and Heck (1996) investigated the indirect effects of a principals’ leadership on student learning. They found a small but significant direct effect of a principal’s efforts on improved learning climate as well as a moderate indirect effect of principals’ instructional efforts on student learning outcomes. Hallinger and Heck (1996) concluded that a principal’s ability to influence student learning encompasses collaboration, high expectations for all stakeholders, teacher professional development, and the allocation of resources.

Limitations

While beneficial information may be gathered from this study, the findings may have several limitations. The data gathered about the CAHSEE scores was from only one public charter high school in a single large urban school district in Southern California. Based on the small and purposely selected sample, the findings may not be generalizable to school practices on a broad scope. Additionally, data collection was limited to two months, precluding more in-depth research. The results however, suggest important variables that can be the focus of reflection and further research regarding the administration’s role in promoting successful interventions for students to pass the CAHSEE on the first administration.

Purpose of Study

Principals who have been unsuccessful in getting their students to pass the mathematics section of the CAHSEE need to be aware of successful interventions and how best to implement those reform strategies to ensure students pass the CAHSEE. The purpose of the study is to examine descriptions of the leadership practices that influence better mathematics performance for Black and Hispanic students on the CAHSEE. If
research were conducted to determine the effectiveness of the leadership related to exam passage rates, the strategies or programs used might be suggested for other school sites to improve their student’s scores on high school exit exams.

The purpose of the study was to (1) examine the practices of a Southern California public charter high school in which high percentages of Black and Hispanic students passed the CAHSEE and (2) to investigate the influence of the school’s administration in developing and promoting practices that resulted in these high passage rates.

**Nature of the Study**

Conducting research on an exemplary school to find out what strategies the school invoked to obtain their success, verify the phenomenon, and share the findings with others served as the nature of the study. The study was qualitative in nature due to the research question. The use of interviews, classroom observations, and a student focus group will provide opportunities and real-life experiences to chart the rich data with principals, district leaders, and superintendents who are faced with similar problems.

**Significance of the Study**

The importance of conducting such a study was due in part to the impact that high school exit exams have on students who fail to pass them, and the significant disadvantage they have to obtain gainful employment. The findings of the study can help others understand and practice strategies suggested for increasing passage rates in other districts. Based on the study conducted by Haberman (1999), the results revealed the leadership characteristics that resulted in high passage rates on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. This became the impetus for the significance of examining another school experiencing a similar phenomenon, while justifying the results.
Research Questions

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the administration influence their staff to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student achievement?
2. What leadership characteristics exist among the administration and the staff that support student achievement?
3. What student and teacher supports exist that bolster student achievement and lead to high CAHSEE passage rates?
4. How does the culture of the school factor into student success?

The data gathered from researching the aforementioned questions assisted in determining what role the administration played in conjunction with their staff, in creating a school-wide focus on the achievement of Black and Hispanic students and their instructional interventions that positively impacted student attitudes, knowledge, and expectations to pass the math portion of the CAHSEE.

Definitions of Terms

The following are definition of key operational terms used in this dissertation:


Competency: A term used to describe an assessment or test in which students must attain a passing score to register a grade.

Leadership: Leaders that can induce followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivation-the wants and the needs, the aspirations and expectations-of both leaders and followers (Burns, 1978; Marzano et al., 2005).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Skrtic, Harris, and Shriner (2005) defined this as the establishment of a set of basic academic standards that all students should achieve,
holding schools accountable for meeting these standards and establishing teachers as highly qualified.

*Principal*: “A person who has controlling authority or is in a leading position” (“Principle,” 2011).

*School Leadership*: The term school leadership refers to many aspects that make a school function successfully, such as developing a clear mission and vision, the climate of the school and individual classrooms, the attitudes of teachers, as well as the curriculum, instruction, and student learning (Marzano et al., 2005).

*CAHSEE*: California High School Exit Exam. A high school exit exam consisting of English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics that, seniors must pass to graduate from high school.
CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to construct a context for the exploration of the actions principals took that resulted in significantly higher percentages of Black and Hispanic students passing the mathematics section of the CAHSEE on the first administration in comparison to San Diego county schools, and the state of California. Research that has addressed similar issues and may have contributed to the problem of student’s difficulty with high school exit exams will be reviewed. The topics related to students passing the CAHSEE include, reasons high school students are unprepared for college and careers, barriers to student preparation, achievement loss associated with the transition from elementary to secondary school, lack of alignment between high school and post-secondary education, low expectations, teacher training and instruction, principal leadership, organization of curriculum and instruction, school support, change theories, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, teacher empowerment, trust, and CAHSEE intervention programs.

This study examined how the administration and the staff exercised their instructional leadership to influence student performance on the CAHSEE. To appreciate the challenges associated with improving high school student achievement, it is important to consider research that contributes to understanding why large numbers of high school students have not performed well on assessments of high school skills, and why many high school graduates are entering college and enrolling in remedial math (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Greene, 2008). In particular, this chapter will examine the lack of rigor and the lack of alignment between PK-12 and postsecondary education (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Boser & Burd, 2009). The review will also
explore the academic impact the elementary and middle grades have on student’s preparation for high school and college level mathematics (ACT, Inc., 2009a; Adelman, 1999; Alspaugh, 1998).

The literature review examines how principals influence improvement in student learning. Additionally, the literature review explores the transformational and transactional leadership roles principals assume as they pursue instructional improvements. This chapter will identify the principal’s role in creating a school-wide focus on student achievement, examine the leadership characteristics associated with improving student performance, review evidence of effectiveness of various interventions for staff and students, and consider how principals influence and sustain change. As part of this focus on change, the chapter will examine change theories that describe how leaders influence change in organizations.

**Reasons Many High School Students Are Unprepared for College and Careers**

In order to thrive within our current competitive global economy, students must leave high school adequately prepared for college and careers. According to a 2008 report issued by the National Mathematics Advisory Panel, there is a “vast and growing demand for remedial mathematics education among arriving students in four-year colleges and community colleges across the nation” (Martino & Wilson, 2009, p. 1).

California students continue to graduate unprepared for college-level mathematics. A recent study, conducted by the American College Test (ACT) entitled, *Measuring College and Career Readiness in California: The Class of 2009*, asserted that only 55% of 2009 ACT-tested graduates met the college readiness benchmarks for entry-level college Algebra (ACT, Inc., 2009b). According to Ali and Jenkins (2002), of the 72% of students who entered college, only 47% completed a college preparatory
curriculum in high school. In the California State University system, 46% of the regularly admitted first-year students required remedial education in mathematics although the average grade point average (GPA) of first-year students in the CSU system was a B+. A study conducted by the Academic Senate concluded that more than 50% of students in California Community Colleges were enrolled in basic skills remedial courses (Ali & Jenkins, 2002). The widespread need for remedial education among entering first-year students in California is also found in many other states (Ali & Jenkins, 2002).

Ali and Jenkins (2002) found, “65% of California high school graduates are ineligible to even apply to the UC and CSU systems because they are not enrolled in the college readiness curriculum, otherwise known as the A-G Curriculum” (p. 3). In San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), 54% of all students failed to successfully complete the UC/CSU coursework. By ethnicity, 69% of African-Americans, 67% of Hispanic, and 41% of White students did not meet the eligibility established to qualify for admission to the UC or CSU system (The Education Trust-West, 2010). The A-G course curriculum requires a minimum of four years of English, three years of math, two years of science, two years of history/social science, two years of foreign language, one year of art, and one year of a college preparatory elective. The purpose of such a curriculum is to raise the academic standards and achievement level of all learners, as well as conduct appropriate assessments, and provide a seamless transition for students from high school to postsecondary institutions (The Education Trust-West, 2010). A report released by ACT showed that of the California high school graduates who took more than the core math curriculum, 63% met or exceeded college readiness benchmarks in mathematics (ACT, Inc., 2009b).
In Nevada, 79.6% of students whose highest level of math completed in grade 12 was Algebra I were enrolled in remedial math during their first year of college. The number of students requiring remediation increased to 83.3% for those students who completed nonacademic math courses in grade 12 (Fong, Huang, & Goel, 2008). Students who completed rigorous math courses in grade 12 were less likely to require remediation in their freshmen year of college. An analysis by Regional Education Laboratory West (Fong et al., 2008) of 4,653 students who graduated from a Nevada public high school and enrolled in at least one math course in a Nevada public college or university during the 2006/2007 school year revealed that there was a steep decline in the predicted probability of college remediation for students who completed Middle I courses (Algebra I, Plane Geometry, and Plane-Solid Geometry) compared with students who completed advanced courses. For instance, 2.7% of students who took calculus were enrolled in remedial math during their first year. The analysis of the Nevada study showed that students who complete higher levels of math courses were less likely to require remedial mathematics during their freshmen year of college (Fong et al., 2008).

An ACT National Profile Report of 1,480,469 students in the 2009 graduating class concluded that 42% of the students met the college readiness benchmark for mathematics (ACT, Inc., 2009a). The benchmark score is the minimum score needed on the ACT math test to indicate a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher, or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in college Algebra. Students who are college-ready are more likely to enroll in their second year, earn a B or higher in their first year of college, have a minimum GPA of 2.5, and complete their degree (ACT, Inc., 2009a). Along
racial lines 23% of African Americans, 31% of Hispanics, and 70% of Whites were considered college ready (ACT, Inc., 2009a).

Following the national trend, a study conducted by the Abell Foundation found that in Maryland, approximately one-third of students who completed a college preparatory curriculum were in need of remedial math classes in college. In 2008, 98% of Baltimore City Public School System graduates attending Baltimore City Community College were required to take remedial mathematics courses. Of those students 50% were placed into a sequence of three non-credit remedial math courses in order to qualify for college-level math courses (Martino & Wilson, 2009).

**Barriers to Student Preparation for College Level Mathematics**

Students want to go to college (Ali & Jenkins, 2002). However, the achievement loss associated with the transition from elementary school to middle school and then onto high school affects students’ preparedness for college level mathematics and subsequently the job market (Alspaugh, 1998; Williams, Kirst, & Haertel, 2010). In addition, the lack of alignment between PK-12 and postsecondary education stymies students’ goals and aspirations of enrolling in college and careers (Achieve, Inc., 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). This problem is exacerbated by low expectations of students’ abilities, as well as a lack of teacher professional development, and a lack of structured professional learning communities (Achieve, Inc., 2005).

**Achievement Loss Associated with the Transition between Elementary, Middle, and High School**

In the 21st century economy, the skills required to enter the workforce and post-secondary education are one in the same (Ali & Jenkins, 2002). An interdependency and
common goal exists between preschool, elementary, middle, secondary, and postsecondary education. Each level must execute its function to prepare students for the next level. According to Williams et al. (2010), the reason so many high school graduates need to enroll in remedial classes in college is the design of the instructional program in elementary and middle school, which fails to adequately equip students with the math skills essential to succeed in high school and postsecondary education.

The urgency of this matter is heightened by the fact that in the United States a student’s performance in mathematics is lower in the middle grades than in the elementary grades. The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) results indicate that a majority of states experience a decrease in middle school performance levels compared to their elementary school scores (Williams et al., 2010). In California the math performance of students on the California Standards Test is lower in middle school than in elementary school and continues to lower in each subsequent year of middle school (Williams et al., 2010).

A student’s performance in middle school math is a strong indicator of their future success in high school and post-secondary education. In California, a student’s scores on middle school standardized tests in math and English language arts (ELA) can help predict their future success on the CAHSEE. According to Zau and Betts (2008), a one-standard-deviation increase on the English language arts section of the California Standards Test (CST) in middle school translates into a 15.6% greater chance of passing the CAHSEE. A student who earns a one-standard-deviation increase on the math section of the CST increases their chances of passing the CAHSEE by 3.2%. Furthermore, in many schools, a students’ placement in rigorous college preparatory
math courses is predicated on their standardized test scores in math such as the CST (Williams et al., 2010).

Additionally, completing the A-G curriculum will make students eligible for admission for the UC or CSU systems (Williams et al., 2010). Kurlaender et al. (2008) and Zau and Betts (2008) found that students who master the mathematics curriculum in middle school are more prepared for the rigors of high school and college-level math, as well as advanced careers. This is why it is necessary to implement systems that can identify and address students’ math deficiencies and learning needs earlier to build strong mathematical foundations. As student’s advance to high school level math with an inadequate mathematics foundation, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to master rigorous high school curricula and succeed at college-level math or enter the workforce upon their high school graduation (ACT, Inc., 2009b).

According to the California Department of Education, 66% of 4th graders in California achieved at proficient or advanced levels in mathematics in 2009, whereas 43% of 7th graders obtained similar results (Williams et al., 2010). In other words, it appears as if schools are failing to continue to build upon the mathematical concepts, instructional strategies, and gains developed in early elementary grades.

Alspaugh (1998) asserted that there is a statistically significant achievement loss associated with the transition from elementary school to middle school at sixth grade, when compared with K-8 schools that did not have an elementary school to middle school transition at sixth grade. The loss in achievement was larger when students from multiple elementary schools were merged into a single middle school during the transition. The students from the middle schools and K-8 elementary schools
experienced an achievement loss in the transition to high school at ninth grade. The achievement loss in the transition to high school was larger for middle school students than for K-8 elementary students.

There was a statistically significant loss for students transitioning from multiple elementary schools to one middle school. Also, there was a mean achievement loss in the transition to high school at the 9th grade regardless of the school group. Students transitioning through a linear school model (one elementary school to one middle school and onto one high school) experienced a mean achievement loss in math of 4.75 percentage points; whereas students transitioning through a pyramid school model (multiple elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school) saw a mean achievement loss of 6.81 percentage points. The sample included three groups of 16 school districts in rural Missouri, for a total of 48 districts. One group of districts consisted of a K-8 and a 9-12 grade-level arrangement. Another group of districts consisted of one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The third group of districts was made up of three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school (Alspaugh, 1998).

Lack of Alignment between High School and Post-Secondary Education

A gap exists between the skills learned in high school and the skills college and the workplace demand (Achieve, Inc., 2005). In states that have exit exams, including California, students can pass state exit exams and complete the required courses to obtain their high school diploma and still be unprepared for college and the workforce (Cohen, Lingenfelter, Meredith, & Ward, 2006). To close this gap and better prepare students for postsecondary education and the workplace, states must first ensure that high school
standards reflect the real-world skills and knowledge students need to be successful upon graduation (Achieve, Inc., 2005). In order to prepare students for post-secondary education and the workforce, states must align their curriculum and content standards with the skills needed to graduate from college and enter the workforce (Achieve, Inc., 2005; Ali & Jenkins, 2002).

One reason high percentages of students need to take remedial math courses in college is the insufficient alignment between K-12 and higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Boser and Burd (2009) described the current K-12 to college pathway as a patchwork of unfocused academic curricula and programs that fail to adequately prepare students with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in college or the workforce. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2006) asserted that general curricula, lack of rigor and alignment between high school academic standards, assessment, and accountability, in conjunction with the demands of post-secondary education, result in students having to take remedial math courses in their freshmen year of college. A report commissioned by then Secretary of Education, Margaret Spelling (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) found that, “a majority of both college and high school faculty and administrators are unaware of the standards and assessments being used by their counterparts in the other sector” (p. 7). ACT’s 2005-2006 National Curriculum survey found that 66% of high school teachers in all content areas rated the content and skills taught important or very important, whereas just 36% of postsecondary instructors agreed with that assessment (ACT, Inc., 2009b).

Schmidt (2006) confirmed that college faculty members and high school teachers have differing assessments regarding student’s level of preparation for the rigors of
college-level curricula. Eighty-four percent of faculty members as opposed to 65% of teachers reported that high school graduates are either unprepared or only somewhat prepared to enter college. A quarter of college faculty members compared with 12% of teachers feel students are not prepared to pursue a college degree. Sanoff (2006) found that high school teachers feel that students exit high school prepared in writing, science, and math. On the contrary, college instructors described students as having deficits in writing, critical thinking, work ethic, and dedication—all necessary skills and attributes for the successful completion of college. According to Conley (2007), college instructors stress independent learning, critical thinking and problem solving which students are not as widely exposed to in high school.

Low Expectations

Among California high school graduates, approximately 25% of African Americans and 20% of Hispanic high school graduates are eligible for admission to the UC and CSU system (Ali & Jenkins, 2002). Many African American and Hispanic students are ineligible because they do not complete the required A-G curriculum. Even when poor students and students of color score in the top quartile on math assessments, they are still channeled into less rigorous courses (Ali & Jenkins, 2002). For those students the result is disinterest, disillusionment, disappointment, disengagement, and disdain for the education system (Ali & Jenkins, 2002). Ali and Jenkins (2002) found that only 51% of African American students and 42% of Hispanic students were placed in higher-level courses when their performance on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) indicated they had the ability to succeed. For Asians and Whites, 100% and 88% respectively were placed in accordance with their ability level (Ali & Jenkins, 2002).
The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has called for schools to close achievement gaps between poor and minority students and their peers by eliminating what former President George W. Bush called the “soft bigotry of low expectations” (Anonymous, 2010). A recent study by Robert Rydell, a social psychologist at Indiana University suggested that low expectations and other negative stereotypes can hurt not just a students’ test performance, but their fundamental ability to learn (Anonymous, 2010). For example, in California these low expectations may influence students’ acquiring too few of the rigorous course credits (A-G curriculum) required to attend the UC and CSU systems. Rydell further explained that if students face negative stereotypes when they are learning basic skills, the damage caused by low expectations could be compounded throughout a student's academic career.

In the San Diego Unified School District, specifically, in 2007-2008 32% of African American graduates completed the A-G requirements. Among Hispanic, Asian, and White graduates respectively, 30%, 58%, and 54% completed A-G requirements. Sixteen percent of English Language Learners successfully completed the A-G course requirements (The Education Trust-West, 2010). Equally disconcerting is the fact that just over half of all Hispanic and African American students in SDUSD had access to A-G courses, whereas three-quarters of White and Asian students had access to A-G courses (The Education Trust-West, 2010).

The Education Trust-West (2010) conducted a study in which they analyzed the master schedules and course offerings of 34 SDUSD high schools. Their research found that in particular there were distinct differences in the quality of education students receive throughout the district. For example, at Madison High School 61% of their
courses are considered college preparatory. However, at San Diego International Studies High School 80% of the course offerings are college preparatory. Given less access to college-preparatory courses, some schools have fewer students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. Many of the schools with smaller enrollments in AP or IB courses are schools that serve predominately African American and Hispanic populations. Over 60% of African American and Hispanic students in SDUSD are not enrolled in any AP or IB courses. For White and Asian students the figures drop to 44% and 39% respectively. Students who took one or more AP or IB courses completed the A-G requirements 58% of the time. That number rose to 88% if they took five or more AP or IB courses. The significance of all students having access to and enrolling in college-preparatory courses is rooted in the strong correlation between AP or IB enrollment and UC/CSU success (The Education Trust-West, 2010). This correlation may be a result of teacher training and instruction.

**Teacher Training and Instruction**

Yanez and Wenrick (2000) conducted a study designed to describe instructional strategies and policy decisions that proved successful at schools in Texas that experienced increased passing rates on the Algebra I End-of-Course exam (EOC). They also investigated how instructional strategies and policies looked at schools that did not experience gains on the Algebra I EOC exam. Yanez and Wenrick (2000) found that district-level support can provide a continued focus on mathematics district-wide and ensure that all schools have access to the proper resources, materials, and professional development. Teachers in schools with improving scores used graphing calculators and
supplemental resources in their classes in addition to previously released Algebra I end-of-course exams.

Schools that experienced declining scores used textbooks as their sole method of instruction. As a result, students were not grasping the algebraic concepts in a manner consistent with the content described in the Algebra I Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. Yanez and Wenrick (2000) examined 378 schools and analyzed the Algebra I exam scores of 26,363 students in 1997 and 26,344 students in 1998. Teachers from schools with declining scores expressed feelings of despair and concern that their students did not have the skills to succeed at Algebra. The teachers also suggested that some of their students should take less challenging math classes due to their lack of comprehension of algebraic concepts.

Teachers also reported feeling isolated. Teachers disclosed that the high turnover rate of the staff made it difficult to collaborate. In comparison, teachers from schools with increasing scores reported that they did not blame students, but instead provided students with multiple opportunities to meet for review sessions.

The report confirmed that administrators must set Algebra I as a priority, which includes setting aside ample time for common planning and collaboration among math teachers. The staff must also establish internal performance standards and accountability systems based on the prescribed standards. Teachers at schools with improving scores met regularly to collaborate and plan lessons, share ideas and strategies, problem solve, stress mathematical connections, and design materials to improve students’ achievement (Yanez & Wenrick, 2000).
Impact of Principal Leadership on Student Achievement

Principal leadership is relevant to student achievement as is evidenced by Andrews and Soder (1987) who found that effective leadership adds value to the impact of classroom and teacher practices and positively impacts student academic achievement, especially minority students. Much attention has been paid to the importance of principal leadership and its impact on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). The results demonstrate that principal leadership is closely aligned with student outcomes (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). Effective principal leadership encompassed setting and maintaining high expectations for teachers and student achievement, evaluating teachers, knowing how to design curriculum, instruction and assessment, emphasizing basic skills, and monitoring student learning (Barth, 1986; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003).

For example, the study conducted by Andrews and Soder (1987) was a joint venture between the University of Washington, College of Education and the Seattle School District in an effort to improve the district’s 67 elementary and 20 secondary schools.

The researchers used gains in individual student normal curve equivalent scores on the California Achievement Test as a measure of improved academic performance. Year-end 1982 test data served as baseline, with individual gains computed on the basis of year-end 1984 test scores. To be considered as a subject in the study, a student had to be enrolled in the same
school during 1983 and 1984. Data were aggregated within schools for all students and by ethnicity and free-lunch status.

The researchers were able to obtain sufficient achievement data to allow for reliable and valid conclusions in 33 of the elementary schools. They divided the schools into three groups based on staff perceptions of the principal as an instructional leader. They classified the 11 highest scoring principals as strong leaders, the middle 11 as average leaders, and the lowest scoring 11 as weak leaders. (Andrews & Soder, 1987, p. 10)

As a result of their study, Andrews and Soder (1987) found that strong principal leadership has a significant impact on student achievement. For the purposes of their study, strong leaders were identified as principals who were considered a resource provider, instructional resource, effective communicator, and visible presence throughout the school. Students in schools with strong leaders scored significantly better on the California Achievement Test for Total Math and Total Reading from 1982 to 1984 when compared to students who were under the leadership of average or weak leaders. On the reading portion of the California Achievement Test, students under the leadership of a strong leader experienced a 27-point increase on their test scores over the two-year period. During the same period, students under the guidance of a weak leader saw an 18-point increase in their reading scores (Andrews & Soder, 1987).

The math test revealed similar results. In schools led by strong principals, students’ math scores increased by 18 points. Students in schools with principals identified as weak leaders experienced a 12-point increase on their math test. Additionally, Black students experienced a 44-point gain in Total Math in strong-leader
schools, whereas in weak-leader schools Black students experienced a decrease of 23 points over the same period. In Total Reading, Black students gained 48 points in strong leader schools. During the same period, in schools identified as having weak leaders, Black students’ scores increased nine points. The gains in math and reading on the California Achievement Test were significantly greater in schools identified as having strong leaders. It is evident that a principal’s leadership has a significant impact on student achievement (Andrews & Soder, 1987).

More recently, Waters et al. (2003) examined 70 studies involving 2,894 schools, approximately 1.1 million students, and 14,000 teachers to determine the correlation between the principals’ leadership and the average academic achievement of students. Waters et al. (2003) determined the correlation of the average effect size between leadership and student achievement to be 0.25 and therefore explained this correlation as follows:

Consider two schools (school A & school B) with similar student and teacher populations. Both demonstrate achievement on a standardized, norm-referenced test at the 50th percentile. Principals in both schools are also average – that is, their abilities in the 21 key leadership responsibilities are ranked at the 50th percentile. Now assume that the principal of school B improves her demonstrated abilities in all 21 responsibilities by exactly one standard deviation…Our research findings indicate that this increase in leadership ability would translate into mean student achievement at school B that is 10 percentile points higher than school A. (Waters et al., 2003, p. 3)
Knowing the relationship that exists between strong principal leadership and student achievement, it is the principals’ responsibility to realize the magnitude of change such as first and second order required to have a positive impact on student achievement (Clarke, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Heifetz, 1994; Waters et al., 2003).

There has been considerable attention paid to the leadership of principals and their impact on student achievement (Witziers et al., 2003).

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) described a link between the knowledge of instruction a principal possess and student achievement. This form of leadership known as instructional leadership involves the principal being intricately involved in the oversight of the curriculum as well as the delivery of instruction to ensure a positive learning environment where students can thrive academically.

**Organization of the Curriculum and Instruction**

The rigor of math courses taken in high school has a direct relationship with college success rates and workforce success in high-growth, high-performance jobs. The relationship is particularly strong for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, disadvantaged students who complete rigorous high school math courses reduce the gap in college completion rate by 50% between White students and Black and Hispanic students (Adelman, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

In order to improve the mathematics instruction that low-achieving, low-income high school students receive, Gamoran, Porter, Smithson, and White (1997), examined the success of mathematics transition courses between elementary and college-preparatory math. These courses introduce students who struggled with math concepts in elementary and middle school to more rigorous mathematics. The researchers’ hypothesis was that students who took the transition courses Math A in California and
Stretch Regents in New York would be better equipped to enroll in college-preparatory courses because these transition courses were rigorous in content and involved a range of cognitive strategies. The data analyzed from 48 math classes and 882 students using a three-level hierarchical-linear model revealed that students experienced increased levels of growth in college-preparatory classes as opposed to those students enrolled in general-track classes. A student’s exposure to rigorous mathematics content in college-preparatory classes was an advantage in increasing their achievement in college and the workplace (Achieve, Inc., 2005).

Lee, Smith, and Croninger (1997) found that successful instruction develops students’ critical thinking skills along with a greater proficiency in academic subjects and bolstering their self-esteem. The performance of disadvantaged students is negatively impacted by instruction that is rote and does not address the needs of each student (Lee et al., 1997). A successful approach to instruction requires students to complete problems that involve constructing knowledge through the use of real-life problems. When students are exposed to more rigorous, authentic, and differentiated instruction they are able to complete more challenging tasks. Such an academically rich learning environment can dramatically improve the performance of both high and low achieving students (Knapp & Shields, 1990; Kozma & Croninger, 1992; Levine, 1988).

The results of a qualitative study of 10th grade students in 26 comprehensive high schools revealed that teachers’ use of instructional practices is directly related to improved student achievement (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000). Students exposed to instruction that emphasized critical thinking and promoted multiple solution strategies, and multiple representation and explanation outperformed students
whose instruction focused on procedures and memorization. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2000) encouraged educators to have students take ownership of their learning in an attempt to enhance the development of their complex cognitive skills and processing. Reform-based instruction and curriculum practices emphasize problem solving, communication, reasoning, and mathematical connections. Successful classroom instructional practices include peer coaching, enhanced classroom discourse, inquiry-based learning and the use of materials and manipulatives to promote meaningful representation of mathematical concepts (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1991).

While there is strong evidence to support instructional practices that emphasize independent learning, critical thinking skills, evidence also exists to support the integration of Direct Instruction programs in math, science, history, reading, and writing in the high school curricula (Kozioff, LaNunziata, Cowardin, & Bessellieu, 2001). Direct Instruction is defined as focused, systematic, explicit instruction where teachers demonstrate a concept, provide guided practice, and give feedback to students based on their work and responses (Klesius, Searls, & Zielonka, 1990). As public schools are increasingly held accountable for student achievement and eliminating the achievement gap between minority students, ELL and White students, studies have shown that Direct Instruction is effective at teaching higher-level reading comprehension skills such as high-order thinking, problem solving, independence, retention, analogical reasoning, reasoning, critical thinking, imagining, and learning words (Klesius et al., 1990; Kozioff et al., 2001).
An evaluation called Follow Through conducted by the Stanford Research Institute and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education from 1967 to 1995 involving 75,000 children per year in 120 communities found that “Direct Instruction was superior both to control schools and to every other model in fostering basic reading and math skills, higher order cognitive-conceptual skills and even self-esteem” (Adams & Engelman, 1996, p. 58). The other models that compared Direct Instruction (DI) in the study included the Behavior Analysis Model, Florida Parent Education Model, High/Scope cognitive curriculum, Bank Street College Model, Open Education, Responsive Education, and the Tucson Early Education Model.

Additional studies conducted on the effectiveness of DI by Meyer (1984) involving Black and Hispanic students in Brooklyn, New York found that those students who were taught reading and math using DI, were one year ahead in reading and seven months ahead in math when compared to students who did not receive DI, by the end of their 9th grade year. DI raised the average scores of participating students in reading, math, spelling, and language arts to near the national average when compared to eight other instructional models. Direct instruction was first in all categories (four skill areas).

Additionally, Gersten, Keating, and Becker (1988) found that students who once received DI continued to outperform students who did not receive DI. Students who received DI were more likely to graduate high school on time, were less likely to drop out, and had higher rates of applying and being accepted into college (Darch, Gersten, & Taylor, 1987; Meyer, Gersten, & Gutkin, 1983).

The basic structure of DI as explained by Kozioff et al. (2001), involves scripted lessons that gauge students thought process. The teacher also presents the lesson in a
logical order that conveys the objectives and expectations for the lesson. The principles of DI include:

1. Introduction/review
2. Development (model examples)
3. Guided practice
4. Closure
5. Independent practice
6. Evaluation

Kozioff et al. (2001) stressed the advantage of high school teachers, supervisors, and principals benefitting from incorporating DI through,

(1) Using DI curricula either for initial instruction or remedial instruction in various subjects; (2) using the main features of DI to organize and improve classroom instruction even if commercial DI curricula are not used; and (3) knowing enough about DI to initiate (if needed) and to play a guiding role in districtwide school reform that involves the implementation of DI (or other focused) curricula. (Kozioff et al., 2001, p. 64)

Thirty years of research revealed that students benefit academically from direct instruction regardless of ethnicity, race, family background, or socioeconomic status (Bessellieu, Kozloff, & Rice, 2001). Despite the evidence that shows the effectiveness of DI and its impact on student achievement, critics feel that DI is not suitable for all subject matter or type of learner (Jones & Cooper, 1987). Klesius et al. (1990) state that, “DI is most applicable to teaching a well-structured body of knowledge or the steps in a process or skill, and it is most advantageous to younger students, slower students, and students of
all ages and abilities during beginning instruction of unfamiliar content” (p. 35).

However, studies by Meyer (1984), as well as the Stanford Research Institute have demonstrated that DI is effective strategy at teaching elementary and secondary students high-level reading comprehension skills previously considered to be too implicit or too abstract to lend themselves to such a method (Kozioff et al., 2001). The instructional practice of using DI as effective in assisting students with passing exit exams in high school represents an approach that is reinforced by the school administration. The administration creates this culture through promoting collaboration among the staff.

**Principal, Teacher, and Student Support**

Picucci and Sobel (2002) conducted a qualitative study in three urban Texas school districts. Through interviews with principals, deans, counselors, department chairs, and teachers, they found that creating a culture of high achievement; focusing on teacher training, planning and collaboration; actively recruiting students by describing the benefits of AP calculus; aligning curricula; and providing resources all contributed to creating a district that prepared students for college. To create a culture of high achievement and college readiness, each staff cultivated an environment of high expectations in which each student could succeed in AP calculus. Tutoring programs and summer academies were offered to students and the district provided summer institutes, on-going professional development, and instructional materials to improve teacher content knowledge and instructional strategies. In response to the teachers’ desire to align curricula, the district redesigned their professional development days to provide time for vertical team meetings. The professional development sessions focused on aligning the key state standards with their curriculum and instruction.
As a collaborative effort, the teachers were able to analyze assessment data on student mastery of key standards and create intervention strategies. For the purposes of the study, during each site visit one section of AP calculus was observed and artifacts of practice were collected which included school improvement plans, lesson plans, teacher resource material, examples of student work, and diagrams of classrooms. Also, teachers were asked to select six students, two performing in each of the high, middle, and low ranges of their AP calculus class, to participate in one focus discussion group about their experiences in the class. The details that describe and explain this process are reviewed by Haberman (1999) related to the Buffalo Creek Elementary School.

**Buffalo Creek Elementary School**

Buffalo Creek Elementary School in Houston, Texas experienced tremendous success after its first year of existence. Ninety-seven percent of the students passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (Haberman, 1999). The underlying question of researchers is why is Buffalo Creek successful? What does the school possess that produces such results? Based on direct observations, school records, conversations with the principal and staff, conducting formal interviews of staff, and reviewing written questionnaires of staff, 33 indicators of success were identified. Among the 33 indicators, the pillars of success identified were: strong principal leadership, relationship building, high expectations, clear vision, academic relevance, and consistent monitoring of student progress. At Buffalo Creek teachers have the autonomy over the daily schedule in order to maximize their student’s learning curve. The instructional leadership exemplified by the principal mean that the needs of the staff and students take precedent over the schedule (Haberman, 1999). To enhance the learning experience of all students few initiatives and programs are introduced each school year. This allows the staff,
students, parents, and the community time to evaluate the relevance of the program and its impact on students and whether it correlates with the vision and mission of the school. Teachers have a common commitment to engage their students in a rich learning environment, being active and putting forth their best effort. Teachers are willing stakeholders in the learning process. It is this belief which forms the culture at Buffalo Creek, where teachers feel accountable to their students, and in turn motivates students to achieve greatness. All work is intentional. Every assignment, activity, project, test, and field trip is planned according to the curriculum goals created by teachers to ensure students will produce meaningful work.

Another stimulant of student success at Buffalo Creek is students believe in the concept of school as a community of learners where they have the potential to accomplish their goals. Cooperative learning and peer-coaching is evident in all classrooms and across grade levels. Such actions on behalf of the students would not be prevalent if it were not practiced by the teachers. Teachers and the administration regularly consult with each other to discuss student progress, plan collaboratively across disciplines, model effective instructional strategies, and develop action plans. Such a collegial educational environment invites dialogue and cooperation. As one staff member explained, “we are in this together. We fail and succeed together.” In essence, success is only measured as a group.

The aforementioned indicators of school success are evident at Buffalo Creek Elementary School because the principal gives the staff the autonomy to focus on teaching and learning. Like researchers Marzano et al. (2005), identified in School Leadership that Works, risk-taking is embraced and encouraged by the principal. With
the blessing of the principal, teachers are able to focus on annual curriculum goals with no pressure to rush through the subject matter. To maintain students’ level of interest in learning, teachers relate the subject matter to students personal lives with the use of field trips, guest speakers, projects, and experiments. Due to the autonomy allowed by the principal, teachers hold themselves accountable for their instruction as well as their students’ results.

This laser focus on instruction and learning is unimpeded due to the principal protecting teacher’s time and energy to focus on their students needs. The principal absorbs the stress from the local, state, and federal bureaucracies. Paperwork, reports, and deadlines are handled by the principal so as not to interrupt teachers’ valuable instruction time with their students. This sets the tone to any observer that people are busy, on-task, and the work is purposeful (Haberman, 1999).

The indicators of success exemplified by the principal and staff at Buffalo Creek Elementary School correlates with the leadership traits outlined by the authors Marzano et al. (2005) and Cotton (2003). Both authors spoke of the importance of being instructional leaders and providing on-going professional development to the staff. Another common theme was the importance of principal visibility. The principal was visible and knowledgeable about the learning experiences and student progress in each classroom. It is essential for principals to be knowledgeable about what is going on with the staff and students. This allows the principal to know what students are learning, their struggles, and their successes. This high level of awareness allows the principal to be viewed among the staff as a partner as opposed to a dictator. Such actions on behalf of
the principal encourage risk-taking when teachers are proactive, practice in the open, and discuss what works in the classroom.

In order to validate the success of Buffalo Creek the 33 indicators of the school’s success were gathered from direct observations, school records, interviews, with the principal and staff, and reviewing written questionnaires of staff. The 33 indicators were not grouped or summarized. Students were observed but not interviewed, nor did they answer any questionnaires (Habermann, 1999).

The findings from this study would be useful to educational leaders. Principals need to know what processes to put in place to create a successful learning environment. Keeping interruptions to a minimum and spending the majority of your time in the classroom will show the staff and visitors alike this is an educational campus where people are busy and the work is purposeful. The findings are also helpful because principals will learn the importance of building relationships and fostering a culture of collaboration where ideas are exchanged, risk-taking is encouraged, and teachers connect the curriculum to children’s lives and teach according to how best children learn.

Because this study was a qualitative analysis the accuracy and generalization of the findings were not compromised. Through observations, interviews, questionnaires, and examining student data the 33 indicators of Buffalo Creek’s success were established. Their success was exemplified by officially being recognized by the state of Texas. Ninety-seven percent of the children passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.

One possible limitation which could affect the generalization of the findings is the length of time the observers spent on campus to accurately determine the 33 indicators of
Buffalo Creek’s success as well as the extent of the access to the staff. Another possible limitation is only Buffalo Creek was analyzed in the study. To enhance the credibility of the study more schools with similar size and demographics should have been added to the study to see if the same actions by the principal and the staff members would produce similar results.

Administrators have to put the education of students and the professional development of teachers at the center of their leadership and serve as the instructional leader. New teaching methods, new school structures, and new accountability measures are evolving simultaneously. Not only is the information technology highway of the 21st century increasing exponentially, but new methods for imparting information are also changing. Teachers, administrators, superintendents, and school boards have to be prepared to bridge the gap between the skills our students possess and the skills the marketplace demands in order to compete and win in the digital marketplace.

**Change Models and Principal’s Leadership**

Change can be a challenging task. However, by implementing the responsibilities outlined that are exhibited by and associated with strong leadership, student achievement can be realized. An examination of various change theories will help explain the process associated with generating change. The following theories will explain how change occurs.

**Kotter’s Change Theory**

Step I of Kotter’s theory (Kotter, 2010) suggests that for change to happen, the leader must develop a sense of urgency. As a transformational leader, part of the process of implementing successful change is realizing the need for change, and knowing how to initiate the process of implementing change, and knowing how to initiate the process of
implementing change: where to start, whom to include, and how best to see it through to fruition (Nisivoccia, 1997). One way to develop urgency is to promote the negative effects of not implementing change. For example, if students fail the math section of the CAHSEE, it is important for all stakeholders to understand the ramifications of such an outcome, such as the withholding of diplomas, as well as the increased risk of dropping out of high school (Reardon & Kurlaender, 2009). Kotter suggested that significant time, resources, and energy must be expended in step 1 before moving onto the next steps.

Step 2 of Kotter’s change process involves, “forming powerful coalitions that come from various sources, including job title, status, expertise, and political importance” (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 3). Once this collection of diverse talent is formed it is important for all stakeholders to work as a team to vigorously promote the change effort. The leader must assess the strengths and weaknesses of the change coalition, work on team building, and ask for an emotional commitment from the members of the team.

With respect to implementing CAHSEE interventions to assist students, this might mean that the principal should include teachers from all departments as well as veteran educators, and community leaders to promote the urgency of the change.

Step 3 of Kotter’s change model includes the principal development of a clear vision for how the change process will be enacted. Based upon Kotter’s model, the principal must create a clear vision of how the CAHSEE intervention will look, so stakeholders know the ultimate goal.

As is the case with Fullan’s change model, step 4 of Kotter’s model puts a heavy emphasis on communicating the vision. Put another way, creating a vision without effectively communicating it to all stakeholders will be a futile attempt at implementing
change. In essence, the vision must be modeled by the principal and become imbedded in the fabric of the school (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

According to Marzano et al. (2005), one of the 21 responsibilities of a school leader is to shield teachers from having to complete tasks that prevent them from teaching and learning. Step 5 of Kotter’s change model requires the principal to assess the change process continuously and remove any barriers that could impede an intervention from being implemented.

As the change process proceeded, Kotter recommended creating short-term wins. It is important for the principal to show tangible results of the intervention to create further buy-in. This is accomplished by the change team setting measurable, attainable, short-term targets.

Following the creation of short-term wins, step 7 of Kotter’s change model looks at the principal building upon the interventions incorporated to sustain and bolster the change, while analyzing what is working and what needs to be improved. Continuity is essential in any change effort.

As Kotter stated in step 8, it is vital to imbed the change in the vision, values, and the culture of the school, while continuing to support the change effort in conjunction with the staff and students (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

**Lewin’s Change Theory**

While Kotter outlined eight steps needed for successful organizational change, Lewin (1950) outlined a three-stage process of change he described by referencing a block of ice as: Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze. A solution to this problem exemplifies Lewin’s change model that results from two forces: driving forces and restraining forces.
The driving forces are catalysts that foster change: unfreezing. This requires the leader to identify the area needing change and providing the necessary motivation to enact it (Lewin, 2010).

The second stage of Lewin’s change model requires the leader to implement the change and move the group to a new level. During this stage, the need for change, known as the driving forces will meet resistance, known as the restraining forces (Lewin, 2010). As the stakeholders move through the change process it is important for the leader to communicate progress effectively, build capacity among the staff, and seek out new ways to implement change. The final stage of Lewin’s change model is known as the refreeze, where Lewin (1950) found that, permanency for a desired period should be included in the objective. This allows the staff to return to a sense of normalcy; build confidence, assess, re-assess, and build upon the change process.

In a school setting, when attempting to implement Lewin’s model, the principal has to identify students who have failed the CAHSEE and attempt to implement interventions to assist them. By the principal realizing the driving force, which stimulates the urgency for change, interventions must be researched and advice solicited as to which programs are most effective to assist students. Concurrently, the restraining forces must be identified by the principal and eliminated. Next, the principal has to secure confidence with all stakeholders by successfully moving the students to a new level of proficiency. Once this is established it is important for the principal to maintain stability, also known as refreezing and build upon the program’s success. Each stage of Lewin’s model suggests that leaders will encounter resistance and will need to make
adjustments as they utilize and respond to the driving force and restraining forces. The next change model involves the collaboration of individuals.

**Concerns-Based Adoption Model**

Whereas Lewin’s and Kotter’s model focuses on implementing change in organizations, the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) by Hall and Loucks (1978) is a model for change intended to help leaders understand how they will need to work with individuals in order to achieve organizational change. It consists of seven stages of concern individuals experience as they attempt to invoke second order change and how best to address those concerns (see Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Stages of Concern</th>
<th>Expressions of Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Individuals express no concern for change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>Individuals start to inquire more about the targeted intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Individuals express concerns about how the intervention will impact them</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Participants accept the change and begin to navigate how best to use the intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>Participants express concerns about the impact the intervention is having on their students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Participants shift their focus to coordinating with others with regards to the intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 7</td>
<td>Refocusing</td>
<td>Participants work to bolster the intervention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


With the use of the CBAM model, principals develop their intervention program based on the questions they ask themselves throughout the seven stages of the model. The questions range from the self-oriented in the early stages to more task-oriented in the middle stages, finally to more impact-oriented questions as the change effort progresses.
Principals involved in implementing interventions will “gradually progress through a developmental set of psychological phases as they raise their awareness of, understand and then gradually accept and then apply an intervention” (Marzano et al., 1995, p. 162).

As is evidenced in the 7 stages of concern, the CBAM model relies on personal reflection when implementing change. With respect to the CBAM model, any adopted intervention or innovation must first be accepted by the administrator as a deeply held belief or principle (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marzano et al., 2005). For example, upon a principal realizing the need for an intervention program for students who have failed the CAHSEE, they must look at the process of implementing the program and develop a “framework of beliefs and principles into which an innovation must be integrated” (Marzano et al., 1995, p. 163). More specifically, how the principal perceives, internalizes and plans the change process is central in the innovation or intervention coming to fruition. Said another way, for the CBAM model to experience success involving an intervention at a school site the principal and staff must believe the intervention is consistent with the mission, vision and values of the intended purpose of the change effort and manage the program within the established boundaries of the change effort.

A more in-depth look at the implementation of a CAHSEE intervention program using the CBAM model at a school site reveals that the principal must first gradually build awareness and support of innovative programs among the staff. Providing staff professional development may be the key to building a following for the program, discussing its relevance, and ensuring teachers are comfortable with the materials and strategies through practice. As teachers’ concerns and doubts about the program arise, it
may be critical for the principal to listen and address those concerns while offering the staff words of praise for their willingness to be a part of the change process. At this point it is the principal’s responsibility to continue to troubleshoot and ensure that teachers know how to accurately and effectively utilize the intervention (Hord, Rutherford, Austin-Huling, & Hall, 1987).

As teachers begin to use the prescribed innovation, questions may arise about how the intervention is benefiting students. During this stage of the CBAM, the principal may be able to display instructional leadership skills by providing the staff with professional development and opportunities to witness the intervention in practice in another setting.

The impact stages known as collaboration and refocusing require the stakeholders to check if everyone is participating in the intervention as a cohesive unit and what are the norms and guidelines with respect to the intervention, while encouraging individuals to access resources to act on their concerns for program improvement. As the intervention becomes entrenched principals may be able to use the influence and trust they have garnered to refocus their staffs to search for ways to enhance the intervention program to maximize their students’ learning (Hord et al., 1987).

First and Second-Order Change

As outlined by Marzano et al. (2005), one of the responsibilities is to challenge the status quo and implement change to the benefit of the staff and students. As a principal recognizes the need for innovation and/or interventions based on their student’s CAHSEE scores it is important to carefully weigh the magnitude of change required to obtain the desired result. This is important because the order of magnitude of change must align with the requirements of the intervention or else it will fail.
There are two types of change known as first and second-order change. Where first-order change is gradual, second-order change requires eliminating the status quo expeditiously and incorporating deep change to find a solution, although it should never be entered into lightly and absent of thought (Prestine, 1992). “Deep change alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction, and requiring new ways of thinking and acting” (Waters et al., 2003, p. 66). Similarly, if a student fails the CAHSEE it is the leaders responsibility to disaggregate the data, create new strategies to ensure passage, and determine the most effective order of change. Furthermore, it can be inferred that a principal and their staff implementing second-order change with respect to a CAHSEE intervention program should assume the responsibilities (see Table 2) identified by Marzano et al. (2005).

It is important for transformational principals to model the aforementioned responsibilities in order to achieve change. This is where the principal must rise to the occasion and inspire greatness, promote successful interventions, build morale, simplify problems, broaden horizons, and raise expectations. Once the leader has clearly communicated the mission and vision to all followers and everyone is working as a cohesive unit, the organization is more likely to stay on task to achieve the desired goal (Griffin, 1997).

**Transactional and Transformational Leadership Style and Change**

In examining how principals create a school-wide focus on student achievement to ensure students pass the CAHSEE, one must take a closer look at the effect that school leadership has on student achievement. By examining the types of leadership invoked by principals, rather than looking at leadership holistically, we are acknowledging that
Table 2

_Leadership for Second-Order Change and Correlation between 21 Responsibilities_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Actions of the Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments</td>
<td>Being knowledgeable about innovation, while seeking about and keeping abreast of research and theory on effective practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimizer</td>
<td>Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations in schools now and what schools can do in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>Fostering knowledge of research and theory on best practice among the staff through reading and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Agent</td>
<td>Is willing to challenge and actively challenge the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring/Evaluating</td>
<td>Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Adapt his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals/Beliefs</td>
<td>Communicates and operates from strong ideas and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and schooling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


School site leaders’ impact on student achievement will depend on the particular leadership practices in which they engage (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Leadership is defined as, “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivation—the wants and the needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers” (Burns, 1978, p. 13).

A principal’s leadership influences school goals and the pursuit of those goals (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Hoover, Petrosko, & Schultz, 1991; Kirby, King, & Paradise, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1991). Given that leadership in schools is a vital component in influencing student learning it is important to examine the impact that transactional
and transformational leadership has on the ability of principals to foster change that results in increased levels of student academic performance (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Whereas transactional leadership relies on trading one thing for another, such as providing rewards to followers based on their ability to carry out the directives of the leader, transformational leadership is based on the ability of the leader to transform and inspire followers to bring about meaningful change (Marzano et al., 2005).

**Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leadership is defined as “trading one thing for another” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 14). Transactional leadership relies on the control of the organization centering around the leader and establishing and maintaining a difference in status among the workers and management, known as a top-down approach. The leader yields the power to control the staff, the allocation of resources, and the process of change (Nisivoccia, 1997).

Transactional leadership embodies a bureaucratic style exhibited by the principal in whom principals entice staff members to attain a desired outcome by appealing to the self-interests of followers, rather than motivating them and building their capacity to improve the academic performance of students (Cotton, 2003; Kuhnert, 1994). Another viewpoint of transactional leadership is offered by Leithwood (1992) who explained that research shows the transactional practices exhibited by leaders may be necessary to help focus the organization on the desired outcomes.

In addition, Bass (1987) and Sergiovanni (1990) stated that the transactional practices implemented by the principal are required to continuously focus the staff on achieving specific performance goals, although this style of leadership does not stimulate
improvement among the staff and students. Mitchell and Tucker (1992) however, found that transactional leadership is effective when the principal, teachers, and students are aware of the established goals and understand and agree to the blueprint laid out. In order to get the staff to maintain a strict focus on the goals, wholesale or incremental change is not as important as maintaining control of the staff and procedures by rewarding those who perform and punishing those who fail to meet the benchmarks. The downside to such a leadership approach is that it negates the value of collaboration to bring about meaningful and effective change to achieve desired goals. As Bennis and Nanus (1985) explained, what results is a dearth of ideas, energy, enthusiasm, and resources, as well as the inability nor (lack of) desire to build capacity and trust to implement a vision for the school.

Bass and Avolio (1994) outlined three forms of transactional leadership: management-by-exception-passive, management-by-exception-active, and constructive transactional. Management-by-exception-passive involves the principal selling and implementing standards in addition to being reactive to problems that occur, while keeping things as they are. Leaders who possess a management-by-exception-active style shun taking initiative and risk-taking, are aware of issues that arise, implement standards, and assess the behavior of their staff. In contrast, constructive transactional leadership involves the staff being invited by the principal to be apart of the change process. In a leadership frame such as this, the principal sets goals and benchmarks, rewards the staff for attaining goals, collaborates with staff, and offers praise when earned. The selling point of this leadership style is that the staff responds by maintaining a focus on the
expected performance goals (Marzano et al., 2005). Leadership, particularly school leadership is viewed as one component that impacts student achievement.

To develop a vision of the future, leaders must have great insight into the environment in which the organization currently exists, and in which the intend it to exist in the future. For example, as the leader of a school, the principal must be able to know and assess the needs of the staff and students to prepare the student body to pass the CAHSEE. For students who do not pass the CAHSEE, the principal must be prepared to implement successful interventions with the help of all stakeholders (Zau & Betts, 2008). Knowing the high stakes of the CAHSEE and the ramifications of failing the exam, a transformational leader will not only react to student failure but will be proactive in implementing instructional interventions that will result in students passing the CAHSEE (Marks & Printy, 2003). The insight of the administration may result in establishing a transformational leadership style.

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership originates from James McGregor Burns’ 1978 publication in which he examined the character traits of leaders and their ability to invoke change through building capacity among the staff, empowering them, developing a culture of collaboration and intellectual stimulation; where the school’s mission and goals of the organization are clearly identified (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership plays a significant role in precipitating change (Marks & Printy, 2003). The transformation process involves the principal and staff working closely together through the transformation process (Marks & Printy, 2003). Transformational leadership is based on the principal motivating followers to their fullest potential and assisting in creating a
working environment in which the staff collaborates and identifies the schools’ goals and the importance of achieving them. During the transformation process, the leader is responsible for convincing the staff to forsake their individual interests for the benefit of the organization.

A transformational leader is defined as one who creates valuable and positive change among the followers. The leader focuses on transforming others to promote a professional learning community. The leader takes a visionary position and inspires and motivates the staff to perform beyond expectations. Leadership that can stimulate bottom-up participation from teachers and principals in an effort to restructure schools has shown academic progress (Sergiovanni, 1990). Transformational leadership with a development orientation toward group members and an overall focus on increasing organizational effectiveness, appears the most compatible leadership style for principals engaged in school social restructuring efforts (Leithwood, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1990).

Transformational leadership relies on the principal building capacity among the staff, inspiring trust, encouraging risk-taking, and developing a shared moral clarity to bring about enhanced performance and change. Transactional leadership relies on bartering and trading one thing for another (Nisivoccia, 1997). Transformational leadership works by “tapping the shared values of followers and building normative commitment to the mission of the school” (Gurr, 1997, p. 4). Such a tactic is known as a team oriented approach, where individual plaudits, self-interests, and egos are shed for the promotion of collaboration, communication, risk-taking, and intellectual stimulation to promote successful performance and change based on commitment to shared values. Avolio and Bass (1988) referred to this form of leadership as value added.
A principal that embodies the attributes of a transformational leader would facilitate instructional and curricular improvements with staff input to ensure passing math CAHSEE scores. According to Wellisch, MacQueen, Carriere, and Duck (1978), effective principals established a vision, set high expectations and kept the focus squarely on curriculum and instruction while including the staff in the change process. Cotton (2003) explained that as a principal and their staff invoke change and move to improve their students’ performance, the principal’s leadership is focused on:

- Continually pursuing high levels of student learning
- Establishing a norm of continuous improvement
- Facilitating discussion of instructional issues
- Observing classrooms frequently and providing feedback to teachers
- Respecting teacher autonomy
- Protecting instructional time
- Supporting teachers’ risk taking
- Providing staff development opportunities and activities
- Supplying other resources, such as time and materials
- Monitoring student progress and reporting findings
- Using student achievement data to improvement programs
- Recognizing student and teacher achievement
- Role modeling

In order for a principal to create and maintain a school-wide focus on achievement they must be aware of what their role is, posses the courage to ask what is
not working, constantly assess the needs and progress of their students, and have the foresight to make adjustments as the need arises.

Bass and Avolio (1994) outlined the four characteristics found in transformational leaders of the 21st century: individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Individual consideration involves the principal working with teachers on an individual basis to address their needs. Intellectual stimulation is characterized as the principal enabling the staff to think critically about the most recent instructional strategies and Response to Instruction (RTI). Inspirational motivation is defined as the principal setting high academic expectations for the staff and students through their dynamic presence. Lastly, idealized influence is duly noted as the principal effectively modeling successful behavior, based upon their achievements and character.

Based on the research findings by Evans (1996) there was significant evidence that suggests a strong correlation between transformational principals and successful school improvement. The research findings of Evans (1996) coincide with the leadership behaviors Marzano et al. (2005) identified. Effective school leadership is evident when there is a clear vision, rigorous standards, quality instruction, ongoing professional development, professional learning communities, and effective monitoring of student learning. The aforementioned characteristics of successful school management embody transformational leadership. Furthermore, the twenty-one responsibilities of the school leader as explained by Marzano et al. (2005) have a direct correlation of student and teacher performance as outlined in the findings by Evans (1996).
Evans (1996) examined the relationship between elementary principals’ use of transformational leadership strategies, which included the implementation of common goals, professional learning communities, professional development, teacher commitment, management of the school, and their effect on student learning. The research sample consisted of eighteen elementary school principles and their 214 teachers in a southwestern Michigan school district. One hundred fifteen teachers (54%) completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and the School Organizational Factors Questionnaire. Seventeen principals (94%) responded to the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire analyzed scores based on the four factors that embody transformational leadership—Idealized Influence, Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, and Inspirational Motivation. The School Organizational Factors Questionnaire collected information on teachers’ perceptions of their workplace conditions and on numerous teacher background characteristics. Eighty-six percent of the respondents were female. Eighty percent of the principals were white and 20% were African-American. Ninety-four percent of the teachers were white, 4% were African-American, and 2% were classified as other.

The findings of this study are useful to educational leaders because the data exemplified a significant correlation between teachers’ reports of principals’ transformational leadership and their “bottom-up” style that empowered subordinates. Principals that consistently demonstrated transformational leadership were associated with effective schools. Transformational principals foster the professional development of the staff and promote collaboration; which school effectiveness and school restructuring deem essential for successful school improvement (Evans, 1996).
Educational leaders must be equipped with critical thinking skills to solve complex problems, develop a vision, and motivate the staff to go above and beyond to ensure student achievement.

The limitations of the findings included the fact that the data was gathered from one rural school district consisting entirely of elementary schools. The sample size was relatively small. Only 115 teachers and 17 principals participated in the study. Another limitation that could possibly influence the accuracy of the findings is that females and whites comprised the vast majority of the sample which is not indicative of what one would encounter in such a heterogeneous society.

Upon reading the study one is left to question if transformational leadership would be as successful in middle and high schools in large urban and suburban bureaucratic school systems with powerful unions. Furthermore, one has to ask what role does age and the experience of the staff play in the success or lack thereof of a leader attempting to invoke positive change. What role did students play as principals attempted to successfully transform a school? How would a more diverse staff view change as a principal exhibits transformational leadership? How would a principal respond to a large heterogeneous staff while attempting to achieve positive results? What was the funding structure of the school district? Was their ample support staff and parental involvement?

To effectively promote change, transformational leaders provide professional development and the tools necessary to increase student performance. The research findings also concluded that effective schools encompassing transformational leadership are better managed, the work is centered around a set of shared educationally appropriate goals, and the curriculum is rigorous. Principals that exercised transformational
leadership lead schools that were deemed effective. This is exemplified by six case studies reviewed by Smith and Andrews (1989), which explained that the five factors most prevalent in transformational schools are strong leadership on behalf of the principal and staff, high expectations for student achievement, clear vision, relevant professional development, and effective monitoring of student progress.

**Transformational Leadership and Shared Instructional Leadership**

Principals have been under increased pressure to improve the achievement of their students on standardized tests (Marks & Printy, 2003). In response to the increased accountability, principals have engaged in greater collaboration with their teachers in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The level of collaboration between principals and teachers involving curriculum and instruction is a strong determinant of student academic success (Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). This model of leadership is known as shared instructional leadership. The results of 27 studies analyzed by Robinson et al. (2008) found that instructional leadership was three to four times more likely to affect teacher instruction, student learning, and outcomes.

Shared instructional leadership is an inclusive concept which involves the principal being actively involved with teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessment; where they assume the mantle of facilitator of teaching and learning as opposed to just a qualified observer. By the principal assuming the role of instructional leader, it allows site leaders to research best practices, plan professional development, provide resources, provide instructional support, and build capacity among the staff (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Instructional leadership is defined as “leadership functions directly related to teaching and learning” (Murphy, 1988, p. 373); which also includes the day-to-day
managerial duties principals perform to ensure teachers can teach and students can learn (Donmoyer & Wagstaff, 1990; Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

While transformational leadership focuses on the vision and builds organizational capacity for school improvement; instructional leadership involves the principal collaborating with the staff to focus on the tenets of teaching and learning: instruction, curriculum, assessment, and student achievement (Firestone, 1996). The combination of transformational leadership and instructional leadership is known as integrated leadership. Bredeson (1996) notes that “there is ample evidence in the literature that effective leadership can and does positively affect school and student outcomes” (p. 255).

An example of integrated leadership is described by Marks and Printy (2003), who conducted a study examining the effects of transformational and instructional leadership and their impact on student performance. The study was comprised of 24 nationally selected restructured schools—eight elementary schools, eight middle schools, and eight high schools in 16 states and 22 school districts mostly in urban areas; mainly comprised of economically disadvantaged and minority students. The study found that when transformational and shared instructional leadership, known as integrated leadership is exercised at a school site based on the quality of instruction and assessments; the achievement of its students is higher in comparison to schools with low integrated leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003). According to the findings of the research, the seven schools where both transformational and shared instructional leadership were above average, the principals provided strong instructional leadership, enhanced teaching and learning, while mobilizing the strengths of the staff to bolster student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003).
The school performance measures based on the study revealed that integrated leadership schools scored above 0.86 SD (standard deviations) of the mean. Low leadership schools averaged -0.67 SD of the mean. This data reflects the strong collaboration that existed between the principal, their staff, and the focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Marks & Printy, 2003).

More recently, Leithwood and Jantzi’s (2006) study assessed school leadership based on a principal’s use of instructional and transformational leadership. They concluded that “an integrated form of leadership, incorporating a strong capacity for developing shared instructional leadership combined with qualities associated with transformational leadership, was the best predictor of the intellectual quality of student work in both math and social studies” (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 658).

Based on the findings of Marks and Printy (2003) and Leithwood and Jantzi (2006), the more involved administrators are with teaching, learning, curriculum and instruction, and assessment, the greater the impact principals will have on achievement. Strong transformational leadership by the principal is essential in supporting the commitment of teachers. …Transformational principals are needed to invite teachers to share leadership functions. When teachers perceive principals’ instructional leadership behaviors to be appropriate, they grow in commitment, professional involvement, and willingness to innovate. Thus, instructional leadership can itself be transformational. (Sheppard, 1996, p. 393)
Teacher Empowerment

A leader that fosters a bottom-up approach empowers teachers to take risks that will enhance their learning, foster greater collaboration among the staff, and provide students with a comprehensive education. Teachers that are active participants and are given the authority to be a part of the change process become vested stakeholders and view the change effort as a cause greater than oneself (Burns, 1978).

Empowerment is defined as shared decision making, where power goes to the employees who then experience a sense of ownership and control in improving the performance of the organization (Byham & Cox, 1988).

Terry (1995) found significant evidence that suggests empowerment is essential to school reform and student academic performance. In the context of education, empowerment is fostered by the principal, where the teachers are emboldened to make decisions which positively impact the academic performance of their students. It is the principal’s responsibility to inspire those working closest with the students and having the greatest impact to make decisions regarding instruction. In order to promote and foster a culture of empowerment the principal must exhibit trust, patience, knowledge of instructional strategies, and the courage to invoke and sustain change. The principal has to embody the role of ‘lead learner’, coach, facilitator; where taking risks, group-think, and participation are encouraged. Such an endeavor will only be successful if the entire faculty is in support of the concept of empowerment.

Peel and Walker (1994) identified four characteristics a principal must possess to make shared decision making a success. The four characteristics include: visible commitment, risk-taker, effective communicator, and foresight of potential problems. The principal must be visible throughout the school and out in the community to
encourage risk-taking and lend their support to the staff. The visible presence of the principal as well as modeling and encouraging risk-taking will encourage the staff to draft and boldly try new ideas. The ability to propose new ideas is made possible by the principal where open communication is encouraged, and ideas freely shared. Because the principal is visible and converses with the staff, students, parents, and the community, potential problems in the change process are noted and addressed so collectively they can come up with solutions. Such actions on behalf of the principal exemplify an atmosphere of mutual respect and commitment which impact results, establish guidelines, resources, accountabilities, and consequences. To empower the staff the principal must involve the staff in an open dialogue about professional development, instruction, curriculum, data, accountability, and results.

Another responsibility of the principal is to conduct all faculty interactions with a leadership style which promotes empowerment (Byham & Cox, 1988). Such actions on behalf of the principal will strengthen the teacher’s self-esteem, and encourage them to seek ideas, information, and make suggestions. Furthermore, the principal must listen and respond with genuine empathy, ask teachers for help, and offer their assistance (Erlandson & Bifano, 1987).

Modeling empowered behavior sets the tone so teachers and students will be placed at the center of the learning curve. Abandoning the traditional hierarchical structure and sharing the responsibilities of managing a school with the faculty gives the teachers professional autonomy and genuine collegial involvement in the decision making process. This by no means suggests the principal is abdicating their role as lead learner, but instead is empowering teachers to become instructional leaders and
stakeholders for student growth and school effectiveness. It is still the responsibility of the principal to lead by example, enforce the mission and vision, ensure data-driven instruction and assess progress and performance (Kirby, Wimpelberg, & Keaster, 1992).

According to Erlandson and Bifano (1987), the benefits of teacher empowerment include increased job satisfaction, expanded job commitment, improved collegial relationship, expanded individual autonomy, enhanced classroom performance, tailored professional development opportunities, and increased teacher self-respect. By empowering teachers, the faculty will view themselves as the focus of instructional control; selecting textbooks, identifying formal and informal measures used to assess student progress, writing curricula, selecting instructional resources, and determining effective instructional strategies tailored to meet the needs of each student (Kirby et al., 1992). Psychologically, for empowerment to be successful teachers need greater responsibility for their daily contributions, as well as trust, praise, direction, clear measurements, goals, resources, and open communication.

According to Cotton (2003), for school-based management structures to be effective, teachers must be empowered by the leader to make critical decisions concerning curriculum and instruction, budgets, and professional development. Shared decision making leads to the faculty learning, planning, and working together to upgrade their skills, as well as their delivery of instruction and student performance. Looking at the 21 responsibilities of the school leader as outlined by Marzano et al. (2005), it is the responsibility of the principal to involve teachers in the design and implementation of important decision and policies. There is a direct correlation with student academic achievement and principal visibility and involvement. The principal must establish open
lines of communication and be aware of curriculum, instruction, new innovations, data, as well as the needs of the staff and students. Daily, the principal must have quality contact with teachers and students.

Terry (1995) explains that the Dade County School System in Florida decentralized their school system on a large scale. This was as a result of the teachers’ union and the school management working closely together. The result was more decisions regarding student learning and teacher development occurring at the school site with the blessing of both teachers and principals. A principal at South Miami Middle School gives site-base management the credit for test scores which have stayed above the national average during four years of challenges which included 40% growth, an increase of minority students from 65% to 75% of the population and the transition from a junior high school concept to the middle school concept. Ownership in the decisions made was one of the major reasons for the success of shared decisions making (Fiske, 1991). Research needs to continue on specific school sites to show how empowerment improved student performance from previous years.

With the increased scrutiny on teachers, principals, and superintendents it is imperative administrators investigate new ways to enhance the profession of teaching by providing enough challenge and variety. Empowerment is only one way to give new meaning to this process and to renew the teaching force in ways which persuade both the best veterans and the most promising prospects that teaching can be a lifelong career. Principals who empower their staff to take ownership of their professional development, their student’s learning, as well as the vision and mission of the school are most effective.
The more power a principal invests in their staff, the more effective and respected the leader becomes (Lucas, Brown, & Markus, 1991).

Based on the findings of Terry (1995), one limitation is that only the Dade County School System was cited in the study. More data from similar school systems to Dade County should have been provided to support the findings. What is not known is how the process of empowerment would be perceived and received in other school systems both large and small. The findings do not explain how the experience of a staff or lack thereof affects the implementation of empowerment.

Some questions left unanswered regarding the empowerment of teachers are, what are the implications of giving a staff increased levels of autonomy? What professional development does the principal require to implement a culture of empowerment? What training and development does the staff require? What is the time frame? Does the age of the staff play a role in the success of implementing empowerment? Is empowerment best introduced to a staff in stages or all at once? What role does the superintendent, school board, community, and faculty play in the transition of power from the district headquarters to the school level? What if anything does the principal have to promise the school board in exchange for them relinquishing a certain level of control of the school-site?

Based on the findings of Terry (1995), a successful school is evident where the principal motivates the staff to improve through empowerment. The principal must assume the leadership role in implementing and supporting empowerment through trust.

Trust

The impetus of empowerment is the concept of trust. Accordingly to Tschannen-Moran (2004), “trust within schools can be fostered or diminished by the behavior of the
leader” (p. 16). An empirical study on trust conducted by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) found that trust was an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open. The study involved a large urban Midwestern school district, consisting of a sample size of 50 elementary schools and 898 teachers. The findings revealed that trust in an organization occurs along three levels: trust in the principal, trust in colleagues, and trust in clients (students and parents).

Trust encompasses the aforementioned five factors that must be present in all relationships (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). An explanation of benevolence is when the intuitive sense of caring occurs. People entrust others to look out for their best interest even if it involves making oneself vulnerable to authority with the expectation that they will be cared for. The next characteristic that embodies trust is honesty. Honesty is the fundamental trait of integrity and authenticity as explained by Tschannen-Moran (2004). Both integrity and authenticity are values that people embrace to ensure trust. Tschannen-Moran (2004) explained that the third trait associated with trust is openness. Openness is defined as the showing of vulnerability when people allow themselves to be open and willing to ask for help (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Reliability as Tschannen-Moran (2004) outlined is knowing that one can predict how others will behave. Trust is an integral part of that predictability. The last trait associated trust is competence. The ability to have people depend on others is based on their knowledge and belief that they know what they are doing, which equates to trust (Solomon & Flores, 2001). Once individuals know each other’s competence, trustworthiness develops between the participants (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).
Examples of how administrators, teachers, students, and parents trust one another for the well-being of the children is discussed by Crowson and Morris (1990) who explained that a school vision is related to the competence, honesty, openness, reliability, and benevolence that is discussed by Tschannen-Moran (2004). Crowson and Morris (1990) explained that the development of a school’s vision is based on the trust of all parties involved to develop the vision, such as ensuring a 100% pass rate for all students on the CAHSEE. Manasse (1986) reiterated that trust within an educational construct encompasses the specific values and beliefs of each teacher and principal to attain a common goal for the benefit of the children. Greenfield (1991) explained that “teachers’ work is not based on nor motivated by bureaucratic mandate or directives from superiors, but by a moral commitment to children rooted in their awareness of the needs of these children and their belief about the significance of their roles as teachers, in these children’s lives” (p. 8).

A principal’s ability to feel comfortable collaborating and relinquishing control serves as the impetus for trust and respect to further support the staff (Hoy & Tarter, 2003). These characteristics of trust and respect as well as the pro-active behavior exemplified by the administration are the thread that transforms school sites for the benefit of each child. The student’s transformation and academic success based on trust and the efficacy of the staff results in their self-empowerment, which actually is an empowerment for everyone in the school. As explained by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), in order for principals to exert their leadership so that collaboration, teaching, and learning can occur to promote academic success, trust must be at the forefront of the relationship.
CAHSEE Intervention Programs

It is important that administrators find innovative ways and interventions for students identified as being at risk of failing the CAHSEE. In anticipation of the lack of success that some students would experience on the CAHSEE, California enacted Assembly Bill 347 (AB 347) and AB 128, which secured tutoring funds to assist 12th grade students who were identified as being at risk of failing the CAHSEE or had failed the CAHSEE and subsequently did not re-enroll the following school year (Zau & Betts, 2008).

San Diego Unified School District provided additional assistance to students at risk of failing the CAHSEE by creating two tutoring programs for seniors (Zau & Betts, 2008). Through the funding of AB 128, Princeton Review implemented a tutoring program that focused on test-taking strategies for students who had failed the CAHSEE but had shown great promise of passing the exam on their second attempt. The second intervention, AB 347 was designed by Kaplan Inc., and focused on intense content-specific tutorials for students who had not only failed the CAHSEE but struggled greatly on the exam. Despite these two interventions Zau and Betts (2008) found no statistically significant differences in the passing rates of students who were enrolled in the tutorial programs and those who were not.

In an effort to increase students’ performance on the CAHSEE the San Diego Unified School District implemented several interventions. Assembly Bill 128 (AB 128) provided funds for tutoring to assist 1,488 students in the class of 2006 who had yet to pass the CAHSEE entering their senior year at a cost of $508,000. Grade 12 students who missed the passing score of 350 and scored between 320 and 349 were offered the opportunity to attend tutoring sessions through Princeton Review, which focused on test-
taking strategies. Additionally, tutoring services designed by Kaplan Inc., were made available to students who scored below 320. The purpose of the Kaplan tutoring sessions was to review the content tested on the CAHSEE (Zau & Betts, 2008).

A study conducted by Zau and Betts (2008) found statistically insignificant evidence that students offered intensive Kaplan tutoring on the content of the CAHSEE exam, especially in ELA, may have had higher probabilities of passing the CAHSEE than did students who were offered less-intensive tutoring on test-taking strategies offered by the Princeton Review. There was statistically significant evidence that the students offered the Kaplan tutoring may have gained slightly more in ELA CAHSEE reading scores. The results were based on a sample of only 79 students.

In an attempt to improve student achievement and CAHSEE passing rates, SDUSD implemented the Blueprint for Student Success in 2000. The purpose of the reform was to assist students struggling in ELA and increase the time students spend on reading. Students were selected to participate in numerous reading programs if their results on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test showed that they were one or more grade levels below the norm. Regardless of their test scores, English Language Learners were encouraged to participate in the intervention program. Teachers received training in the form of professional development that focused on various reading programs to improve student literacy. The key intervention strategies for ELA students in grades 6-10 performing below grade level included:

1. Literacy block. Literacy block was a double-length English class offered in grades 6 through 10.
2. Literacy core. In grade 9, the literacy class was extended to three periods. In 2001–2002, grade 6 and 7 students also began to participate in literacy core.

3. Extended day reading program. In all schools with grades 1–9, participants received three 90-minute periods each week of supervised reading before or after school.

4. Summer school. Participants included students from most grades from K through 9, who were asked to attend for six weeks for four hours per day. Some schools in the district, mostly elementary schools, were year-round schools, in which case participants attended special intersession studies. (Zau & Betts, 2008, p. 42)

Students who were identified as being significantly below grade level as well as 1 to 1.9 levels below grade level in reading showed a lower probability of passing the CAHSEE by grade 10 (Zau & Betts, 2008). However, when examining the passage rate of seniors on the CAHSEE who participated in the Blueprint for Student Success, Zau and Betts (2008) found statistically significant and positive results. Students who participated in the extended day reading program increased their probability of passing the CAHSEE by 4% when compared to similar students who were not enrolled in the intervention program. “Similarly, the number of peer coaches as a percentage of enrollment at the school had a positive and statistically significant effect (as it did in the model of passage by grade 10) and may have helped some students pass the CAHSEE. However, the triple-period literacy classes appear to have had a large negative effect” (Zau & Betts, 2008, p. 43).

At the conclusion of the 2005-2006 school year approximately 10% of students in California failed the CAHSEE and did not graduate from high school (Zau & Betts,
Additionally, there was a miniscule increase in the graduation rate from year 2006 to 2007 of 0.3% reflected by actual scores of 90.4% to 90.7% (Zau & Betts, 2008). For students who have failed the high school exit exam part of the principal’s leadership is to research and implement the types of interventions that will assist their students in passing the CAHSEE.

Conclusion

For principals to lead their staff and students in the 21st century economy, principals must be aware of situational leadership, specifically, when transactional or transformational leadership, and first and second order change is most appropriate. Encompassing such leadership requires the principal to be the catalyst who implements the appropriate level of change and supports to serve as a guide and positively impact the established goal of getting students who failed the math CAHSEE to pass it.

There has been a focus on determining what, if any, correlation exists between educational leadership and its impact on student outcomes (Witziers et al., 2003). Bredeson (1996) notes that, “there is ample evidence in the literature that effective leadership can and does positively affect school and student outcomes” (p. 255). Despite the aforementioned finding, researchers have been unable to solidify a direct affect of the principal’s leadership on student achievement (Witziers et al., 2003). In fact, Murphy (1988) concluded that there is insufficient proof that educational leadership impacts student learning. Additionally, Hallinger and Heck (1996) could draw no conclusive positive effects of a principals leadership because, “despite the traditional rhetoric concerning principal effects, the actual results of empirical studies in the U.S. and U.K. are not altogether consistent in size or direction” (p. 1). What is needed is greater insight
into the types of leadership principals possess in promoting and sustaining student achievement.

According to Leithwood et al., (2004), successful principal leadership is a necessary requirement to improve student learning. Leithwood et al. (2004) states that solid evidence is lacking to determine a common set of basic leadership practices used by successful leaders to promote student achievement.

There is a substantial body of research that outlines the performance gap between Whites, Hispanics and African American students on high-stakes exams such as the CAHSEE and the impact unprepared students have on the workforce (Achieve, Inc., 2005; Zau & Betts, 2008). However, the research has not adequately investigated the role principals play in improving student achievement on high school exit exams. What is still left unanswered is whether principal leadership matters and what is the principal’s role in fostering the academic success of students.

To address the issues and concerns, the current study investigated the administrations impact on results of the math CAHSEE. The purpose of the study was to (1) examine the practices that contributed to the success of African American and Hispanic students on the mathematics section of the CAHSEE at a public charter high school in an urban school district in Southern California and (2) to identify the ways in which the school’s administration and staff influenced those practices. This study was intended to help principals and other stakeholders consider how they might support students in learning critical skills and attaining a passing score on the CAHSEE.

This study provides additional information about the leadership of one high school administration and their staff who had high percentages of African American and
Hispanic students pass the mathematics section of the CAHSEE on the first administration. This research study examined the administrative leadership effectiveness and understanding of how their leadership practices work and how it translates into student learning and success on the CAHSEE.

The results from the study may suggest important variables that can be the focus of reflection and further research regarding the administrations role in promoting successful mathematics instruction for African American and Hispanic students. The findings might also suggest a possible blueprint for improving student success rates on high school exit examinations like the CAHSEE.
CHAPTER 3—METHODOLOGY

There is increased pressure on principals in California to provide students relevant intervention programs to ensure the successful completion of the math portion of the state test called the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). Passage of the test is a graduation requirement. Also, student passage rates are included in school accountability profiles. As a result, passage rates are likely to influence perceptions of principal effectiveness.

While the responsibility for passing high school exit exams inevitably falls on the individual student, the administration are responsible for sustaining the improvement and achievement of their students on these exams (Rammer, 2007). With the rise of high school exit exams, principals are expected to influence high passage rates and high graduation rates.

The dearth of research studies regarding the role and responsibility of school leadership in getting students to pass high stakes exit exams such as the CAHSEE on the first administration, especially among Black and Hispanic students, makes this a significant topic in need of further exploration.

This study employed a qualitative case study through which the researcher conducted structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions with the following participants from a high performing high school: three school administrators, four mathematics teachers at the school, including the math department chair, and support staff. Participants were selected to determine what they did to influence high passage rates on their students’ math CAHSEE scores (Weiss, 1998).
In addition to conducting these one-on-one interviews, I conducted a focus group consisting of Black and Hispanic students who passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE during the 2010-2011 school year as sophomores on their first attempt. These interviews lead to the identification of relevant documents (artifacts) such as lesson plans (See Appendix A), curriculum materials, school plans, school mission and vision, teacher expectations, daily attendance percentages, and the school motto that illuminated the factors that have influenced student success on the mathematics portion of the CAHSEE. The interviews revealed valuable data including the administrative makeup of the school, the instructional knowledge of the administration and the teachers, interactions between staff and students, and descriptions of the culture of the school that help to explain the phenomenon that is occurring (Roberts, 2004). Finally, I observed freshman and sophomore mathematics classes in the school through the use of a formal observation protocol. All of these data were analyzed through qualitative data analysis strategies to identify important trends, issues, and themes.

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the body of literature concerning the roles principals play in improving the achievement of Black and Hispanic students; specifically in the area of high stakes testing. The generally positive nature of the study posed minimal risks to subjects; however, to ensure the protection of subjects, data was reported anonymously.

**Purpose**

In Chapter 2, I explored the wide-ranging effects of high-stakes tests on students. There is a substantial body of research that outlines the performance gap between Whites and Hispanics, African Americans, and English Language Learner (ELL) students on high-stakes exams such as the CAHSEE as well as the impact unprepared students have
on the workforce (Achieve, Inc., 2005; Zau & Betts, 2008). However, the research has
not adequately investigated the role the administration plays in improving student
achievement on high school exit exams. The question that is still left unanswered is
whether the administration’s leadership matters and what their role is in fostering the
academic success of students.

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the role the administration
played at a charter high school in an urban school district in southern California and the
other factors that contributed to high passage rates on the mathematics section of the
CAHSEE. The study specifically (1) examined the practices of a public charter high
school in which high percentages of Black and Hispanic students passed the CAHSEE
and (2) examined the influence of the school’s administration in developing and
promoting practices that resulted in high passage rates. The study also sought an
explanation as to how the administration created a school-wide focus on student
achievement, and how they influenced this focus. What interventions were made
available to the staff and students? How were the interventions selected, implemented,
and monitored? How was the administration able to influence and sustain change so that
students and teachers had the expectation that passing the math CAHSEE on the first
administration was the only option? What types of leadership characteristics
(transformational, transactional) were associated with assisting students in passing the
CAHSEE?

Methodology

This study is best described as a qualitative, single case study that is a descriptive
phenomenological analysis and bounded. Case study research is defined as a,
“qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or
multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Yin (2009) explains that a case study investigates the factors contributing to the phenomenon in a natural setting, where the data garnered from the investigation of complex interrelationships among people, institutions, events, and beliefs are taken into account by the researcher in a holistic fashion.

The research study encompassed a qualitative approach. Strauss and Corbin (1990) identified five major purposes for conducting qualitative research:

1. The conviction of the researcher based on experience.
2. The nature of the research problem.
3. To uncover and understand what lies behind and phenomenon about which little is yet known.
4. To gain novel and fresh slants on things about which quite a bit is already known.
5. To give intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 19)

This study is considered a qualitative design because it was descriptive in nature, relied on observations and interviews, the collection of intensive data, the extrapolation of the data collected, and purposive sampling (Roberts, 2004). The study incorporated interview techniques to learn more about the practices that influenced the phenomena of high CAHSEE math passage rates among Black and Hispanic students at an urban high school in San Diego County. The aforementioned methods of data collection allowed the researcher to closely examine the problem and develop a better understanding of the
phenomenon of the administrations leadership and how their actions translated into high passage rates for sophomores on the CAHSEE.

Weiss (1998) defined qualitative research as “research that examines phenomena primarily through words and tends to focus on dynamics, meaning, and context. Qualitative research usually uses observation, interviewing, and document reviews to collect data” (p. 335). Qualitative research reveals how all parts of the phenomenon intricately interact to with each other to form a whole. It is the researcher’s responsibility to extract and analyze the data from interviews, people’s experiences, and observations to develop a depth of understanding of the uniqueness of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

The five characteristics that are unique to a qualitative research study are:

1. The importance of understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants view or the insider’s perspective.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. The researcher is in the field to conduct interviews in the natural setting.
4. Involves abstracting data, constructing concepts, and developing themes based on observations and interviews.
5. The product is richly descriptive containing words and artifacts. (Merriam, 1998)

The goal of this researcher in conducting a qualitative research study was to produce a descriptive case study in which rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon were provided (Merriam, 1998). The descriptions included the culture, mission, vision, curriculum, roles, and leadership actions of the administration and staff to ensure high CAHSEE pass rates for sophomores who took the high school exit exam for the first time. By focusing on a single public charter high school, the researcher was able to drill
down into the data and concentrate on the significant contributing factors to the phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Moustakas (1994) explained that the object of a phenomenological analysis is to describe experiences and precipitating factors that account for the phenomenon coming to fruition. In essence the researcher attempts to see the phenomenon from different angles, perspectives, roles, or functions. “The aim of a phenomenological analysis is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced…How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159)? According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “a bounded system is a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). In this case the phenomenon studied was intrinsically bounded, in that there was a limit to the data that could be collected at the charter high school (Merriam, 1998).

This study looked at how the administration at a single school influenced their teachers and relevant support staff to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student achievement and sustained high passage rates on the CAHSEE, and therefore lent itself to a qualitative research approach. Part of the qualitative research involved the collection of data including documents, classroom observations, artifacts, interviews, and focus groups. The primary source of data generated from qualitative research is interviews and focus groups (Lewis, 2003). Therefore, for the purposes of this research study, structured interviews with the administration and staff, as well as a focus group consisting of 11 students (8 seniors, 3 juniors, 5 males, 6 females, 5 Hispanics, 6 African Americans) were used to collect the data.
The benefits of a focus group to the research are twofold: (a) They obtain the views of 6-12 people in one place, and (b) the views, opinions, and recollections of the participants are bounced off of each other so there is debate, discussion, denial, defense, learning, and understanding throughout the session. It also gives the researcher the opportunity to observe the body language of the group members, their level of commitment to their views, their opposition to other members’ opinions, and the changes that occur when different positions are voiced (Weiss, 1998). According to Dexter (1970), “interviewing is the preferred tactic of data collection when…it will get better data or more data or data at less cost than other tactics!” (p. 11). The purpose of conducting interviews is to obtain specific information as well as to find out what the participants are thinking (Patton, 2002).

The use of a case study is appropriate for research in a school setting due to the intricacy of the school site and the need to examine all contributing factors to the phenomenon. A qualitative case study further allows the researcher to analyze and thoroughly describe the phenomenon by examining and comparing field notes until saturation occurs (Merriam, 1998).

The scarcity with which the literature discusses the role and responsibility of school leadership in getting students to pass high stakes exit exams such as the CAHSEE on the first administration makes this a significant topic in need of further exploration. Conducting a qualitative study of the administration’s actions in getting their students to pass the CAHSEE at higher rates, including Hispanic and Black students when compared to the state of California, enabled the researcher to better describe the administration’s role in preparing students for high stakes exit exams, which may inform the practice of
school districts, superintendents, principals, and teachers. The research study will attempt to answer the question: How do principals exert their leadership to impact the achievement of students who passed the CAHSEE on their first attempt?

Structured interviews were conducted with the principal, other school administrators, math department chair, teachers, math tutors, and relevant support staff member to determine what they did to influence the success of African American and Hispanic students on the mathematics section of the CAHSEE. Relevant support staff members included individuals who coordinated math intervention programs, counselors who identify and schedule students to participate in support programs, and other staff members who play important roles in planning or delivering mathematics support to students who are struggling in math before the administration of the CAHSEE. The use of formal interviews allowed for a systematic mode of collecting data (Weiss, 1998). The use of structured interviews was beneficial because the interview questions were worded the same for the administration, teachers, and support providers, so they all responded to the same questions, and in the same order. For the purposes of this study, open-ended questions were used. “Open-ended questions are particularly useful when the evaluator wants respondents to explain why they chose a certain answer, when they want their suggestions for improvement, or when they don’t know enough to anticipate what the categories of answers are apt to be” (Weiss, 1998, p. 140).

The interviews served the purpose of rehashing events, verifying, and discounting information, regarding the phenomenon in an attempt to draw meaningful conclusions and triangulate the data (Brod, Tesler, & Christensen, 2009). Throughout all interviews with the participants the researcher used a range of probes to achieve and verify depth of
an answer through asking the same question in multiple ways and multiple times. In addition, the researcher conducted site observations, and viewed relevant artifacts to check for consistency in order to triangulate the data (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). Triangulation involves the process of verifying that the findings from the data collected through interviews, observations, and artifacts agree. Once the researcher analyzes the data and determines that there is consistency in the findings, they can develop main themes and sub-categories (Weiss, 1998).

During each interview, participants were asked to describe the practices they believed influenced the success of African American and Hispanic students on the mathematics section of the CAHSEE. As well, individuals were asked to explain how they believed the school’s administration influenced those practices. The interviews with the principal and other school administrators took approximately 50 minutes. Interviews with teachers and other school employees lasted approximately 40 minutes. The student focus group lasted approximately 40 minutes.

One of the most powerful tools that the writer of a case study can use is the evidence of the participants’ own words to convey the story (Stake, 1995). This brings the reader into the participants’ world and provides a rich context for understanding the phenomenon of the study.

**Initial Research Questions**

This study was based upon the assumption that certain high schools in this large urban school district in Southern California had higher CAHSEE passing rates among Black and Hispanic students when compared to other high schools in San Diego County as well as the state of California. The underlying question of the research was what
actions did the principal take that resulted in the high percentages of African American and Hispanic students passing the mathematics section of the CAHSEE as sophomores?

The specific research questions that will guide the study are as follows:

1. How does the administration influence their staff to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student achievement?

2. What leadership characteristics exist among the administration and the staff that support student achievement?

3. What student and teacher supports exist that bolster student achievement and lead to high CAHSEE passage rates?

4. How does the culture of the school factor into student success?

Potential Significance

The results of this study sought to further help inform the practice of principals as they assist students in passing the CAHSEE. Principals may utilize the findings to assess their leadership and their ability to institute support, motivate, and prepare students to pass the CAHSEE or applicable state graduation exams. The findings may help principals identify and pursue critical change opportunities, pursue a plan of action, and invoke change. The results of the study might justify the need for additional research in order to validate the principal’s leadership role in promoting successful interventions for students who failed the CAHSEE.

Data Collection

The research study encompassed a qualitative research approach. The math CAHSEE scores of the selected school were analyzed using Data Quest through the California Department of Education (CDE) website to examine the passage rates of the students compared to the school district, county, and state CAHSEE scores. With the
aforementioned data in hand, structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions, which allowed for open narrative responses, were utilized during individual interviews with each administrator (Weiss, 1998) and relevant staff member. This allowed the researcher to determine what each administrator, math department chair, math teacher, and relevant support staff did to influence high passing math CAHSEE scores among African American and Hispanic students, and how they contributed to the phenomenon. All interviews were taped. The researcher individually coded the transcribed data to allow categories of data to emerge during the interviews, and a grounded theoretical approach utilizing a constant comparative method was pursued until saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The findings from the interviews were analyzed to determine emerging categories, themes, similarities, differences, and patterns and to draw conclusions based on administration’s leadership and their ability to foster change and attain high passage rates on the math CAHSEE on students’ first administration (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The study used structured interviews to reveal the administration’s role in promoting and sustaining successful interventions for African American and Hispanic students who passed the math CAHSEE on the first administration. The formal interviews provided the researcher an opportunity to immerse themselves in how administrators recognize effective instruction, an academic problem, how they created an action plan, how they secured required resources, how they built support for the planned intervention, and how they motivated and monitored the progress of each student to ensure they passed the CAHSEE on their first attempt.
In addition to the individual interviews with the administration, teachers, and the focus group consisting of students, the researcher observed one math class taught by each teacher who agreed to participate as well as one math department meeting. During the observation, the researcher strictly observed, but did not interact with the participants. Each observation lasted one school period (approximately 90 minutes).

Field notes were taken during interviews with each participant. The researcher took careful field notes which included the role of the interviewee, their mood, as well as the setting (Merriam, 1998). Part of the data collection included gathering artifacts and documents that further explained the administration’s role in ensuring that African American and Hispanic students passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE on the first administration.

**Site and Sample Selection**

In conducting this qualitative case study it was important for the researcher to select people from a population that could provide data that could answer the specific research question: What is behind the phenomenon of high CAHSEE passage rates for sophomores at an urban charter high school in Southern California named Franklin Charter High School (pseudonym) that outperforms the statewide average (Weiss, 1998)?

Purposive sampling is defined as, “a sample chosen deliberately by the researcher for some specified research reason” (Weiss, 1998, p. 335). A purposeful selection of one high school in Southern California was chosen for this study (Boeije, 2010). For the purposes of this case study, the qualitative researcher purposefully selected one specific school based on the high passage rates of their sophomores (in comparison to sophomores statewide) on the California high school exit exam known as the CAHSEE, a personal and professional connection with one of the participants, the participants vast
knowledge and ability to contribute to the field of research regarding administrative leadership, their knowledge of instruction and subsequent increased student achievement, and their willingness to participate and make the staff available for interviews. All these attributes meant that they could best provide valuable data to help understand the research problem, question, and surmise/validate the phenomenon (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998). The individual participant selection criterion was based on the participants’ knowledge and ability to provide valuable data to answer the research question: What role does the administration play in creating a school-wide focus on student achievement and implementing interventions that positively impact student attitudes, knowledge, and expectations to pass the CAHSEE as sophomores (Merriam, 1998)?

The researcher chose to study one particular school in Southern California when conducting research on the high passage rates of Hispanic and African American students at this urban school as a way to “minimize variability and create a set of homogeneous cases that can readily be compared with each other based on respondent’s answers” (Weiss, 1998, p. 164). The findings can assist in resolving unanswered questions about the administrations leadership and their role in getting students to pass the high school exit exam on their first attempt.

Participants in the sample chosen for this study included three administrators, four teachers, and a focus group consisting of 11 students who passed the CAHSEE as sophomores on the first attempt. All staff interviewed possessed sufficient years of experience to contribute valuable data to the case study. Each administrator brought a different perspective to the school based on their specific job title. For example,
Administrator 2 served as the dean of instruction, Administrator 3 focused on the day-to-day logistics of the school such as attendance, scheduling, and counseling, and Administrator 1 was the founder of the school. The different administrative roles allowed the researcher to examine trends, or lack of trends, in examining the different responsibilities of the administration, and how they each work with the staff and students to contribute to the increased student achievement and high passage rate on the CAHSEE.

High school principals who have significant Black and Hispanic populations failing the math CAHSEE need to know what successful leaders have done to achieve high passing rate for students on the math CAHSEE on the first administration. The high school selected focused on an administration that had a record of achievement of producing high passing rates on the CAHSEE for Black and Hispanic students that was higher than schools in San Diego County and the state of California. The rationale for selecting the sample school included the following:

1. The high school was conveniently located in Southern California.
2. It included 20 or more African American students and 20 or more Hispanic students who passed the math section of the CAHSEE as sophomores on their first attempt.
3. The percentage of African American and Hispanic students who passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE exceeded the district, county, and state average.
4. Given that the first three criteria were met, I recruited adult participants who were likely to have insight into the practices that have influenced the mathematics
success and high passage rates of African American and Hispanic students on the CAHSEE. These participants included:

- Individuals with administrative and instructional responsibility
- Individuals who teach mathematics to freshman and sophomore students
- Other employees who might influence student achievement in mathematics (including tutors and counselors)
- Individuals who have been employed at the school for at least three years
- African American and Hispanic student participants who passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE as sophomores

The data collection process gave the interviewer greater insight as to who was involved in making this phenomenon happen. Subjects were recruited based on their capacity to inform research. The researcher and the administration selected participants based on the criteria for inclusion. The administration identified other teachers and support staff that were instrumental in producing the high passing rate among African American and Hispanic students on the mathematics portion of the CAHSEE. Such an approach of securing witnesses is known as purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). One type of purposeful sampling involves network sampling where participants in the research are asked to refer other participants who know people who know people who can provide valuable information (Merriam, 1998). For the purposes of this research network sampling was used to identify vested stakeholders such as math department chairs, math teachers, CAHSEE support teachers, as well as math tutors, and programs such as Accelerated Math to gain a thorough understanding of the process successful administrations follow to ensure students pass the CAHSEE on their first attempt. The
number of participants was dependent on the recommendations of the administration, the phenomenon being studied, the depth of the study, the data to be collected, the design of the qualitative study, and the quality of the data collected throughout the duration of the study (Morse, 2000). Following the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher conducted a member check with the administration to ensure all available data had been collected.

**Focus Group and Interviews**

For the purposes of this research case study, a focus group consisting of 11 students (8 seniors, 3 juniors, 5 males, 6 females, 5 Hispanics, 6 African Americans) who passed the CAHSEE as sophomores and could speak to the administration’s role in that effort was chosen to assist in the collection of evidence about student responses and the triangulation of the data. The reasons for incorporating a focus group was to allow participants to interact with each other for a rich exchange of information, opinions, and viewpoints, while the researcher collected field note data based on observations of similarities, characteristics of the participants, behavior patterns, facial expressions, and individual perceptions in an attempt to develop themes to triangulate the data (Finch & Lewis, 2003).

Brod et al. (2009) explained that a “Focus group should be viewed as a temporary community of people with some similar characteristics who come together for a brief period of time to discuss that similarity” (p. 1267). Within the confines of a focus group, themes can “develop based on the shared experiences of the students in the focus group who are able to reflect, relate, and recall pertinent information, “especially in response to other group members whose comments can trigger recollection and reflection that can
result in modification or amplification of earlier thoughts and commentary” (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 20).

The researcher is dependent upon the focus group to be transparent, open and honest in order to ensure the validity of the data. The success of the research gleaned from the focus group “will depend upon the willingness of a diverse group of participants to share personal beliefs and doubts, struggles and victories, joys and fears” (Roland & Wicks, 2009, p. 262).

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (IRB approval #656067) on August 26, 2011, telephone conversations with the administration selected to take part in the study was conducted, at which time I scheduled face-to-face interviews to explain the purpose of the research and how the results would be used (Weiss, 1998). The IRB concluded that the qualitative study being conducted was of minimal risk. Cover letters were developed and distributed to the school administration as well as the disclosure forms. The disclosure forms were distributed to the administration, teachers, and students. Prior to conducting the interviews the disclosure statement was read informing the participants of the purpose of the study, that there was no obligation to participate, as well as their right to terminate the interview at any time without consequence. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and lasted for approximately 50 minutes. The interview questions were given to each administrator participating in the study one week before the interview was to be conducted. Time was allocated for follow-up questions and clarification with each administrator aside from the structured interview questions. To protect the identity and maintain the confidentiality of the school and participants, each were given pseudonyms such as Franklin Charter High School
(FCHS), Administrator 1, and Teacher 1. The data from the transcriptions were stored in the researcher’s place of employment in a locked, secured location and will be destroyed after a period of five years in conjunction with the artifacts and transcriptions.

**Data Collection Methods**

Prior to conducting the interviews participants received a detailed explanation of the intent of the study as well as how the findings would be utilized (Weiss, 1998). An agreement of confidentiality and voluntary consent form were presented to the participants (see Appendix B for Consent and Assent Forms). In addition, participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identity. The intent of the interview would be to explore and recognize an administration’s leadership role in promoting successful interventions for students who passed the CAHSEE on the first administration (see Appendix C for Interview Questions). The administrators were interviewed individually and in private. The interviews were held in school offices. Interviews with the teachers, support providers, and the focus group were held in classrooms and school offices. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes, including the focus group. Structured interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The data was protected in a locked, secured location.

**Reliability and Validity**

The reliability and validity of the study is largely dependent on the ethics of the researcher. The credibility of the researcher is paramount; in conjunction with rigorous methods and a genuine appreciation for the qualitative research study undertaken (Patton, 2002). The link between reliability and viability is grounded in the assumption that a study is more valid if repeated observations and similar structured interviews with participants in the same organization within the same study yield the same results.
(Merriam, 2009), therefore making it more reliable. Weiss (1998) defines reliability as, “the consistency or stability of a measure over repeated use. An instrument is said to be reliable if repeated efforts to measure the same phenomenon produce the same result” (p. 336).

The literature on qualitative research is clear about the strategies that a researcher should implement to enhance the validity of the results (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Weiss, 1998). The strategies include:

1. Triangulation: Using multiple sources of data and data collection methods to confirm the emerging findings.
2. Member checks: Taking the data and the descriptions or themes back to the participants and asking them if the results are plausible.
3. Long-term observation: The researcher spends an adequate amount of time in the field collecting data to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in order to increase the validity of the findings.
4. Peer review/examination: Discussions with colleagues, professors, principals, area superintendents, and other professionals to discuss the process of the study, the emerging findings, and the resultant interpretations.
5. Rich, thick descriptions: The researcher provides the reader with multiple perspectives to contextualize the study and ensuing themes to make the results more realistic and richer.
6. Maximum variation: Purposefully seek variation and/or diversity in the sample selection to allow for a greater depth in the research and application of the findings.
7. Audit trail: A detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study.

8. Researcher’s position: Critical self-reflection of how the interpretation of the data and the findings were influenced by the researcher’s culture, history, socioeconomic background, and biases.

For the purposes of this qualitative research study, and to ensure reliability and validity, the researcher interviewed three administrators, four teachers, and one focus group consisting of 11 students who passed the CHASEE as sophomores when they were first allowed to take the high school exit exam. This allowed the researcher to obtain a rich, thick description of the data to the point where it becomes saturated. This aided in the triangulation of the data and subsequent development of themes and sub-categories.

To obtain such rich and in-depth data, the researcher conducted all interviews and follow-up interviews, classroom observations including member checks over the course of one month between the October and November. By spending adequate time in the field and conducting in-depth structured interviews, the researcher was able to check for similarities and differences to assess the consistency in the participants’ responses. The researcher interviewed Administrator 1, Administrator 2, Teacher 1, and Teacher 2 twice to verify that the data collected during the first interview was consistent not only with their responses in the second interview, but with the answers of the other participants. This occurred by asking all the participants multiple questions in a number of ways within each interview.

To assist with the disaggregation of the data, the researcher solicited the advice and expertise of their dissertation chair and fellow colleagues. To protect against bias the
researcher stuck to the structured-interview questions when gathering and analyzing the data, and relied on the transcriptions to develop themes and sub-categories. Additionally, all observation notes taken in the field were based on the purpose of the qualitative study and the researcher did not diverge from the mission. The researcher compared the notes taken in the field with the transcription of the interviews to further triangulate the data. Lastly, a professional transcriber was employed to transcribe the taped interviews and provided the researcher with a certification of verification ensuring that the transcriptions were accurate (See Appendix D).

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The researcher independently analyzed the data to determine emerging categories, themes, and patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher looked for key words and phrases that were consistently heard throughout each interview. The researcher also summarized and imported all key words and phrases from interviews into www.wordle.net to generate a diagram of the most commonly used words and phrases. This helped the researcher to confirm what the research said and narrow the focus. From the transcription the researcher looked for key words and phrases that recurred regularly, from which they were able to generate themes, categories and subcategories.

Based on the responses of the participants; in analyzing the data gathered from field notes, observations, artifacts, interviews, and the transcriptions several times; the researcher reflected on the questions, (a) what is significant to this participant? (b) What has lead them to say this? and (c) What key words, phrases, terms, and concepts did the participants use? The answer to these questions, which were found in the transcriptions, helped guide the researcher to generate themes, sub-categories, and definition of terms after patterns of key words, phrases, and concepts began emerging from the transcriptions.
and field notes (Weiss, 1998). Each theme was color coded, underlined, given a number and a name (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Each sub-category was assigned a color and a number based on the resulting theme. This process was an organizational procedure that eased the process of identifying which sub-categories were related to which themes and was supported by the transcription quotes. Once the researcher coded the transcribed data, the findings were shared. The constant comparison method was repeated until saturation occurred (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The basis of the qualitative study was rooted in the ability of the resulting data to address the research questions and authenticate the phenomenon. The themes and sub-categories that emerged from the taped interviews, disaggregation of the transcriptions, observations, field notes, and artifacts validated the evolution of the themes and sub-categories; therefore substantiating the research questions.

**Generalizations/Limitations**

As I conducted the study, one possible concern was that I would arrive at conclusions based on my personal biases about principals’ limitations with respect to student achievement and the importance of parental involvement. To reduce this possibility, I used a structured formal interview that prompted me to ask the same questions of each administrator, teacher and support provider. I listened attentively, took field notes, audio recorded each participants responses, and endeavored to avoid the role of a consultant where personal opinions and suggestions are offered that could skew the responses.

While beneficial information was gathered through this study, the findings had several limitations. One such limitation was the relatively small sample size. The data was gathered at one high school in a large urban school district in Southern California.
and utilized responses from three administrators, three math teachers, one teacher/support provider, and one student focus group within the selected high school.

Parental involvement, teacher support, and many other variables that could have contributed to state exit examination scores are not factored into the study’s results; except for the extent those factors might have been influenced by the administration and the staff. External factors such as changes in the focus of each CAHSEE and the assigned weight of each test question, as well as the level of difficulty of the test from year to year was not taken into account.

Another limitation was the fact that this study was conducted as part of a doctoral program that comes with time constraints. Therefore, this was not a longitudinal study, where more in-depth research could have been conducted to draw more precise conclusions. Also, the primary informants were the administrators of the school. The principals may have overestimated or underestimated their role in influencing the high CAHSEE passing rate. Finally, the CAHSEE is unique to California. While several other states have exit examinations, state tests may differ in content, administration, and other processes that may influence the generalizability of findings.

For these reasons the generalizability of the finding may be limited, the findings may not be applicable to school practices on a broad scope. Nonetheless, administrators may perceive that these findings are useful as they consider how the role they will play in promoting successful interventions for students who have failed the CAHSEE. The results may further inform decisions regarding the principal’s leadership and their ability to promote and sustain change to ensure their students’ academic success.
Implications for Further Research

The research study unveiled several research opportunities. Other researchers may consider utilizing a greater number and more diverse sample of principals to generate findings with broader applicability. A larger sample might allow researchers to analyze the impact of principal’s leadership and their impact on math CAHSEE scores for targeted populations. Research conducted on each subgroup (Black and Hispanic students) followed by a meta-analysis of the findings would provide more comprehensive data. Further analysis might be necessary regarding the role principals play in getting their students to pass the mathematics section of the CAHSEE. This type of study may justify the need for an analysis of the evolution of principal leadership programs in order to inform decisions about their ability to invoke change and motivate their students to pass high-stakes high school exit exams.

Summary

This chapter presented a detailed outline of the methodology used to conduct a study in an urban charter high school in southern California and the administration’s role in promoting successful interventions for Black and Hispanic students who achieved high passage rates on the math CAHSEE on the first administration. The chapter included a detailed description of the research questions, an overview of the study design, site and sample selection, data collection methodology and analysis, study validity, as well as the limitations of the study.

This study investigated how one public charter high school’s administration which had significantly higher passage rates among Black and Hispanic students on the math CAHSEE than other high schools in southern California and the state of California
initiated, promoted, and sustained change that resulted in successful interventions that ensured their sophomore students passed the math CAHSEE on the first administration.

In Chapter 4, the process of the data collection and data coding are offered. The evolution of themes and sub-categories disseminating from the analysis of the data are also explained in the subsequent chapter.
CHAPTER 4—RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RESULTS

In this chapter the researcher presents the results of the study of a school in which high percentages of Black and Hispanic students passed the math portion of a state high school exit examination. The findings are based upon interviews that involved three administrators, four teachers, and a focus group consisting of eleven students (8 seniors, 3 juniors, 5 males, 6 females, 5 Hispanics, 6 African Americans) who passed the math portion of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) on their first attempt as sophomores. These students were chosen because they could speak to the administration’s efforts in providing the necessary resources and supports in getting them to pass the math CAHSEE. This school was selected through purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990), given the school’s record of success with getting students to pass the math CAHSEE.

The purpose of this study was to (1) examine the practices of a southern California charter high school in which high percentages of Black and Hispanic students passed the math portion of the CAHSEE and (2) to investigate the influence of the school’s administration in developing and promoting practices that resulted in such high passage rates, even when compared to the results for the rest of California high schools. The correlation between principal leadership and student achievement has been widely studied (Marzano et al., 2005), but with the influx of high-stakes examinations as high school graduation requirements, the dynamic of testing, accountability, and principal leadership required greater study (Murphy, 1988).
This qualitative study was intended to provide greater insights into the school’s leadership, particularly as the leaders influenced consistently high passage rates on the math portion of the CAHSEE. Specifically, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the administration influence their staff to improve teaching and learning practices in ways that might have increased student achievement?

2. What leadership characteristics (among the administration and the staff) support student achievement?

3. What student and teacher supports bolster student achievement and lead to high CAHSEE passage rates?

4. How does the culture of the school influence student success?

These questions were posed to generate deeper understanding of a high school that produces CAHSEE passage rates among Black and Hispanic students that are higher than the overall average passing rates in California.

The first section of this chapter provides a description of the school and the participants involved in the study. The data in this section were gleaned through individual conversations and interviews conducted with the participants. The purpose of this section is to provide a description of the participants’ background and experiences and to establish that the participants met the criteria for participating in the study. Further, the description of the participants helps to provide the context for this research. The accuracy of this description was verified through member checks (Glesne, 1999) with each participant. Establishing the context for this research study is essential given that this is a qualitative research design (citation). In the second section of this chapter,
findings are presented as dominant themes. These themes are divided into sub-categories. The final section of this chapter is a summary of the findings according to the research questions that guided the study.

**Data Collection**

The primary data collection involved individual interviews and a focus group. The purpose was to obtain evidence about the role school leaders played in creating and promoting practices that resulted in high passage rates for all students (in particular Black and Hispanic students) on the math portion of the CAHSEE. The interviews ranged in duration from 15 to 50 minutes. They were conducted from October to November of 2011. All interviews were audiotaped and conducted at the school site in offices and classrooms. These audiotapes were then transcribed by an independent party (who was compensated for their services) to create a written record of the data. The data from the interviews were coded and analyzed for the purposes of identifying themes and subcategories. Pseudonyms (such as Administrator 1, Teacher 1, etc.) were created to protect the anonymity of participants. Following the initial round of interviews, the researcher reentered the field to conduct follow-up interviews with Administrator 1, Administrator 2, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 as a means to further triangulate the data and conduct member checks. Although the majority of the data were extracted from the transcribed interviews with administrators, teachers, and the student focus group, additional data came from the researcher’s field notes from observing classrooms, and department meetings. Specifically, the researcher observed six math classes on two days. Each observation lasted approximately 40 minutes. Also the researcher visited three department meeting for approximately 30 minutes. Finally, additional data were amassed through the collection of artifacts, pictures, and demographic data from California Data
Quest, documents from the school website, and e-mail correspondence from school administrators to the researcher.

Based on the responses of the participants; in analyzing the data the researcher reflected on the questions, “What is significant to this participant?”, “What has lead them to say this?” and “What key words, phrases, terms, and concepts did the participants use?” The answer to these questions helped guide the researcher to generate themes and sub-categories. Each theme was color coded, underlined, given a number and a name (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Each sub-category was assigned a color and a number based on the resulting theme. This process was an organizational procedure that eased the process of identifying which sub-categories were related to which themes and supported by the transcription quotes.

**Description of Selected Site and Participants**

The researcher identified a public charter high school (pseudonym – Franklin Charter High School) that opened at the beginning of the 2007/2008 school year serving students in 9th through 12th grades in an urban locale in southern California. The school admits students on a first-come, first-served, blind admissions basis. The school enrollment is 500 students. The demographic composition of the school’s students is: 50.2% Hispanic, 20.6% Black, 18.6% White, and 10.6% other. There are a total of 38 staff members serving in a variety of capacities including administration, teaching, coaching, advocacy, and school operations. The mission statement of the school is:

FCHS is where people want to be to learn about health and healthcare as part of a world-class education. FHS is a home away from home, an open door, a place of rigor and academia where students earn a diploma that matters. We do what it takes, we do no harm, we set no limits on our potential to learn and
grow, we do it like a family, and we LOVE what we do! (Administrator 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

The school is guided by four overarching principles:

- Principle 1: Health and Healthcare
- Principle 2: Home Away from Home
- Principle 3: Diploma that Matters
- Principle 4: Respect for Self, Others, and Environment (Administrator 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

The grading policy is centered upon the school’s mission and vision of academic rigor which states:

Franklin Charter High School requires that students receive a C- or higher in all core academic courses to receive credit. Consistent with our mission and vision, as well as the school’s identity, students at FCHS receive the grade of “Incomplete” when their performance does not meet the standard of quality established by the instructor and based on state standards. If a student’s overall performance in any given 9-week term falls below the level of earning credit (C-), the student will earn an Incomplete in the course. An Incomplete in any course requires the development of an Academic Recovery Plan, which must be approved by the teacher, parent, and Vice President for Academic Affairs. When the student completes the work outlined on the Academic Recovery Plan, the student is assigned a grade for the course. Furthermore, at FCHS our expectation is that each student’s academic performance is of the highest quality. Students who believe their performance in any 9-week term
does not represent their best capabilities and competence will be permitted to petition their teacher to negotiate a Work Quality Plan. (Administrator 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

A unique feature of the school is the internships that students are involved in one day a week in a health care setting. The purpose is to provide the students with rigorous and relevant educational experiences centered upon health and healthcare.

The Franklin Charter High School cohort graduation rate for the class of 2009/10 was 93.8%. The graduation rate was 92.6% and 100% for Hispanic and Black students respectively. By comparison, the cohort graduation rate for the class of 2009/10 for the state of California was 74.4%. Disaggregating the state graduation data by race revealed that the graduation rate was 67.7% and 59.0% for Hispanic and Black students respectively.

Table 3 outlines the CAHSEE passing rates of FCHS in comparison to the students of the district, county, and state (See Appendix E).

Table 3

Comparable CAHSEE Passing Rates for FCHS, District, County, and California

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Participants

The study participants included three administrators, four teachers including the math department chair, and a focus group consisting of 11 students at Franklin Charter
High School who passed the CHASEE as sophomores when they were first allowed to take the high school exit exam. The participants were selected because of their perceived ability to inform research on the administration’s ability to invoke change and motivate their students to pass high-stakes high school exit exams; especially high rates of Black and Hispanic students. The selection of three administrators, four teachers including the math department chair, and a focus group consisting of 11 students was based on purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). A personal and professional connection with one of the participants, the participants vast knowledge and ability to contribute to the field of research regarding administrative leadership, their knowledge of instruction and subsequent increased student achievement, and their willingness to participate and make the staff available for interviews meant that they could best provide valuable data to help understand the research problem, question, and surmise/validate the phenomenon (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998). The following provides more specific information about the participants.

**Administrator 1**

Administrator 1 is the Chief Operational Officer, President, and one of the founders of the school. He is also a college professor. He explained that he created the school due to his interest in school reform at the high school level. He designed the school around three themes: rigor, relevance, and relationships and established connections to the healthcare industry and healthcare careers. Administrator 1 said that he wanted to change the way students and adults interact with each other, which involved focusing on building and sustaining a school culture that supports students.
Administrator 2

As a founding leader, Administrator 2 helped conceptualize the school. He serves as a school director, and teacher leader at the high school. He is also a college professor. His primary role is overseeing the curriculum and instruction, as well teacher observations and evaluations.

Administrator 3

Administrator 3 is the principal and a founder of the school. She has been at the school since its inception in 2007/2008. Her roles include but are not limited to: college counseling, nursing, coordinating the master schedule, managing the board of directors, monitoring daily student attendance, serving as a substitute teacher, and managing student discipline.

Teacher 1

Teacher 1 is the math department chair, math teacher, and academic coach. She has been at the school since its inception. She has taught all math grade levels. She is also an adjunct professor at a college.

Teacher 2

Teacher 2 is currently the math instructor for 10th and 11th grade, but has taught all grade levels. He is currently in his second year of his Master’s degree program in mathematics education. He has been at the school for four years. He has taught all levels of math.

Teacher 3

Teacher 3 is currently the math instructor for 9th, 11th, and 12th grade and began teaching at the school when it opened in September of 2007.
Teacher 4/Student Support

Teacher 4 is the student support teacher who manages student IEP’s, 504 plans, and academic recovery. She provides science and math support based on the direction’s provided by classroom teachers. She has been a staff member at the school for four years.

Focus Group

The focus group consisted of eleven students who were juniors or seniors and had passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE as sophomores, on their first attempt. The racial make-up of the group consisted of five African American and six Hispanic students. Eight of the students that participated in the focus group were juniors and three were seniors.

Data Analysis

The interviews served the purpose of rehashing events, verifying, and discounting information, regarding the phenomenon in an attempt to draw meaningful conclusions and triangulate the data (Brod et al., 2009). Throughout all interviews the researcher used a range of probes to achieve and verify depth of an answer through asking the same question in multiple ways and multiple times. As well, the researcher conducted site observations, and viewed relevant artifacts in order to develop consistent themes (Legard et al., 2003). The researcher individually coded the transcribed data from the interviews, field notes, and artifacts, to allow categories of data to emerge. A grounded theoretical approach utilizing a constant comparative method was pursued until saturation occurred (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each theme was color coded, underlined, and given a number and a name (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Each sub-category was assigned a color and a number, based on the corresponding theme. This organizational procedure eased the
When identifying the relationship between sub-categories and themes, the collected data supported the researcher's coding of the transcribed data, allowing for shared insights among Administrator 1, Administrator 2, Teacher 1, and Teacher 2. This approach was facilitated through member checks (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Weiss, 1998).

Upon analyzing the transcriptions, observation notes, and artifacts, four themes emerged: Essence of rigor, investment in culture, wisdom to collaborate, and reciprocal-teacher learner. These themes directly relate to the school's focus on rigor, relevance, and relationships. These themes collectively describe the influence of the school's leaders in developing and promoting practices that resulted in over 90% of their students passing the CAHSEE and outperforming California schools. A detailed description of the themes and the resultant sub-categories follows.

**Essence of Rigor**

The aura of rigor that surrounds, engulfs, and encapsulates the mission and vision of FCHS is the very reason why the students of FCHS succeed. The essence of rigor is part of the fabric of the school, which relates to why there is a synergistic energy of success. The synergy centered on the relentless pursuit of success is represented by the fabric of the totality of the applied practice of the staff. In interviewing the administrators, they intentionally and explicitly state and strive for a culture that focuses on rigor, relationships, relevance, and transparency, so much so that their mission is directly related to caring about their students in all facets of life to make things come alive for them. One of the themes that emerged from the data collection focuses upon rigor in the instructional program to ensure increased student achievement and high CAHSEE passage rates. A defining quality and trait of FCHS was rigor. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary ("Rigor," 2010) defines rigor as "strict precision". The
researcher’s field notes revealed that rigor was a critical component in all facets of the school. Rigor was evident in the classrooms, in instruction, in the creation of their assessments known as competencies, in the mission statement, in the school’s hiring practices, in the hallways, and in the purposeful interaction between the staff and students. The phrase *essence of rigor* was coined based on the researcher’s observation that rigor was embedded in the DNA of the school and subsequently positively impacted the student performance on the math CAHSEE. *Essence* is defined as a significant element, quality, or aspect of a thing (“*Essence,*” 2011). The very essence of FCHS and their academic success on the CAHSEE was as a result of their focus on rigor as well as how purposeful in nature it was. In fact the researcher consistently observed and witnessed rigor in practice. In each of the 12 interviews conducted, the participants explicitly used the word rigor or alluded to the word when explaining the phenomenon that occurred at FCHS. For example, in interviewing Administrator 1 the essence of rigor was evident in that they specifically sought to create a school culture that focused on rigor, relevance, and relationships where it was imbedded in the very fabric of the school. They went onto elaborate by explaining that,

> Education reform requires academic press and by academic press, that’s the word that’s been used to talk about all the improvements in teaching and learning and better curriculum and the focus on instruction, but the literature early on said that academic press is absolutely necessary for educational reform, but it’s not sufficient. That along with academic press, you needed to look at and build school culture because if you increase the rigor in the classroom and, in the process, disengage more learners, you’re not doing
anything to actually help students achieve. Our mission is directly related to caring about our students and their education. (personal communication, October 27, 2011)

Teacher 1 added that, part of the laser-like focus on student achievement centered on rigor in the preparation of students for the math CAHSEE. She went onto explain that, We meet all year long about high school exit exams, about our competencies, and we’re always trying to determine what skills our students are lacking and what standards are covered on the math CAHSEE. We examine the data to determine why aren’t they getting this. This transcends even in our science meetings where we look at why students are really struggling with dimensional analysis. As a staff we look at how we can all help to really fill up all those academic gaps. So the math department meets all the time.

Testing is something that our students will encounter all of their life; it’s not just a high school exit exam. You need to, in our world. You’re taking tests for everything. And so we just incorporate it into every day and we found that it is showing us better results. (personal communication, October 27, 2011)

The essence of rigor was further exemplified in the interview with the student focus group as they explained that, “teachers tell us that this is the most important test for you to graduate and that you should take it seriously…teachers offer emotional support because they are aware that we are nervous” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). They also informed the researcher that their teacher’s personally encourage them to go to tutoring. The focus group further explained that, “Right in the middle of class the teachers would take time out of their time to help you through whatever you needed.
The teacher would have their own little group thing going if you need help with something….The way that they have trained us and loved us, it makes me want to work hard. The staff takes the time to sit down and talk with you and determine what you are struggling with so they can help” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). The aforementioned interviews revealed that the essence of rigor was a compelling theme and was not relegated strictly to the classroom and instruction, but was evident in the mission and vision, the interactions between the staff and students, and the overall culture of the school.

The interviews and evidence revealed how rigor captured the essence of FCHS. Throughout the interviews with staff and students the sub-categories coaching and mentoring, as well as stamina emerged.

**Coaching and Mentoring**

The researcher’s field notes revealed that there was shared relationships with equal voice that occurred between the administration and the staff. There was an equitable trust that was built between the administration and the staff that acknowledged the expertise of the staff and to trust them as decision makers, to know what’s best for kids, and put that into practice. Coaching and mentoring relates to rigor in that it helps students and teachers pursue more rigorous academic content which contributed to the high passage rates on the CAHSEE math exam. Franklin administrators, as reported in the research, exemplified the essence of rigor by involving the faculty and staff in modeling coaching and mentoring. This practice of coaching and mentoring is the impetus for ensuring that failure is not an option for the students of FCHS. The Franklin administrators provides teachers with an understanding and expectation of how to support
the students by encouraging the practice of having them build relationships with the expectation being increased academic success; which is the foundation of the mission statement of Franklin Charter High School. Every administrator and teacher spoke of the extensive coaching and mentoring for both students and staff that is part of the fabric of the school. The math department chair explained that the goal from the beginning of the CAHSEE preparation, as outlined by the Franklin administrators, was to address the areas where students experience difficulty. Staff members described these academically challenging issues as “holes” and they included content areas such as fractions, decimals, and scientific notation. When discussing the supports available to students, almost every participant disavowed the notion that their success is due to specific test preparation on CAHSEE, but instead focused upon student-centered instructional techniques that are centered on “really good tier-one core instruction” (Administrator 2, personal communication, October 28, 2011). All administrators spoke at length about the “high pass rate on the CAHSEE simply being a byproduct of really good teaching” (Administrator 2, personal communication, October 28, 2011). They all spoke of working together to plan lessons that focus on critical thinking and applied learning. For example, the math department chair stated:

So how do we fill in those holes? We’re not believers of teaching to the test. I want to teach problem-solvers. That’s that social aspect, that’s that working together. I want to be able to teach you how to problem solve and how to be a good test taker regardless of what the test is. How to take what you’ve learned and apply it to different situations, critical thinking and that’s so difficult that sometimes what’s happened is we’ll start lesson planning and we might be
weeks behind like a traditional standard pace because we’re putting so much energy into building groups and how do we talk in the classroom. So then it springs us forward where by the second semester, we’re doing way higher-level mathematics and problem-solving and thinking more like a seminar class because we spent that time working instead of being trapped in a chapter because we don’t understand the chapter. (Teacher 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

Part of the coaching and mentoring includes productive group work among the students, where assessments include both group and individual components. The productive group work involves the staff teaching the students how to work in groups to solve mathematics problems. The researcher observed what the staff calls productive group work in each of the math classes he visited. Speaking with the staff, they explain that students learn concepts best when they learn among their peers, so placing them in groups only serves to enhance their academic performance. Students learn skills such as determination, critical thinking, trust, respect, teamwork, and collaboration (See Appendix F). As Teacher 1 explained, “We wanted to bring the rigor up. We wanted to bring the critical thinking up. We wanted to bring the group working as a team, meeting a deadline” (personal communication, November 16, 2011). Due to the extensive collaboration around instruction among the administrators and the teachers, all math classes use the group and individual competency format. The competency is another name for an assessment. The purpose of the competency is to ensure that students are competent about the content being taught. Essentially, students receive grades based on their mastery of the subject matter and the standards being assessed after each unit of 
instruction. At FCHS grades for each unit are not based on an average of homework assignments, tests, quizzes, notebook checks, attendance, and class participation. All students must pass each competency, which is based on the California state standards. This demonstrates to the teacher whether or not students have mastered the concepts taught. Students who prove their mastery of the competency are worthy of getting a grade, and students who fail to pass and require more time to pass the competency receive an incomplete. Failure to pass a competency triggers an immediate intervention where students receive extra assistance at lunch and fifth period, known also as an academic recovery period.

The competencies take place over two days with the first day devoted for the group portion and second day for the individual. The group work, individual work, and evaluations are worth 60, 30 and 10 points respectively. Groups are usually composed of three students, including students who have varied skills. For example, each group might include students who have strong mathematical/logical, visual, and interpersonal skills. The purpose of the group competency is for students to work productively/collaboratively on difficult mathematical concepts by applying all of their previous knowledge along with what they are currently learning towards novel tasks. The purpose of the individual competency is to test students on the core concepts or basic skills from the current unit of study. During the group competency students may use their notes and books. During the individual competency students may not use their notes. According to the administrators’ responses, the competencies were created by the teachers to identify students’ areas of weakness and areas of strength throughout the year, and not just for CAHSEE.
preparation. Additionally, the sophisticated assessment system triggers an intervention immediately if a student fails to pass a competency.

All teachers and administrators spoke about coaching and mentoring as being an integral part of the culture of the school, and a contributing factor to the academic success of the students, including their high pass rates on the CAHSEE. Upon speaking to one teacher and the department chair in particular, they both became quite animated and passionate in their description of the supports that are available to them. In particular, the math department chair remarked:

We write all the comps together. So even if you’re not teaching juniors, if I’m writing a comp, the people who are teaching juniors look at it, but the other people look at it too because we believe in vertical teaming. It doesn’t matter if I’m teaching ninth or seniors, you’re still a part of our four-year program and if you don’t know what’s happening in the ninth grade, you don’t know how to, so we like that vision of vertical teaming. So everybody’s involved in lesson planning competencies and our focus this year is productive group work and how do we do that. So we’ve been meeting a lot for that. We also meet, … if you have a question, like I have separate meetings with different math teachers depending if they need something specific or if they need a new strategy. (Teacher 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011)

As is evidenced by the aforementioned statement, coaching and mentoring is centered upon instruction, teaching, and learning through the use of vertical teaming and the rich exchange of ideas. The emphasis on competencies was also articulated by the students. All eleven focus group students understood the competencies. They understood
how many there were for the year. They knew how they’re graded. They knew the consequences that resulted when they did not pass a competency. They knew that not passing triggered interventions. They also knew who would know if they did not pass a competency. For example, students explained that if they did not pass a competency all teachers knew and would stop you in the hall and offer their assistance to them during or after school. One student stated that, “If you didn’t get a certain problem or a certain type of subject in math, then you can go to tutoring and it will help you with end and it would make it easier for whenever a test would come” (Focus group, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Supporting these sentiments, another student opined that,

When I didn’t really get certain problems, the teacher would actually come to me and sit down and explain it to me in different words and go step by step with me. And also when I went to math tutoring during lunch and after school, she was always there and helped me out. (Focus group, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

The opinions expressed by the students were supported by the administrators in that they explained that if a student did not pass a competency every administrator and teacher knew about their results and would offer to assist the student. Administrator 1 further explained that, “We are on them until they pass the competency. When they pass the competency, they get a letter home. If they get a good grade, a 95 or above the first time on the competency test, they’ll get a handwritten letter home. They know we care about their performance and respect it” (Administrator 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011).
**Stamina**

In preparation for the CAHSEE, that is the impetus for their life, the Franklin administrators and staff purposefully sought to replicate the testing environment so the students have knowledge and exposure of sustained focus and determination, while recognizing the practice and appreciation of stamina. Stamina is explicitly taught, modeled, and nurtured. The practice of stamina is not left to chance.

All administrators and teachers interviewed, as well as the student focus group described stamina as an attribute imbedded in the culture and academic program of the school that played a role in advancing the pursuit of rigor. The creation of competencies to assess student’s mastery of California state math standards requires all students to pass a competency after every unit or receive a grade of incomplete until they do receive a passing score. This is further evidence of the administrators and staff’s use of stamina to promote a culture of rigor. The stamina involves the students having to participate in an intervention to address the academic shortcoming whether at lunch and/or during the academic recovery period known as fifth period, and then retake the competency until they can show their teacher that they have achieved mastery. For example, the administrators collectively explained that when a student gets an incomplete, they know they still have a chance if they consistently put in the work and effort to demonstrate their mastery on the competency. The faculty and staff is also cognizant of the fact that such an intervention promotes stamina among the students and promotes their mission statement, in which it states that it is never too late to learn. For example, one administrator explained how the school has promoted stamina through the use of homework and competencies,
We have a very sophisticated assessment system that triggers intervention immediately if a kid can’t pass a competency. We don’t inflate or deflate grades based on homework. Homework is practice. It’s not the assessment, and I think students have learned to do the practice because it helps them on a competency. (Administrator 2, personal communication, October 28, 2011)

Six of the eight staff members interviewed and the focus group of students explained that the preparation for and resultant success on the competencies in preparation for the CAHSEE is based on the staff’s focus on the rigors of testing. For example, one teacher explained that one of their interventions is Accelerated Math, so students “know how to sit and test. They understand how to bubble. I mean even the most basic things a lot of students don’t know how to do. And we want to get them ready to sit in a close setting with quiet and working conditions that mimic the high school exit exam” (Teacher 3, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Another teacher reemphasized the point by noting the importance of, “building that stamina because a test is hard, it’s a lot of hours, it’s sitting quietly, and it’s difficult for teenagers…. building stamina. We found that that’s another thing we’re looking at. Can the kids actually make it through sitting there taking that test for two and a half hours and then another test” (Teacher 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011). The math department head made it a point to show me that what I observed during her class instruction was the focus on stamina. She stated, “Well and that’s what you saw today, we’re working on that. When I give you six minutes, that’s six minutes of intense work, I want working” (Teacher 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011). During the focus group interview all eleven of the students emphasized that the administrators and staff focused
on being mentally prepared for the CAHSEE test. For example, one student reported that his teacher explained, “You guys need to be able to have enough stamina because the CAHSEE and other types of tests will be much, much longer. So he was giving us lots of work” (Focus group, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Teacher 1 emphasized to the researcher that stamina was a focal point for preparing students for the rigors of testing and ensuring that they could make it through two and a half hours of testing and then be prepared to take another test. Teacher 3 corroborated Teacher 1 by stating, “We teach the students how to anticipate, how to sit in a chair and take a test, develop stamina, to kind of demystify some of the jargon that they will encounter on the CAHSEE and expose them to the way that those problems are written” (personal communication, October 27, 2011).

The focus that the staff places on developing stamina among the students is further evidence of their belief in a culture that fosters rigor, relevance, and relationships.

**Investment in Culture: Personal Relationships**

At Franklin Charter High School, the focus on high expectations and quality instruction is evident within every individual and decision that is made. This expands the perception of the culture to include rigor, relevance, and relationships where students are viewed as the pillar of FCHS. According to the Franklin Charter High School administrators and teachers this high school is successful because of the purposeful and intentional investment in a personal relationship with each student and a culture of transparency. This was evident based on the celebratory atmosphere that focused on relationships and trust, high expectations, and quality instruction. The staff builds personal relationships with each student, identifies and utilizes students’ prior knowledge
as they provide instruction, builds students’ self-esteem, and increases their knowledge base.

When asked about the relationship between students and the school administrators, the student focus group members explained that the administrators are visible in the hallways and classrooms and give tips on how to prepare for the CAHSEE. Students also explained that Franklin administrators reassured them that they would do well on the CAHSEE. Students appreciated that the staff was encouraging and that the administrators took time to wish them luck.

Students also discussed ways in which teachers created positive in-classroom relationships that addressed CAHSEE preparation. For example, students noted that every teacher had them form a circle in their respective classes to talk about the CAHSEE pre-test results. These circles helped to build student confidence and build a team climate. The culture of the school was exemplified by this statement made by a staff member:

I absolutely think yes we’re building their self-esteem. You have a lot of kids who come in to math and hate math. This is not their favorite subject by any means and especially when I get a kid who says I’ve only ever failed math, I tell them I am so glad we finally met because this is going to be the first time you pass math. I am here to help you. I am here. … I want questions. I don’t care if it’s “what’s 2+2?” I am never not going to let somebody ask a question because we’ve all had moments where we don’t remember. It’s like I don’t know what else is going on. Maybe I just don’t know what 2+2 is today and so I want that open, caring environment. I think building that self-esteem along with teaching the math is what is causing the high grades and the
achievement. They [Students] need to believe that they can do it. (Teacher 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

Building personal relationships with students is the very foundation on which the school exists. The researcher observed the staff building relationships with students on a constant basis. Students were regularly greeted with a warm smile, a hug, enquiries about their family, and words of encouragement for the day. Throughout the researchers observations no student went unnoticed in the hallways. Administrator 2 even knew when a student received dental work and checked on their well-being; which the student appreciated.

The word that is constantly used to describe the atmosphere of FCHS is family. This was evident based on the encounter that Administrator 1 had with numerous students after a break as they returned to school. He explained that,

We had the break last week and the number of kids that I saw come in the door this Monday morning, I said how was your break? Not good, I’m glad I’m back. That’s a really unusual response. Most kids love break. They love the fact that school is over. I’m not saying that every kid is excited to be here because they’re going to pass the CAHSEE, but for the kids to say that this place is the best alternative that they can think of to where they would be spending vacation is a huge statement. And I’m not saying one kid, I’m saying as I stood on the stairs on Monday morning and said good morning, how was your week, it was 50%, it was 60% of the kids that were saying terrible, I’m glad I’m back. Wow, it’s a really nice thing to say about your school, but I
wish it wasn’t the case. (Administrator 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011)

Examples of efforts to invest in relationships can be divided into three sub-categories: which consisted of students as the center of focus, equal voice, and high expectations.

**Students as the Center of Focus**

In discussing the culture of the school, all teachers and administrators explained that they placed students at the center of their leadership.

Three teachers interviewed spoke about the importance of building relationships, teacher efficacy, and the team aspect to learning mathematics. One teacher stated the importance of,

> [It’s important to] say hello or good morning, to ask “what did you do this weekend?”, to make a connection with your students regardless of what group they are in, and to help them believe that they can achieve anything they set their minds to. And they need to understand that if math is a difficult subject, they’re going to work their butts off and nowhere did I say it was going to be easy, but we will get through this together and that’s why I’m here. I am here to help them. I will bend over backwards as long as they are working as hard as I am. (Teacher 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

Upon speaking with the Franklin administration and teachers, it became obvious that the mission and vision statement, as well as all decisions, actions, and interactions are centered around the well-being of the students. The Franklin Administrator 1 explained that, “the mission statement is directly related to caring about students and their
education…we want to build a school culture where we’re always expected to have excellent relationships with students and constantly be working on nurturing those relationships with students” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). The staff explained that without fostering positive relationships, and simply stressing rigor and academics, you disengage learners and you are not doing anything to actually help them achieve and develop an appreciation of life-long learning.

Teachers gave other examples of how they focused deliberately upon students. In particular, one teacher talked about being knowledgeable about students’ learning modalities of learning to enhance their academic performance. The teacher explained:

There are different types of learners. We’re all different. Some of us have strengths and some of us have weaknesses. So one of my main things is to let them know, okay, you’re a visual learner and if the teacher is just up here talking, that doesn’t work for you. You need me to write it down on the board I’m aware of that, so what do I do to fix that? Or I’m a kinesthetic learner. I need something to touch and it’s not always available, of course, or I’m an interpersonal learner. I work really well with others. So for me the main thing we get out of that and I want the students to get is, okay, they understand what kind of learners they are and that it’s okay to be a different type of learner because we all have strengths and weaknesses and in certain situations, a person who’s a visual learner is really going to bring a lot to that group and someone’s who a kinesthetic may bring a lot to a group in a different situation. (Teacher 2, personal communication, October 27, 2011)
Additionally, when students were questioned about the culture of the school, they overwhelmingly responded that the school staff was in tune with their academic, social, and emotional needs. All eleven respondents in the student focus group used words such as emotional support, instilling self-confidence, caring, team-building, and one-on-one tutoring to describe the culture of the school. Every student spoke of receiving a note stating that they were going to do great on the CAHSEE and think positive. Additionally, the focus group students spoke of the “teachers and the administrators being visible in the classrooms and the hallways, encouraging the students to do their best, handing out candy and magical pencils, and reminding students that the CAHSEE would determine if they graduated from high school” (Focus group, personal communication, October 27, 2011). The students also enthusiastically described, “big banners and stuff … and they were like cheering like you’ll do fine and all this and then someone would talk to you individually” (Focus group, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

All of the administrators spoke about building relationships with students and building their self-esteem. For example, one administrator described the culture as follows:

Loving them [students] smart. Getting them comfortable and helping them become better test takers. I feed them snacks. I give them a break. I give them a piece of chocolate. I tell them they can do it. I try and de-stress them. We try to provide supports for them and make them generally feel comfortable. I think sometimes emotion precipitates action and so if they believe, they do. And I think that’s the way I directly affect [student performance]. We take a different approach to test taking from a cultural standpoint just because we
make the culture of the school very, very supportive and very loving.

(Administrator 3, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

A contributing factor of the high passage rates on the CAHSEE may be the relationships that are formed between the staff and students. The participants explained that they knew their students' names, their backgrounds, their learning styles, and their grades. In fact, the entire faculty was very conscious about preventing their students from falling through the cracks. One teacher explained that, “Here, you don’t get to be quiet. You don’t get to be nameless. You don’t get to be faceless. So we’re going to pester, bug, love up -- you can use whatever verb you want -- but we are going to be equally caring about the students” (Teacher 3, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Throughout all interviews conducted with the staff, the culture described by the teachers and the Franklin administration involved one of care, support, and belief in one’s abilities.

**Relationships of Equal Voice**

The culture of transparency which included the dialectic equity of accepting, embracing, and freeing everyone in the school to contribute was evident. All administrators and teachers described a school culture in which everyone’s voice is valued and their opinions matter. All eight respondents spoke about being one team, one circle, and serving one purpose. One teacher stated, “Because we meet so much and we do so much collaboration… you realize you have an equal voice” (Teacher 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011). All of the administrators interviewed spoke of the culture of trust that is a fabric of the school, the positive relationships, and their student’s resultant success. One administrator in particular stressed the following:
The math teachers, the entire administrative team, the peer professionals who tutor, the people who work after school, the people who work at lunch time. Everyone who works on the culture of this place that says to the kid I trust you. I know you can do this, you must feel proud. Every person who has interaction like that is helping us raise that pass rate. Every person who helps get a kid here five more days better than the previous year is helping us with that kid passing the CAHSEE. (Administrator 2, personal communication, October 28, 2011)

Notably, one teacher stated that teachers were willing to work side-by-side with their students to ensure their academic success. That response is indicative of the leadership displayed by the school administrators, who spoke about leading by example and being clear about their expectations. One administrator explained that, “My leadership style, I think, is a certain amount of lead by example. I don’t ask people to do things I wouldn’t do or that I couldn’t do and I think there’s also a certain amount of me being very clear and upfront about my expectations… and then giving very honest feedback about those expectations” (Administrator 2, personal communication, November 28, 2011).

Upon receiving the results of the CAHSEE scores the staff collaborates to disaggregate the data. In the researcher’s conversations with the interviewees, they explained that they examine the data and look at what worked, what didn’t, and how the results will impact their instruction. The Franklin administrators went onto explain that creating an environment where everyone has an equal voice allows for ample feedback
and a rich exchange of ideas in a respectful and loving environment among the administrators and staff.

The Franklin administration further fostered an atmosphere of collaboration by having a stand-up meeting every morning at 7:30 AM for 12 minutes where issues involving students, curriculum, and instruction were discussed. The meeting is a time for the staff to regroup, reflect, and spotlight students who are succeeding or struggling, and solicit ideas from colleagues on how best to assist their students. Administrator 1 explained the stand-up meeting as follows, “We make connections to ourselves …every day we regroup. We realize we’re part of one team. We’re one circle and serve one purpose…our students. If people have problems, they bring it up there. If people have kudos to send, we give them theirs at the meeting and it’s every day and it’s 12 minutes” (personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Part of the Franklin administration’s role in the promotion of an equal voice among the staff involved Franklin Charter High School’s Path to Excellence for the 2011/12 school year, where grade-level teams take turns each day addressing one of the five goals to focus on including: increase the level of rigor, promote the school culture, differentiate instruction, improve attendance, and develop test savvy students.

**High Expectations**

All administrators interviewed stressed that “failure is not an option.” The researcher’s field notes found that the administrators and teachers at FCHS hold high expectations for themselves and their students. For example, Teacher 3 explained that, “the math department talked about how best to focus on the high school exit exam, the implications for the school as well as the students, and how to adjust the curriculum so
that the CHASEE is prioritized because our expectation is the students will do really well” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). This feeling of high expectations for the staff and students was supported by Administrator 2, who stated that, “our goal is that 100% of them pass. Every kid passes in the 10th grade the first time they take it” (personal communication, October 28, 2011).

The focus group consisting of students explained their desire to pass the test on their first attempt while showing the high expectations they have of themselves by saying that, “I wouldn’t want to tell my mom I didn’t pass the CAHSEE and I have to retake it so I can graduate from high school. I know I would disappoint her a lot if I didn’t take full advantage of the opportunities that they give us here” (Focus group, personal communication, October 27, 2011). The culture of high expectations did not only come from the staff and students themselves, but the parents of the students. The students explained that, “My dad would come home and he would push me to look at the practice CAHSEE tests online and he would go look at it with me so that way he could explain it to me…My dad would always ask me if I was practicing and he’d ask me if I’m having trouble in certain areas in the math section. My father would always tell me different strategies I could use, and tell me to always relax…When my dad comes home late from work he would grab a math textbook and then just sit down with me and then go through the problems with me to make sure I understand the math CAHSEE practice problems” (Focus group, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

This culture of high expectations for the staff and students goes beyond the CAHSEE. In speaking with the Franklin administration, they explain that, they refuse to accept a 55% failure rate in Algebra. Their opinion is that, “A 55% failure rate in
Algebra is accepted in San Diego Unified School District. We can’t accept that. If we’re going to have a 55% failure rate, we should close the school” (Administrator 2, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Each of the administrators concurred with the sentiment expressed by one of them who explained, “Your accomplishments yesterday can be your failures tomorrow, so I don’t think we presume that we won’t have or we shouldn’t be doing things to maintain and improve our record. We’re not really satisfied with our record” (Administrator 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011). All of the other staff members interviewed used similar language to describe the culture of the school. For example, one bluntly stated, “We work our butts off…the expectations are high and transparent” (Teacher 2, personal communication, November 16, 2011).

Even though this school has achieved CAHSEE passing rates that exceed those of most schools in the state, teachers were not content with the status quo. Several teachers interviewed described a culture that consists of high expectations and the constant pursuit of excellence (See Appendix G). A teacher explained, “We want a 100% pass rate. You know 100% always. We’re getting pretty close” (Teacher 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

Interestingly, the high expectations for school personnel include a focus on positive relationships with students. For example, an administrator claimed, “There’s not a classroom that a teacher won’t expect an administrator, another teacher, three other teachers, 12 visitors to come and spend time in. … we have a very open-door policy. So people know they’re always expected to be teaching. They’re always expected to be prepared and they’re always expected to have excellent relationships and work on those relationships with students” (Administrator 1, personal communication, October 27,
2011). This statement suggests that perhaps the focus on students (the first sub-theme) is influenced, at least in part, by the high expectations for school personnel.

Another possible influence on relationships and high expectations may be the hiring process at Franklin. Administrators described extensive hiring practices designed to recruit the very best teachers who will serve the students while maintaining a culture of high expectations. One administrator stated:

The interview [process] is extended and expanded. …If [a candidate is] currently teaching, we’ll send probably a teacher, administrator, and a student to observe their classroom instruction and talk about that. We’ll then invite [the candidate] to the school. They’ll have a chance to spend a day with us, a full day, and teach a lesson in the school. We’ll talk a lot about the culture of the school and the type of teachers that are excellent teachers that wouldn’t fit in the culture of this school as well as the excellent teachers and the type of teachers that we’re looking for that we think will fit within the culture.

(Administrator 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

The administrator explained that the school leaders try to spend considerable time with the teacher they are trying to hire, watch them teach, listen for their philosophies, and hear their perspectives and how it relates to theirs. The administrator explained that what they do to hire teachers at Franklin is different compared to traditional public high schools. That being said, they want to know “does it intrigue candidates or scare them that our grading policy is different, or that our attendance policy is different, or that our behavior policy is different” (Administrator 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011).
When the researcher asked Franklin administrators about their expectations for the staff all three administrators talked about expectations designed to sustain the school’s culture. The three administrators spoke about the same five principles or tenets: We don’t do harm, it’s never too late to learn, we create a welcoming environment, we do use choice words, and we are the best school in the universe. One administrator elaborated further:

We will invest in rigor and expect you to. We will invest in relevance in what happens in your class with the rest of the world in our career developed thematic school and we will invest in effective mentoring, tutoring, and instructional relationships with kids and those are the non-negotiables. You’re going to be a team player. You can be a leader. You’re going to be a follower. You’re going to be an active participant. …The expectation is that you have to love kids, that you can deal with the frustrations of teaching in a civil and humane and responsible manner, and that you’ll learn with us. (Administrator 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011)

**Wisdom to Collaborate to Improve Instruction**

One of the defining features of Franklin Charter High School is the culture of collaboration. Specifically, collaboration opportunities were designed and implemented to improve the effectiveness of instruction. The school’s administrators constructed opportunities such as daily stand-up meetings and department meetings where the staff could regularly collaborate to refine the delivery of instruction. Being in the field the researcher was able to observe two department meetings where collaboration was evident among the staff. Teacher 1 explained during the interview that,
The math department meets all year long about high school exit exams, CST’s, and about the comps to discuss what’s on the various assessments, what’s needed, the standards that need to be taught. We openly discuss what the students should have mastered, why they aren’t getting it, and how we tailor our curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of our students.

(personal communication, November 16, 2011)

Talking with the staff and reviewing the field notes, the researcher found that the staff at FCHS is committed to collaboration, including cross-curriculum. The staff explained that they have meetings where coaching takes place based on classroom observations, and/or the instructional focus for the year, such as gradual release and cooperative learning.

Administrators described instruction at Franklin as intentional, meaningful, and purposeful. To achieve this caliber of instruction, collaboration is incorporated in the daily routine of the school day. All of the administrators interviewed mentioned the importance of collaboration with and among the teachers. One administrator explained how he engaged teachers in collaborative efforts to make instruction more effective for students who needed additional assistance in mathematics. He explained:

I talk about what is on the CAHSEE, what are the demands of the CAHSEE, what kinds of habits we need to develop for kids. I talk about which kids I think are at risk right now for not passing the CAHSEE and what is the intervention in place for that kid to be able to pass the CAHSEE or score proficient on the CAHSEE. So we have a list of students that we’re worried
about it and each [teacher] has an intervention plan in place for the 10th graders. (Administrator 2, personal communication, November 28, 2011)

Franklin administrators also emphasized the importance of focusing collaboration on the right academic content: the content students needed to master in order to pass the CAHSEE. One administrator explained:

Kids need to be prepared for it [the CAHSEE]. They need to know the content of it, but that’s our course of study. They need to know algebra. They need to know geometry. They need to know a little bit of statistics, and they need a strong dose of number sense. That’s our curriculum anyway to give them a grade. We do look back at our CAHSEE pass rates at the end of the year and do a little bit of postmortem, what worked, what didn’t work kinds of things. (Administrator 2, personal communication, October 28, 2011)

Collaboration at Franklin is intended to help ensure that students will learn the mathematics curriculum through carefully planned, intentional instruction. One administrator elaborated:

They [students] continue to perform well…because we have very, very good teachers who use those minutes that they have instructionally in a very sound way. [Franklin] is not do-it-yourself school. It is not putting a bunch of worksheets in front of kids and telling them to do them. It’s not just random homework assignments. It is very thoughtful experiences that are planned for the entire 90 minutes that we have with them… It’s very, very intentional about how we develop their understanding. (Administrator 2, personal communication, October 28, 2011)
The teachers interviewed explained that they meet as a math department on a weekly basis to plan lessons, look at student work, and competency results. Part of the collaboration involves colleagues asking each other, “What worked well for your students? What did not work? What did you do differently? And what are successful strategies?” Another teacher explained, “Everyone is involved in lesson planning and planning competencies...” (Teacher 2, personal communication, November 16, 2011).

**Trust**

One teacher explained that the culture of openness and collaboration evolved over several years as the trust between the staff strengthened. Teacher 1 explained that, “it took a lot of years of trust and working collaboratively, which is hard for a lot of people. It’s a big transition” (Teacher 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011). This trust was fostered by the Franklin administration as they worked to create a culture of openness. Administrator 2 explained that,

> We spend a lot of time together talking about the big issues of the school every three weeks for four hours, every morning for at least ten minutes, … there’s a level of trust that you’re allowed to bring up something that’s working and not working. There’s a belief that if you put out an email as a teacher and say I’m having a problem with this, that it is not perceived as a sign of weakness, but is perceived as a sign that something in the school is not working and that we should take action about it. (Administrator 2, personal communication, November 28, 2011)

The findings presented show that trust is part of the family atmosphere that was present in each interview conducted. The researchers’ field notes reveal that the level of respect,
trust, and interaction at FCHS is higher than the other high schools that the staff has worked at and more closely reflect a sense of family. Administrator 3 used the word trust when explaining the way the students are treated by the entire staff, and subsequently how they are able to assist them both academically and socially. Teacher 4 reinforced this belief by stating that, “Teachers and students are always around each other. Positive relationships are fostered because every staff member serves as a mentor since all the teachers have a mentoring quality that the kids feel comfortable with discussing their problems” (Teacher 4, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

In an interview with Teacher 2, the word trust was used 15 times to describe the environment that supports the phenomenon and the focal point of the success that is experienced on the CAHSEE. They explained that,

FCHS is a very trusting environment in terms of the staff communicating to the students that they believe in them. The teacher efficacy is high. It is a reciprocal relationship. The students know that we trust them and are looking out for their best interests. This takes time and is promoted by the administration in their day-to-day interactions with the students. In return, students begin to trust that we have a better idea of the bigger picture and we are trying to help them out and make sure they graduate from high school, and are successful. And so I think the support that we have from the students and the trust are all part of our culture. (Teacher 2, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

The student focus group also alluded to the fact that they trusted their teachers due to the emotional support that they invested in them as they prepared them for the CAHSEE. As
students mentioned specific teachers by name they smiled broadly when explaining the
time a teacher offered emotional support, tutored them, and believed in their abilities.

Risk-Taking

The culture of collaboration at Franklin allowed the staff to take risks to enhance
their instruction and their students’ learning. All of the teachers interviewed explained
that they feel comfortable trying new instructional strategies, as long as the strategy
supports the mission and vision of the school and does no harm to students. In fact the
teachers used phrases such as, the administration backs me the administrators push you
out of your comfort zone and we’re always striving to learn more and do better.

Teachers reported that they are supported in their efforts because the overarching school
goal is student well-being. One teacher explained to the researcher, “We’re not
micromanaged…we’re not afraid of stepping out of the box and just trying different
methods…I feel comfortable to just do what I want…I can try something new and I don’t
feel like there’s going to be repercussions and so I feel very supported from the math
department and the administration” (Teacher 2, personal communication, November 16,
2011). Overall, all teachers interviewed indicated that they had the full support of their
administrators to enact something new without the fear of a reprimand.

Franklin administrators supported the claims of the teachers with respect to risk-
taking. The administrative team members explained that the culture of the school is based
on relevance, rigor, and relationships where the environment invites learning and
engagement. One administrator discussed the importance of facilitating and supporting
smart and brisk thinking. The administrator further explained that, “the creation of the
competency test was teacher initiated and developed” (Administrator 1, personal
communication, November 16, 2011). The teacher who created the competency assessment validated this claim by explaining, “Last semester it just really wasn’t working and I was like, gosh, I need to change this. How about group comps? And I talked with the math team. I talked with the admin team. I’m like what do you guys think, can I try this out? They’re like go, do it and tell us what happens. The goal is student well-being. So as long as that’s everyone’s goal, yea, they absolutely push you to[try new things]. We’re always striving to learn more and do better” (Teacher 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011).

**Reciprocal Administrator/Teacher/Student Learning**

Administrators created an environment in which the school’s leaders, teachers, and students were encouraged to learn from each other to bolster learning. An example of how the administration and teachers learn from each other occurred when I interviewed Teacher 1 and they explained that regardless of grade level taught or position you hold, you are still considered a part of the four-year instructional program, because if you don’t know what is happening in the 9th grade, you won’t know the needs of subsequent grade level courses, and how to coach the staff appropriately and instruct the students. This vision of vertical teaming in place at FCHS allows everyone to learn from each other and involve themselves in the planning of lessons.

As a staff, they learn from the students by first understanding their struggles and fears, showing them that they care, and building trust, which will in turn open the lines of communication between student and teacher to allow learning to take place.

Administrator 3 explained that they are educated every day from students because, 65% of our population consists of at-risk youth. So if you don’t deal with some of the social issues that they are dealing with at a fundamental level,
they’re not going to perform well academically because they are distracted by personal issues. They’re focused on other things that are bothering them and they’re not going to be great learners. So we spend an enormous amount of time helping kids resolve some of the social pressures, but social stresses that they have that have nothing to do with school. So if a kid walks in in the morning and they’re half an hour late, I don’t say to a kid where were you? Did you oversleep again? I walk out and I say, hey, I’m so glad to see you. Everything okay this morning? Yea, my mom’s supposed to bring me, but our car broke down and I had to walk. Oh, I’m sorry to hear about that. If I gave you a bus pass today, do you think you could get here on time tomorrow. Yea, that would be great. (personal communication, October 27, 2011)

Teacher 1 expressed the importance of learning from their students, showing compassion, and creating a family atmosphere in the learning process. They went onto explain that, in the process of learning from their students, they attempt to build their self-esteem. Students would routinely approach them and state that they hate math and have never passed it. Teacher 1 responded that, “I tell them I am so glad we finally met because this is going to be the first time you pass math. I am here to help you, I am here” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). Teacher 1 went onto explain that by creating a welcoming, and caring environment where every student is free to learn at their pace, the questions they receive from the students only serves to further assist them in figuring out their strengths and weaknesses.
Accountability

A culture of shared accountability for learning results may be contributing to the environment in which Franklin’s administrators, teachers, and students learn from each other. Even though the Franklin administrators insisted that “failure is not an option” and that the school needed to ensure high rates of academic success, administrators gave the staff autonomy in creating solutions to address students’ academic needs and enhance learning. One administrator explained accountability expectations as follows:

I think by asking really good questions and letting people go and figure it out and not saying this is the way we’re going to do it, but to say 55% failure rate in algebra is not acceptable, what are we going to do about that? Let’s come up with a different system. To say kids need more time to work hands on with content, what are we going to do about that? I think that’s a big part of why this school has worked and why the outcomes are such for kids.

(Administrator 2, personal communication, November 28, 2011)

Part of the accountability on behalf of the staff and Franklin administrators is to take responsibility for their students CAHSEE results. As a result, discussions involving data, curriculum, instruction, and student achievement are openly discussed as an entire faculty. At Franklin, administrators do not dictate all of the curricular and instructional decisions related to improving CAHSEE results. Instead, they share responsibility with teachers for identifying strategies and approaches that are likely to result in stronger achievement. For example, one administrator described a two-day retreat at the beginning of the school year during which teachers and administrators disaggregate and analyze student assessment data. Both the administrator and the math teachers
consistently described what happened during the meeting. They discussed what the CAHSEE data meant, they examined positive and negative data trends, and they identified clusters of students who increased and decreased their performances. As well, they asked themselves questions about how their programs and teaching practices might have influenced the test results. For example, they asked questions such as, “Are we better at number sense than algebraic thinking? Is there a correlation between the CAHSEE and CST math results? Did the after school intervention work? Which students identified as high risk passed the math portion of the CAHSEE?”

Such an exercise allows for the rich exchange of ideas and information. As well, such an exchange leads to shared understandings about how each person will contribute to improvement efforts. According to one of the administrators:

> We have reached an agreement on a specific set of expectations for teachers, which includes instruction and grading and all kinds of stuff. And I think when you reach that level of agreement with faculty, [concerning] expectations for a teacher who works at the school, it’s not just one person handing it out. It’s through that community process that these are what I expect of my peers. This is what I expect of myself. This is what I expect of the culture that operates here. Here are some clear expectations for how you work at this school and I think those had a lot of influence on how people think about their jobs here and the work they do. (Administrator 2, personal communication, November 16, 2011)

Teachers share the accountability of the learning with their students. Teacher 3 explained that they can teach students instructional strategies and prepare them for the
CAHSEE, but the students are held accountable for knowing how to sit in a chair, concentrate for long stretches of time, and answer questions for 90 minutes to show their mathematical knowledge. In speaking with the staff, students are also held accountable for making use of the tutoring that is available to them. The staff is held accountable for ensuring that students pass their competencies and students are aware of the expectation that that the Franklin administration will really hold firm that kids who don’t pass a single competency will need to retake it once they effectively pursue the various tutoring and work packets available to them. As Teacher 2 explained, “We are on them right away… I tell them they need to come to tutoring. I need you to come in after school. Here are some materials that I know you need a little extra help on so let’s work on this together or maybe you can work on this at home and then bring it to me and we can review it” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). The researcher’s field notes and observations revealed that the culture of accountability assisted in building positive relationships among the staff and students.

Positive Relationships

Part of the reason administrators, staff, and students effectively learn from each other may be the positive relationships discussed previously as a theme. Franklin administrators have instituted a variety of routines, such as the stand-up meetings that occur with the entire staff every morning for twelve minutes. These routines help build and sustain positive relationships that make it easier for administrators and teachers to work with and learn from each other. Two of the three administrators interviewed spoke about the stand-up meetings. The administrators explained that the purpose of the stand-up meetings is for the staff to regroup, be in a circle, spotlight students who are doing
well or struggling, provide time for reflection, and reiterate that the staff is one team, one circle, with one purpose. An administrator further explained:

This staff is very close. It’s very supportive of each other. We build relationships from day one. We want to get rid of the divisions that typically separate the kind of conversations and support and collaboration that exists when people say, look, you have a job of learning this material. I have a job of teaching this material. How are we going to make this relationship work? We’ve tried to blur the lines between administration and staff … We try to be responsive. We try to be receptive. We practice the art of rounding, which basically is every one of us is constantly asking, purposefully asking teachers or students what’s going on, what’s working, what isn’t working, if you could change one thing what would it be and when, and we try to follow up on those things. (Administrator 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011)

Franklin teachers explained that their school administrators are very supportive and they are not “micromanagers.” Teachers reported that they their administrators viewed them as “equal partners in the learning equation.” Perhaps these positive relationships played a role in leading teachers to share responsibility for improving mathematics instruction and CAHSEE math results.

**Building Capacity**

The term building capacity is based on the interviews conducted with the Franklin administrators and staff, and refers to realizing the developmental goals of FCHS while enhancing the abilities of the staff that will allow them and the students to achieve measurable and sustainable results, such as high passage rates on the math CAHSEE.
When asked about building capacity among the staff, all of the administrators interviewed talked about treating the staff as professionals. They further explained that the staff should be celebrated as professionals and they deserve transparency about the inner workings of the school. Part of building capacity also included the staff “agreeing each year to a set of things that they really wanted to build and put into practice whether it was the discipline plan, the competency activities, grading policies, the gradual release of instructional practice…. we also read together, we write together, we celebrate together, we critique together” (Administrator 2, personal communication, November 28, 2011). When asked by the researcher why the school does not employ a math resource specialist an administrator explained:

> Based on the leadership and knowledge base of our more experienced math teachers, we felt the investment in people who could work with small groups and individual teachers under their leadership would be more effective than having another person in that intervention role. Our internship program allows staff half days or a day of prep time, and puts them in the position of taking on that role even though that’s not their title. Every professional here is a teacher, every professional here has resource responsibilities, every professional here is a coach, everyone, but that has nothing to do with title. Right now we have 35 counselors because everybody has a counseling responsibility. (Administrator 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011)

When asked by the researcher how the administrators build capacity among the staff, the administrators spoke of the extensive professional development, classroom
observations, and coaching that is available to teachers. Specifically, one administrator talked about building capacity in the following manner:

Math department staff is doing a training with math teachers in Iowa. That whole planning process, that whole reflection process and the experience of going and presenting what you do in math education to another school is huge capacity building and way better than any other professional development I could give to them. And every person here has presented this work to someone else in some other school system. In addition, we do a regular PD. We have PD sessions where we bring in ideas and expertise and we talk about them. We read articles together. We read books together. We have short presentations from each other and we engage in ideas about what’s the school we want to be. (Administrator 2, personal communication, November 28, 2011)

Two of the three teachers reported that they were having their Master’s degree paid for by the school. They explained that the school’s administrators are empowering them to be teacher leaders by encouraging them and providing the financial assistance to obtain their graduate degree. One teacher explained:

That [Getting a Master’s degree] was definitely encouraged heavily from them and I know they do that throughout almost everyone here. They’re almost assuming like when are you going to get your Master’s, when are you going to get your Doctorate? When are you going to take the next class? So they also supported me financially, which obviously helps make that possible. And so I’d say that’s definitely the number one thing that is really helping me develop
as a professional, as a researcher, as a math educator. (Teacher 2, personal communication, November 16, 2011)

Based on numerous conversations with the administrators and staff, from the very beginning of the hiring process, the Franklin administration seeks out prospective candidates that they believe they can invest in, and in turn can give back to the students, staff, and community. When interviewing Administrator 1, they stated that,

No doubt about the fact that the most valuable commodity in a school is its people. And so you sit down and you figure out what resources we have, what is our vision, our academic model, and what is the best way to hire and deploy people based on their skill set and level to best implement our program?... We look at our student body and the level of intervention required and try to match that in our hiring or with the staff currently in place based on the leadership and knowledge base of our more experienced math teachers (Administrator 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011).

The administrators and teachers spoke of the importance of empowering people and respecting them as professionals in the field of education. In particular, the administrators stated that they were interested in knowing the academic and professional goals of each staff member and how they could be of assistance. That could include paying for a Master’s program, getting a speaker to come and talk to the faculty about a particular topic of interest, sending them to other states such as Oklahoma and Iowa to do consulting work with schools, attending professional conferences as participants and/or speakers, and writing educational books. The focus of building capacity serves as a pillar of FCHS, where people learn from each other; which further contributes to the phenomenon.
Thus far in this chapter I have shared findings related to the four themes that emerged from the data collected. It is appropriate to discuss how these themes relate to the research questions guiding this study.

How do Franklin administrators influence their staff to improve teaching and learning practices in ways that increase student achievement? The administrators at Franklin influenced the improvement of teaching and learning by encouraging higher levels of academic rigor in mathematics. They did this by modeling best practices, while coaching and mentoring the faculty. As Administrator 1 stated, the Franklin administrators insisted that “failure’s no option” and that students had to learn more rigorous academic content. The administrators helped teachers understand how to support their students as they pushed students to learn challenging mathematical concepts.

Franklin administrators also influenced improvements in teaching and learning by promoting risk taking and collaboration. The school administrators and the math department chair encouraged teachers to try instructional techniques that might bolster student achievement without fear of retribution. Teacher 2 offered, “We’re not afraid of stepping out of the box and just trying different methods or whatever” (Teacher 2, personal communication, November 16, 2011). The level of comfort with risk taking stemmed from daily stand-up meetings to discuss students and instruction, and weekly and monthly department meetings including, staff professional development.

Administrator 2 commented on the extensive professional development and support available to the staff. For example, this administrator explained, “Teachers get a lot of feedback and coaching on the lessons that they design... I may walk in a classroom
two days after a peer coach walked in and watch a lesson and give feedback. And teachers will say we give a lot of feedback. We give coaching often, often, often” (Administrator 2, personal communication, October 28, 2011). Several respondents indicated that administrators visited each math classroom on a weekly basis and then met with the teachers to discuss what worked, what did not, and the appropriate instructional strategies that were most suitable to ensure student mastery of the math concepts being taught.

Franklin administrators promoted teacher collaboration in ways that influenced better teaching and learning. Both administrators and teachers discussed how collaboration started at the beginning of the school year, as the whole staff took part in a two-day retreat to analyze CAHSEE data and other standardized test results. One teacher described the retreat as follows, “There’s big chart paper and teachers stick sticky notes all over them [with questions] like ‘why did the percentage of this group go up this time or down this time? Why did this cluster not do as well than that cluster? How predictive are the CST’s of the CAHSEE results? Did our interventions work’” (Teacher 4, personal communication, October 27, 2011). Staff invested in a rich exchange of ideas with the ultimate goal of increased student achievement.

In addition to engaging teachers, Franklin administrators encouraged students to collaborate with the staff to discuss their academic deficiencies, as well as their worries and fears about academics. These collaborations took the form of one-on-one assistance and team building activities. In the focus group, a student highlighted, “We have a one-week thing [students meet in a big support circle to talk and share their feelings about the CAHSEE], but it’s just like team building for all of us. Every teacher has their students
form a circle in their respective classes to talk about the results on the CAHSEE pre-test to establish team building and confidence. Everybody here supports each other” (Focus group, personal communication, October 27, 2011).

At Franklin, administrators supported and fostered collaboration with students by building a community of learners where the staff and students learn from each other. Administrator 3 described the culture by explaining:

They’re [Students are] focused on other things that are bothering them and they’re not going to be great learners. So we spend an enormous amount of time helping kids resolve some of the social pressures… (social stresses that they have that have nothing to do with school). So if a kid walks in in the morning and they’re half an hour late, I don’t say to a kid “where were you? Did you oversleep again?” I walk out and I say, “Hey, I’m so glad to see you. Everything okay this morning?” “Yea, my mom’s supposed to bring me, but our car broke down and I had to walk.” “Oh, I’m sorry to hear about that. If I gave you a bus pass today, do you think you could get here on time tomorrow.” (personal communication, October 27, 2011)

By emphasizing both rigor and relationships, the Franklin administrators influenced improvements in the teaching and learning of mathematics. They helped create an environment in which teachers were eager to support each other in teaching more challenging content. As well, they helped create an atmosphere in which students felt that their teachers cared about them personally and wanted them to succeed.

What leadership characteristics exist among the administration and the staff that support student achievement? Studies have revealed that strong principal leadership
impacts student achievement (Lezotte, 1992; Marzano et al., 2005). The leadership characteristics and practices of successful principals contribute to increased student achievement and effective schools (Cotton, 2003; Haberman, 1999; Stiggins & Duke, 2008). The characteristics that embody leadership include having a clear vision, an emphasis on teaching and learning, building capacity, taking risks (proactive), providing an environment that encourages and promotes collaborative relationships, setting high expectations for the staff and students, and providing professional development (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990).

The aforementioned characteristics were exemplified by the Franklin administrators and staff. A significant characteristic of the leadership of the school is the specific acknowledgement of how setting high expectations plays an important role in fostering student achievement. Franklin leaders maintained high expectations for themselves, the faculty, and the students. High expectations were demonstrated on behalf the leadership through the consistent coaching and mentoring of their staff and students. This was further evident by their laser focus on high expectations for quality instruction every class period of every day. The administrators were unequivocal in their belief that failure was not an option on the math CAHSEE or any math class, including Algebra. The leadership described how important it was to set a school culture of high expectations that embodied the mission and vision of the school. Teachers regularly receive feedback on what good instruction looks like and sounds like. As a result, teachers raise the expectation level for their students as well. They are expected to complete all assignments, pass all of their competencies, attend tutoring, and graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education...no exceptions! In fact 68% of
the students of FCHS meet the University of California (UC)/California State University (CSU) system entrance requirements, compared to 36% of students statewide. Approximately 60% of the Black and Hispanic students at FCHS attain the UC/CSU required courses, whereas 28% of Black and Hispanic students statewide achieve the same results. This is further evidence of the leadership characteristics of FCHS, especially in the area of high expectations for the staff and students.

Franklin administrators consistently demonstrated the characteristic of caring about students, including their academic and social well-being. Administrator 2 stated unequivocally that we, “Do what it takes to get the kids to learn” (personal communication, November 28, 2011). The depth of administrators’ concern for students led them to a variety of approaches for meeting student needs. For example, administrators supported teachers in connecting students’ prior knowledge to current learning material, they helped teachers ensure that instructional gaps were filled, and they led teachers to develop and incorporate mini lessons when it was evident that students were not understanding the material being taught.

The administrators’ care and concern for their students was further evidenced by their insistence on building students’ self-esteem to ensure they could succeed in math. Administrator 2 cited the school’s mission and vision statement to explain, “Kids learn to love school and appreciate learning, which corresponds directly to the outcome measures and all the systems that are in place” (personal communication, October 28, 2011).

The faculty was willing to take risks because they perceived that the administrators valued them. The administrators demonstrated characteristics that promoted trust such as integrity, openness, and honesty. According to Tschannen-Moran
(2000), in schools where there was high levels of trust, there also tended to be high levels of collaboration among the staff. A school culture rooted in trust and collaboration allows for learning, the rich exchange of knowledge and ideas to assist the customers—the students. The researchers’ field notes revealed that the trust that the administrators had for the staff was a significant factor in the faculty feeling comfortable taking risks. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), explained that “the willingness to risk or be vulnerable is inherent in all trust relations” (p. 204). As Hoy and Tschannen-Moran found in their quantitative study, and the researcher observed; when teachers trust the principal they are more likely to trust each other and therefore collaboration is realized.

Several staff members interviewed expressed similar sentiment. For example, with respect to trust and transparency Administrator 1 stated that, “I think it begins with the notion that the staff is treated, respected, and celebrated as professionals. There is also a significant amount of transparency, about budget, about staff, about our school program, and the nature of where the school is at” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). Administrator 2 further explained that, “the level of respect, trust, and interaction at FCHS is high… there is this family we please, we do this for the family [students]” (personal communication, November 28, 2011). From a Teacher perspective, Teacher 1 shared that, “We can have the administration in our collaborative meetings. We can talk freely. It’s very open, but that took a lot of years of trust and working collaboratively” (personal communication, November 16, 2011). Additionally, upon interviewing Teacher 2 he shared with the researcher that the environment was very comfortable, due in part to the culture of trust that the Franklin administrators worked to put in place. Teacher 2 further explained that they felt comfortable going to any administrator or
teacher and express concerns, complaints, and that those issues are going to be
legitimately addressed. The teacher also explained that FCHS is a very trusting
environment, in terms of staff members trusting each other and trusting the work they do.
They also explained that there is a reciprocal relationship of trust that exists between the
staff and the students.

The administrators were keen on fostering and promoting a culture of trust that
led to risk-taking. Part of the administrator’s leadership as reported in the research
involved creating an environment that encouraged the staff to think outside the box. This
practice involved the staff coming together to exchange ideas on best practices to bolster
student achievement. One administrator elaborated,

We spend a lot of time together talking about the big issues of the school
every three weeks for four hours, every morning for at least ten minutes.
There’s a level of trust that you’re allowed to bring up something that’s
working and not working and is not perceived as a sign of weakness, but is
perceived as a sign that something in the school is not working and that we
should take action about it. (Administrator 1, personal communication,
October 27, 2011)

The administrators stressed that the school is a flat organization that focuses on
the student, team work, family, rigor, relevance, and relationships. They further stated
that they plan together, disaggregate data together, create assessments together, and
critique each other together absent of title and positions. For example, one administrator
explained, “It’s a flat organization so everyone takes ownership and responsibility. Every
administrator here also has an instructional role of whatever that grade level is for that
exact same reason” (Administrator 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011). The administrators seemed to be trying to create a school where adults empathized with the challenges students faced in their academic and social lives. As such, the recruited staff members that were passionate about building positive relationships and sharing their knowledge with fellow staff members and students.

What student and teacher supports exist that bolster student achievement and lead to high CAHSEE passage rates? The practice of coaching and mentoring established a relationship between the teachers and the students to create a community of learners. The staff promoted that failure was not an option. The Franklin administration asserted, “We can’t accept a 55% failure rate in algebra.” Additionally, the researcher’s notes reflected that the staff accepted the students with a caring spirit to emphasize their love and concern and made them comfortable in an academic setting. The findings from the research acknowledged that the staff provided emotional and academic support to bolster student achievement. The staff provided a trusting environment that promoted student determination for passing the CAHSEE. This determination resulted in the practice of stamina so that students learned appropriate testing behaviors. One of the supports that bolstered student achievement on the CAHSEE as well as other standardized exams was teaching them how to concentrate for ninety minutes on a standardized exam.

Part of the supports that existed was an extensive array of tutoring services that were made available to the students. The services include tutoring at lunch, one-on-one tutoring during class, and after school tutoring known as 5th period. This was part of the culture of the school where students were engulfed in support and encouragement from
the moment they entered the school and even after hours, where teachers are accessible via cell phone. Teacher 4 reinforced the researcher’s findings by stating,

    We offer support every day for anything. So if they can’t stay after school they’ll give us part of their lunch time to review. All the teachers have office hours too so the kids know that they’re posted. Kids come to me and say, hey, can you work with me at lunch so I don’t really have office hours, but I’m always available. The culture here is, we call it a family and it’s basically we welcome each other. We welcome the kids. We give them a lot of trust right up front. We also are around them all the time at lunches. We hang out with or they’ll come and hang out in our classrooms. So we’re always mixed together and I feel that that gives them a lot more confidence and security as students and they know they can go sit in a teacher’s class if I don’t feel good or if they just want to hang out with their teacher or if they need help, it’s just how we are. (personal communication, October 27, 2011)

Based on the fabric of the school, teachers know that they are free to consult with any staff member including the administration for support with their delivery of instruction. Additionally, there are daily stand-up meetings under the umbrella of Paths to Excellence that help to focus the staff on rigor, school culture, differentiated instruction, daily attendance, and test-taking strategies. Administrator 2 emphasized with vigor that, “the five things we chose to focus on this year are brought up every day. They’re part of a culture of the school and because we have a staff meeting every day, we can talk about those things” (personal communication, October 28, 2011).
The Franklin administration was consistently focused on quality instruction. This was exemplified by the practice of math department meetings, known as professional learning communities (PLC). This non-judgmental collaborative model was the bedrock of the math department meetings, which consistently met with fellow math teachers to examine student work, create rigorous competencies, discuss instruction and coach each other on their delivery of instruction. The researcher’s field notes reflected the extensive coaching. This was reiterated by the administrators, which stated that, “the math coach goes in all the math classrooms and runs coaching in mathematics. They provide coaching on instruction. Teachers get a lot of feedback and coaching on the lessons that they design” (Administrator 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011). This was a defining feature of the school. This non-confrontational model of collaboration was part of the culture of the school that the administrators promoted as a family atmosphere where support is always available and non-compromising.

The administrator’s steady focus on accountability was part of their continued support. As the research states, the administrators provided ongoing support to the staff and students by holding them instructionally accountable. Part of the support involved holding the teachers accountable for filling in the gaps of students who have not mastered concepts taught. This was part of the administrator’s investment in quality instruction and student learning. This was reinforced by the researcher’s findings, where the administration commented that, “We have reached an agreement on a specific set of expectations for teachers, which includes instruction and grading. I think that has a lot of influence on how people think about their jobs here and the work they do” (Administrator 1, personal communication, October 27, 2011).
How does the culture of the school factor into the student success? The school culture exemplifies the authenticity and essence of rigor. Student success was predicated on the foundation of rigor and was an integral part of the curriculum, assessments, while acknowledging the equality of the student voice. Analyzing the curriculum, the responses of the students as well as the staff, the researcher determined that, all students take community college classes for community college credit starting in 9th grade and seniors are taking Psych 101 and Abnormal Psych so they’ll have six college units immediately transferrable to wherever they go. Government and Econ are also offered to students through the community college.

Since the essence of rigor was the practice of preventing failure for all students at the school, an integral part of the school culture was the teaching and learning of the physical attributes of stamina. The school built the practice of training students in effective ways to be able to focus their attention for long periods of time. Teacher 1 reinforced this concept by explaining that, “We wanted to bring the rigor up. We wanted to bring the critical thinking up. Students also have to possess the ability to sit in their chair for upwards of two consecutive hours and show your mathematical knowledge” (personal communication, October 27, 2011).

The administrators put in place a culture of transparency where every member of the school family had an equal voice. The culture of the school was such that every student was welcomed with open arms and could not remain anonymous. Teacher 4 affirmed that, “everyone’s a mentor or all the teachers have a mentoring quality that the kids will feel comfortable going to or you’ll see that certain kids, they have their teacher or their support staff that they’ll trust with their problems” (personal communication,
October 27, 2011). Every staff member knew when a student did not pass a math competency and subsequent tutoring services were made available to that student in a caring and nurturing manner. As Teacher 1 told a student after they said they hated math and never passed, “I am so glad we finally met because this is going to be the first time you pass math. I am here to help you” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). The administrators constantly preached that they want a culture that is transparent, obvious, isn’t hidden, or subtle. In fact, the researcher’s observations noted that the mission is directly related to caring about the students and their education in a way that the learning comes to life and is purposeful, meaningful, and intentional.

The administrators focused on developing a family atmosphere that was transparent, obvious, purposeful, and was not subtle. The nurturing and caring atmosphere, in conjunction with the collaborative nature promoted by the administration was the very essence of the culture of the school. This was emphatically and uncompromisingly reinforced by the administration, which stated,

The expectation is that you have to love kids, that you can deal with your frustrations of teaching in a civil, humane, and responsible manner and that we’ll learn as a family. Every kid, every human being has a story to tell and when a kid has a chance to tell that story, and have it respected and have enough encouragement, support, and tutoring to use it as a springboard to be successful so that the story can be a great part of who they are rather than a tragedy. (Administrator 1, personal communication, November 16, 2011)

Due to the singular focus on student achievement by any means necessary, teachers were encouraged to collaborate and think outside the box to create ways to ensure students
mastered all math objectives. The administrations leadership practices and focus on student well-being led the math department to take a risk and create an assessment called the math competency, which required students to pass a group test and then an individual test in order to obtain a grade for the assessed standards. The creation of the competency was further evidence of the staff and administrations relentless pursuit to learn more, do better, and continue to investment in the culture of the school; which included rigor, relationships, and relevance.

The Franklin administrators and staff insisted on connecting student learning to prior knowledge, known as spiraling. That involved the creation of mini lessons to ensure that students received the appropriate level of remediation. The culture of the school embodied loving and motivating students. During an interview with Administrator 3, they described the culture as, “loving them smart, getting them comfortable and helping them become better test takers”, in an attempt bolster the student’s self-esteem so they could succeed academically. The research suggests that the administrators clearly exemplified a leadership practice that focused on loving kids, providing the appropriate level of support, and embracing their shortcomings in a civil, responsible, and humane manner where everyone learns from each other.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided evidence of the school administration’s leadership in developing and promoting practices that resulted in the high passage rates on the CAHSEE for sophomores including Black and Hispanic students.

The first part in the formulation of the study involved the qualitative researcher purposefully selecting one specific school based on the participants’ vast knowledge and ability to contribute to the field of research regarding administrative leadership, their
knowledge of instruction and record of student achievement, with a focus on rigor, relationships, and relevance.

The second part of the case study involved the collection of data through individual interviews with three administrators, four math teachers, and a focus group consisting of 11 students. This allowed the researcher to collect meaningful data about the role of the administration with respect to student achievement and draw conclusions about the phenomenon. Based on the interviews with the administration, teachers, and students, the data revealed that the Franklin administrators created a school-wide focus on student achievement through a variety of interventions that were tailored to the needs of each student. The focus on academics and student achievement was accomplished with a carefully crafted message by the administration that failure is not an option and that they will do whatever it takes to ensure student success, which was embraced by the staff and students. This was exemplified through the researchers’ findings of coaching and mentoring, rigor, positive relationships, trust, high expectations, and placing students at the center of the learning equation upon interviewing the participants. Additionally, the teachers and the focus group spoke of a Franklin administration that promotes risk-taking, quality instruction, building capacity, as well as accountability. The data allowed the researcher to triangulate the data and develop the four common themes that emerged throughout the study, which were rigor, culture, collaboration, and reciprocal teacher-learner.

When comparing the data from the interviews with the administration, teachers, and the student focus group with Marzano’s 21 Responsibilities of the School Leader; which included affirmation, culture, flexibility, relationships, visibility, and knowledge of
curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the researcher was able to make a direct relationship between the leadership exhibited by the administration and staff of Franklin Charter High School, and the resultant student achievement on the CAHSEE (Marzano et al., 2005).

The findings suggest that the overall culture of the school nurtured by the administration and embraced by the staff and students supported the phenomenon researched. The research conducted by Haberman (1999), further supported the researcher’s findings in that among the 33 indicators of student success identified in Haberman’s findings were relationship building, consistent professional development, high expectations, setting a clear vision, and academic relevance. Teachers were made to feel as equal partners in the learning process and therefore felt accountable for student learning and their outcomes. In fact, Haberman found that, “They (teachers) believe their job involves engaging learners, getting children to persist, being active, and working hard” (Haberman, 1999, p. 4).

The findings of the study allowed the researcher to validate that the actions of the administration influenced the staff to improve teaching and learning, whereby increasing student achievement and supporting the phenomenon. In Chapter 5 the researcher will give an overview of the study, implications for future research, the limitations of the study, and conclusions.
CHAPTER 5—SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In Chapter 4, I presented the results of this research study. The results included a detailed description of the actions taken by school administrators to enhance student achievement. The study examined the role and responsibilities of school site leaders in getting students (especially Black and Hispanic students) to pass high-stakes exit exams such as the CAHSEE on the first administration. The analysis of the data yielded four themes—rigor, culture, collaboration, and a community of learners. The final chapter discusses the research findings of this qualitative study and summarizes the results. The researcher also provides evidence of a link to the literature presented in Chapter 2. The chapter also gives an overview of the study, key findings, review of the limitations, implications for future research, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

**Overview of the Problem**

Research has revealed that effective principal leadership is a critical factor in student achievement (Evans, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Witziers et al., 2003). Despite the aforementioned finding, researchers have been unable to solidify a direct effect of the principal’s leadership on student achievement (Witziers et al., 2003). In fact, Murphy (1988) concludes that there is insufficient proof that educational leadership impacts student learning. Additionally, Hallinger and Heck (1996) could draw no conclusive positive effects of a principal’s leadership because, “despite the traditional rhetoric concerning principal effects, the actual results of empirical studies in the U.S. and U.K. are not altogether consistent in size or direction” (p. 1). Therefore, an evaluation of the role and responsibilities of school site leaders in getting students to pass high stakes exit exams required greater, in-depth study.
The qualitative research study undertaken sought to make a connection between principal leadership; staff and student motivation, and student performance on the CAHSEE. The study examined the practices of a charter high school in which high percentages of Black and Hispanic students passed the CAHSEE and looked at the influence of Franklin’s administration in developing and promoting practices that resulted in high passage rates. The study also sought an explanation as to how the administration created a school-wide focus on student achievement by investigating interventions, common themes, and leadership characteristics. In an attempt to explore the connection between strong administrative leadership and student academic success, the research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. How does the administration influence their staff to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student achievement?
2. What leadership characteristics exist among the administration and the staff that support student achievement?
3. What student and teacher supports exist that bolster student achievement and lead to high CAHSEE passage rates?
4. How does the culture of the school factor into student success?

**Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative, single case study that is a descriptive phenomenological analysis and bounded. The study looked at how the administrators at a single school influenced their teachers and relevant support staff to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student achievement and sustained high passage rates on the CAHSEE, and therefore lent itself to a qualitative research approach.
Part of the qualitative research involved the collection of data including documents, classroom observations, artifacts, interviews, and focus groups.

The scarcity with which the literature discusses the role and responsibility of school leadership in getting students to pass high stakes exit exams such as the CAHSEE on the first administration makes this a significant topic in need of further exploration. The researcher conducted a qualitative study of the administrators’ actions that influenced their students, including Hispanic and Black students, to pass the CAHSEE at higher rates, than the overall passage rate for the the state of California. This enabled the researcher to better describe the administrators’ role in preparing students for high stakes exit exams, which may inform the practice of school districts, superintendents, principals, and teachers.

Structured interviews were conducted with the three school administrators, four math teachers, including relevant support staff, and a focus group consisting of 11 students (8 seniors, 3 juniors, 5 males, 6 females, 5 Hispanics, 6 African Americans) who passed the CAHSEE as sophomores; to determine what administrators and educators did to influence the success of African American and Hispanic students on the mathematics section of the CAHSEE.

The interviews served the purpose of rehashing events, verifying, and discounting information, regarding the phenomenon in an attempt to draw meaningful conclusions and triangulate the data (Brod et al., 2009). Throughout all interviews with the participants the researcher used a range of probes to achieve and verify depth of an answer through asking the same question in multiple ways and multiple times,
conducting site observations, and viewing relevant artifacts to check for consistency in order to triangulate the data (Legard et al., 2003).

The researcher individually coded the transcribed data, and used field notes, as well as artifacts, to allow categories of data to emerge during the interviews, and a grounded theoretical approach utilizing a constant comparative method was pursued until saturation occurred (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This allowed the researcher to triangulate the data and authenticate the phenomenon.

The data derived from the study was used to draw conclusions about the role and responsibilities of school site leaders in getting students to pass high stakes exit exams such as the CAHSEE on the first administration; especially among Black and Hispanic students.

**Findings**

The research findings and results of this qualitative study provided greater insights into the leadership of the administration and how their students were able to consistently achieve high passage rates on the math portion of the CAHSEE. Research has revealed that principal leadership, behavior, and practices play a significant role in student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). Based on the study conducted by Robinson et al. (2008), their data revealed five sets of leadership practices that impacted student outcomes and support the researcher’s findings. The leadership practices included establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning development, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

The analysis of the data helped explain the phenomenon that Franklin Charter High School produced high CAHSEE passage rates among Black and Hispanic students.
that outpaced the average CAHSEE rates in California. The themes that consistently emerged throughout the research were rigor, culture, collaboration, and a community of learners.

One of the themes that emerged from the researcher’s interviews with the participants was the administrators’ focus on rigor in the instructional program to ensure increased student achievement and high CAHSEE passage rates. Rigor and high expectations were demonstrated through the leadership by the consistent modeling of coaching and mentoring. The administrators visited classrooms daily, observing instruction and giving feedback so that teachers always knew what constituted quality instruction and rigor. This is the very foundation by which the high CAHSEE pass rates were realized. The leadership explained that the pass rate was a byproduct of really good teaching, learning, and classroom environments. As referenced in the literature review, Lee et al. (1997) found that successful instruction develops students’ critical thinking skills along with a greater proficiency in academic subjects while bolstering their self-esteem.

The Franklin administrators, as reported in the research, exemplified the authenticity of rigor by involving the faculty and staff in modeling, coaching, and mentoring. This involved meeting with teachers to discuss what worked, what did not, and the appropriate instructional strategies that are most suitable to ensure student mastery of the math concepts taught. Cotton (2003) explained that for a principal to create and maintain a school-wide focus on student achievement they must possess the courage to ask what is not working, constantly assess the needs and progress of their students, and have the foresight to make adjustments as the need arises. The practice of
coaching and mentoring was the impetus for making sure that failure was not an option for the staff and students in the school.

The administrator’s steady focus on accountability was part of their continued support. The administrators provided ongoing support to the staff and students by holding them instructionally accountable. Part of the support involved holding the teachers accountable for filling in the learning gaps of students who had not mastered concepts taught. This was part of the administrations investment in quality instruction and student learning.

The administrators supported their strong belief that a 55% failure rate in algebra is unacceptable by having a sophisticated assessment system that triggers interventions immediately if a student does not pass a competency. The literature explained that how the principal perceives, internalizes, and plans is central in the intervention coming to fruition (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marzano et al., 2005). In essence, for the CBAM model to experience success involving an intervention at a school site the principal and staff must believe the intervention is consistent with the mission, vision, and values of the intended purpose (Marzano et al., 1995). The researcher observed the culture of “failure not being a viable option” during site visits, and particularly in the school’s “stand-up meeting.” These meetings helped to focus the staff on rigor, school culture, differentiated instruction, daily attendance, and test-taking strategies. These meetings occurred every morning before school started for 15 minutes.

Collaboration was a defining feature of the school and strongly promoted by the school administrators. The administrators understood how collaboration factored into student achievement. This was consistent with the literature, in that Cotton (2003)
explained that for a principal and their staff to improve their students’ performance, the principal’s leadership must be focused on pursuing high levels of student learning, facilitate discussions on instructional issues, observe classrooms frequently and provide feedback to teachers, support risk-taking, provide staff development, monitor student progress and report findings, and use student achievement data to improve teaching and learning. The ground work for collaboration was firmly rooted from the beginning of the year as the whole staff took part in a two-day retreat to analyze the data of the CAHSEE and the CST standardized assessment results. This was the very essence by which the staff felt vested in a rich exchange of ideas with the ultimate goal of increased student achievement.

A qualitative study conducted by Picucci and Sobel (2002) in three urban Texas school districts found that creating a culture of high achievement; focusing on professional development, planning and collaboration, and aligning curricula, contributed to preparing students for college. To create a culture of high achievement and college readiness, each staff member cultivated an environment of high expectations in which each student could succeed in AP calculus. Tutoring programs and summer academies were offered to students and the district provided summer institutes, on-going professional development, and instructional materials to improve teacher content knowledge and instructional strategies.

Students were also encouraged to collaborate with the staff to discuss their academic deficiencies, as well as their worries and fears about academics in the form of one-on-one assistance and team building activities. The administrators supported and fostered a community of learners where the staff and students learn from each other. This
encompasses both academics as well as students’ personal lives in an attempt to address any issues that may serve to inhibit a student’s academic development.

The administrators consistently placed students at the center of their leadership practice. Students were viewed as the pillars that made the school a success. Everywhere one looked in the school, there were posters, slogans, and student work that was centered around the students and exemplified the mission, vision, and values of the school established by the administration and staff. The leadership and staff focused on connecting student’s prior knowledge with current material to ensure all instructional gaps had been filled. To assist students with their academic achievement, teachers collaborated and incorporated mini lessons when it was evident that students were not comfortable with the material being taught.

The researcher’s field notes acknowledged that part of the support that existed for the students was an extensive array of tutoring services that were made available to the students. The services included tutoring at lunch, one-on-one tutoring during class, and after school tutoring known as fifth period. This was part of the culture of the school where students were engulfed in support and encouragement from the moment they entered the school and even after hours, where teachers were accessible via cell phone.

The care and concern shown on behalf of the administration for their students was further evident by their insistence on building their student’s self-esteem to ensure they could succeed in math. This was bolstered by their focus on high expectations and quality instruction every class period of every day. This passion and dedication on behalf of the administrators and staff were characteristics of the leadership.
The results of the study confirmed the administration’s willingness to foster and promote risk-taking. Part of the administrators’ leadership involved creating an environment that encouraged the staff to “think outside the box.” This practice involved the staff coming together to exchange ideas on best practices to bolster student achievement. Nisivoccia (1997) supports the aforementioned findings by stating that transformational leadership relies on the principal to build capacity among the staff, inspire trust, encourage risk-taking, and develop a shared moral clarity to bring about enhanced performance and change.

The administrators stressed that the school is a flat organization that focused on the student, team work, family, rigor, relevance, and relationships. The family atmosphere at Franklin Charter High School is fostered by the administrators who try to keep everyone focused upon what their students are going through in their academic and social lives. To ensure that this level of care and support is firmly rooted in the fabric of the school, the administrators recruited staff members who were passionate about building positive relationships and sharing their knowledge with fellow staff members and students. The findings acknowledged that the staff provided emotional and academic support to bolster student achievement.

A strategic component of the rigor in the instruction was providing a trusting environment that promoted student determination for passing the CAHSEE. This determination resulted in the practice of stamina so that students learned appropriate testing behaviors. One such behavior that bolstered student achievement on the CAHSEE as well as other standardized exams was teaching them how to concentrate for ninety minutes on a standardized exam. Since the essence of rigor was the practice of preventing
failure for all students at the school, an integral part of the school culture was the
teaching and learning of the physical attributes of stamina. The school built the practice
of training students in effective ways to be able to focus their attention for long periods of
time. The purpose was to replicate the same testing conditions that the students would
encounter during testing.

The phenomenon was supported by the administrators’ laser-like focus on quality
instruction. According to Wellisch et al. (1978), effective principals established a vision,
set high expectations, and kept the focus squarely on curriculum and instruction. The
results of the study further exemplified the practice of math department meetings, known
as professional learning communities (PLC). This non-judgmental collaborative model
was the bedrock of the math department meetings. Math teachers consistently met to
examine student work, create rigorous competencies, discuss instruction, and coach each
other on their delivery of instruction. The researcher’s field notes reflected the extensive
coaching taking place. As referenced in the literature review Evans (1996), explained
that effective school leadership is evident when there is a clear vision, rigorous standards,
quality instruction, ongoing professional development, professional learning
communities, and effective monitoring of student learning.

As outlined in the results section, the Franklin administrators fostered a culture of
transparency where every member of the school family had an equal voice. The culture
of the school was such that every student was welcomed with open arms and could not
remain anonymous. Kotter’s model put a heavy emphasis on communicating the vision.
The vision must be modeled by the principal and become imbedded in the fabric of the
school (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).
The researcher’s field notes revealed that every staff member knew when a student did not pass a math competency, and subsequent tutoring services were made available to that student in a caring and nurturing manner. The administrators constantly preached that they wanted a culture that is transparent, obvious, isn’t hidden, or subtle. In fact, the researcher’s observations notes mention that the mission is directly related to caring about the students and their education in a way that the learning comes to life and is purposeful, meaningful, and intentional.

A qualitative study conducted by Haberman (1999) at Buffalo Creek Elementary School in Houston, Texas found that 97 percent of their students passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Among the indicators of success were: strong principal leadership, relationship building, high expectations, clear vision, risk-taking, academic relevance, consistent monitoring of student progress, rich learning environments, intentional and relevant work, community of learners, peer-coaching, and cooperative learning. The indicators of success exemplified by the administration and staff at Buffalo Creek Elementary School correlated with the leadership traits observed by the researcher at Franklin Charter High School.

The findings of this study found that the administrators focused on developing a family atmosphere that was transparent, obvious, purposeful, and was not subtle in their desire to attain such a school culture. The nurturing and caring atmosphere, in conjunction with the collaborative nature promoted by the administration was the very essence of the culture of the school and provided a plausible explanation of the phenomenon of high passage rates on the CAHSEE exam. This was supported by the literature, which explained that it is important for the leader to take a visionary position
and inspire and motivate the staff to perform beyond expectations and promote academic progress (Rowan, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1994). The research suggests that the administrators of Franklin Charter High School exemplified a leadership practice that focused on loving and motivating students, providing the appropriate level of support, and embracing their shortcomings in a civil, responsible, and humane manner where everyone learns from each other.

**Limitations of the Study**

As I conducted the study, one possible concern was that I would arrive at conclusions based on my personal biases about principals’ limitations with respect to student achievement and the importance of parental involvement. To reduce this possibility, I used a structured formal interview that prompted me to ask the same set of questions of each administrator, teacher, and the focus group. I listened attentively, took field notes, audio recorded each participant’s responses, and endeavored to avoid the role of a consultant where personal opinions and suggestions were offered that could skew the responses.

While beneficial information was gathered through this study, the findings had several limitations. One such limitation was the small sample size. The data was gathered at one charter high school consisting of approximately 500+ students in a large urban school district in Southern California and utilized responses from three administrators, three math teachers, one teacher/support provider, and one student focus group within the selected high school. The purpose of the qualitative study was not to compare different school administrations, teachers, and students, but rather to examine the phenomenon that existed at this particular charter high school and the role the
administrators played in getting their sophomore students to pass the CAHSEE on the first administration.

Another limitation that could skew the data is the fact that the study was conducted at a public charter school. This is significant in that the administration is not bound to the constraints of the union contract for the local public school system. As Administrator 1 explained, that they have the right of first refusal with respect to hiring. Also, all of FCHS employees are at-will so that is an advantage when it comes to getting the staff member who fits our core beliefs. The issue that arises is that for a qualitative study such as this one to be replicated; one would have to take into account that the staff goes through a rigorous hiring process replete with classroom observations, demonstration lessons, and a number of interviews. Public school systems may not have this luxury when it comes to hiring teachers, since they may be subject to the terms and conditions of a union contract. In many cases, such contracts stress seniority. Also, one would have to take into account the number of meetings and their impact on staff camaraderie and student achievement since every morning before school starts the entire staff takes part in a 15 minute stand-up meeting to discuss students, instruction, attendance, rigor, testing, and culture. Such meetings could be in violation of the union contract in a typical school district, considering that the custom may be one staff meeting a month and any additional meetings require 24 hour notice.

Additionally, the researcher was not privy to the inner workings and personality conflicts that might exist at Franklin Charter High School. Due to the relative short period of time that the researcher spent at the school, the researcher did not have the
opportunity to observe any tension that may have arisen between the leadership, staff, and students.

Parental involvement, and other external variables that could have contributed to state exit examination scores were not factored into the study’s results; except for the extent those factors might have been influenced by the administration and the staff. External factors such as changes in the focus of each CAHSEE and the assigned weight of each test question, as well as the level of difficulty of the test from year to year was not taken into account.

Another limitation was the fact that this study was conducted as part of a doctoral program that came with time constraints. This qualitative study took place over the course of one month during October and November of 2011. Although the researcher did spend an adequate amount of time in the field and interviewed all of the participants recommended by the school leadership while conducting member checks; one month in the field is a limited amount of time to allow the researcher to thoroughly gather and analyze the data to test the phenomenon. Therefore, this was not a longitudinal study, where more in-depth research could have been conducted to draw more precise conclusions.

Also, the primary informants were the administrators of the school. The participants may have overestimated or underestimated their role in influencing the high CAHSEE passing rate.

Finally, the CAHSEE is unique to California. While several other states have exit examinations, state tests may differ in content, administration, and other processes that may influence the generalizability of findings.
For these reasons, the findings may not be applicable to school practices on a broad scope. Nonetheless, administrators may perceive that these findings are useful as they consider the role they will play in promoting the success of students on state exit examinations. The results may further inform decisions regarding the principal’s leadership and their ability to promote and sustain change to ensure their students’ academic success.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

It is recommended that a longitudinal in-depth study on Franklin Charter High School be conducted to further explain the role and responsibilities of the administration in getting students to pass high stakes exit exams, such as the CAHSEE on the first administration; especially among Black and Hispanic students. The study could track the progress of the school’s CAHSEE scores over a number of years, and the factors that affected what the administrators and staff did to produce those results; and determine if the study’s findings were reliable over a longer period of time. Additionally, the researcher could simultaneously study a similar school and what that administration did to contribute to their CAHSEE scores.

Another study could examine the extenuating circumstances that may have contributed to high CAHSEE scores, such as school size, family background, individual motivation, and socioeconomic status.

It is recommended that student input be included in a future study in a formal focus group structure. The three focus groups might include students, teachers, and the administration. Each group would be interviewed separately asking the same research questions. Follow-up interviews would include combining the three focus groups for a verification of additional questions that were previously asked. The purpose of the four
focus groups would be to provide a multi-dimensional perspective where the students’ feedback was an integral part of the data analysis.

**Implications**

The findings of the study point to specific areas that influence students’ achievement on the CAHSEE based on the four dominant themes that emerged - rigor, culture, collaboration, and community of learners. An implication of this study from a policy standpoint, in order to build upon the established themes all stakeholders must be vested in working with colleges to work on principal training programs that speak about trust, rigor, collaboration, and quality instruction. It is important for school districts and principals to work with teacher colleges to have authentic conversations about what school systems expect in educators and what is currently being provided. The essence of rigor emphasized coaching and nurturing of students. The importance of listening to the voice of the children is an integral part of the culture of the school. Those qualities emphasized the strengths of the self-accomplishments of the students, which may be the impetus for their success on the CAHSEE. For example, the administrative staff stressed the importance of being able to hire staff members who believe in the mission and vision of the school, adhere to expectations set firmly in place as a community of learners, are understanding to the plight, needs, and socioeconomic status of their customers -- the students, and are willing to love and work with the students to ensure they reach their full potential.

Another implication of this study involves school districts examining their hiring practices so they can select staff based on their best fit to serve the students and support the vision and values of the school. Many school systems use checklists to select teachers, in which interviews are scored based on the candidates ability to mention key
words and phrases to obtain the maximum number of points. At Franklin Charter High School, it is common practice for the administrators, staff, and students to observe a prospective candidate’s lesson, bring them to the campus to observe the culture of the school, and be interviewed by a number of stakeholders including, but not limited to, the administration, staff, students, and community members. The importance of hiring the best fit teacher is based on the school leadership selecting staff who will buy in and support the philosophy of the school. The extensive interview process allows the administrators to select candidates who believe in self-motivation, adding value to the school, the importance of building capacity, trust, and addressing student shortcomings in a loving, compassionate, and rigorous manner.

The findings of the study including rigor, high expectations, culture, collaboration, and community of learners are the foundation for how the administrators used their leadership efforts and endeavored to ensure that their Black and Hispanic students passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE on their first attempt. These findings may have implication for any state in the nation that has exit level examinations and any school district that administers exit tests. While students clearly have a role in determining whether or not they pass such assessments, the results from Franklin Charter High School suggest that leaders have substantial opportunity to influence student success. From a policy standpoint, the United States Department of Education, state education agencies, and school boards could endeavor to learn more studies of Franklin Charter High School and similar schools in other locations.
Conclusion

This chapter provided a summary of the qualitative study including the findings and how they connect to the research, implications for future research, recommendations, and limitations.

Rigor, culture, collaboration, and reciprocal teacher-learner learning are the four prominent themes that emerged from the study. The data underscored the administrators’ leadership in getting students (especially Black and Hispanic students) to pass high stakes exit exams such as the CAHSEE on the first administration. By conducting such a study rich in descriptive detail, the researcher was able to see firsthand the impact that principal leadership had on student achievement. A revealing aspect of the findings included the administrators’ willingness to place students at the center of their leadership practice to enhance student learning. In an effort to maintain such a strict focus on the school culture, instruction, rigor, and life-long learning the administration went to great lengths to promote a family atmosphere where all staff members were considered counselors, the traditional hierarchical structure was downplayed, collaboration was a constant, and failure was not an option. The relationship building that the leadership spent such a significant amount of time on only served to increase students’ morale and their will to succeed on the CAHSEE. The emotional and academic support available to students served to bolster student determination and achievement. This was accomplished through trust, pep talks, distributing magical testing pencils to students during testing, writing encouraging personal notes to students, conducting group talks to listen to students’ fears about testing, and one-on-one tutoring.

On a personal note, speaking as a current school administrator; school culture, collaboration, community of learners, and rigor are the very essence of student success.
As reported in the research, the administrators modeled the authenticity of rigor by involving the faculty and staff in coaching and mentoring. This culture of collaboration was exemplified by the administrations focus on building capacity among the staff in the areas of instruction, professional development, and discipline to bolster the students’ leadership voice, enhance their fellow colleagues’ learning curve, and build their student’s academic performance through rigor, relationships, relevance, and stamina, while instilling a sense of self-worth in each child.

Following the disaggregation of the data and the development of the dominant themes, the researcher was able to reflect on what type of characteristics existed in their leadership style as a principal, and where students were situated in their daily leadership practice. It is evident that based on the findings from this study that school administrators would benefit from developing a school culture centered around high expectations, rigor, relationships, and relevance.
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Appendix A

Sample Lesson Plan

Purpose: Using prior knowledge of fractions, equations, and variables and applying it to rational equations.

Solving rational equations:

\[
\frac{3}{4}x + \frac{1}{2} = \frac{x}{1} + \frac{1}{2}
\]

If you have a sign, you can multiply the equation by LCM.

\[
\frac{4}{1}\left(\frac{3}{4}x\right) + \frac{4}{1}\left(\frac{1}{2}\right) = \frac{4}{1}\left(\frac{x}{1}\right)
\]

Combine like terms:

\[
3x + 2 = 4x
\]

\[
-3x + 2x = 1x
\]

[\text{Example 2}]

\[
\frac{10}{1}\left[\frac{3x}{5} + \frac{2}{2}\right] = \frac{7x}{10}
\]

LCM: 5·2

\[
\frac{10}{1}\left(\frac{3x}{5}\right) + \frac{5}{1}\left(\frac{2}{2}\right) = \frac{10}{1}\left(\frac{7x}{10}\right)
\]

\[
6x + 15 + 7x = \frac{10}{15} + 1x
\]

[Notes]
\[ \left( \frac{n-2}{n} - \frac{n-3}{n-6} - \frac{1}{n} \right) = \frac{n(n-6)}{n} \]

L.C.M.: \( n(n-6) \)

\[ \frac{n(n-6)}{n} \cdot \frac{(n-2)}{n} = \frac{n(n-6)(n-2)}{n^2} = \frac{n(n-4)}{n} \]

\[ (n-6)(n-2) - 1n(n-3) = (n-6) \]

\[ n - 6 \]

\[ n - 6n \]

Combine like terms:

\[ n^2 - 8n + 12 - n^2 + 2n = n - 6 \]

\[ -5n + 12 = \sqrt{n - 6} \]

\[ -n \]

\[ -6n + 12 = -6 \]

\[ -12 - 12 \]

\[ -6n = -18 \]

\[ -6 \]

\[ n = 3 \]
2. \[ \frac{70}{1} \left[ \frac{\frac{2x}{7} + \frac{27}{10}}{2 \cdot 70} \right] \]

\[ \text{LCM: } 2 \cdot 7 \]

\[ \frac{10}{1} \left( \frac{2x}{7} \right) + \frac{10}{1} \left( \frac{27}{10} \right) = \frac{10}{1} \left( \frac{4x}{8} \right) \]

\[ \frac{27}{7} = \frac{14}{5} \]

\[ \frac{90}{189} = \frac{51}{51} \]

\[ 20x + 189 = 56x \]

\[ -20x \]

\[ \frac{189}{360} = \frac{360x}{360} \]

\[ \frac{12}{12} = x \]

\[ \frac{21}{4} = x \]
\[ 12 \left[ \frac{m}{m+1} + \frac{5}{m-1} = 1 \right] = \frac{(m+1)(m-1)}{1} \]

LCM: \((m+1)(m-1)\)

\[ \frac{(m+1)(m-1), m}{(m+1)(m-1), 5} = \frac{(m+1)(m-1)}{1} \]

\[ m(m-1) + 5(m+1) = (m+1)(m-1) \]

\[ m^2 - lm + sm + 5 = \]

Combine like terms:

\[ m^2 + lm + 5m + 5 = m^2 - 1 \]

\[ -m^2 + 4m + s = m^2 - 1 \]

\[ 4m + 5 = -1 \]

\[ 4m = -6 \]

\[ m = \frac{-6}{4} \]

\[ m = \frac{3}{2} \]
Appendix B

IRB Permission Consent Letters

San Diego State University

Consent to Act as a Research Subject: Principal Improving math CAHSEE scores: The role and responsibilities of school site leaders

Dear Principal,

My name is Stanley Munro and I am a doctoral student in the education department at San Diego State University. I am conducting a study to examine your high school, in which high percentages of Black and Latino students passed the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) on the first administration. In particular, the study will examine how the principal influenced changes that resulted in strong math performances for these two demographic groups of students. I am asking you to spend approximately one hour answering questions in a one-on-one interview. The results will be reported in a thesis that I will complete as a requirement of my doctoral program.

The interview includes questions that ask you to discuss your role in developing and promoting success in mathematics for Black and Latino high school students to the point where they passed the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) on the first administration. In particular, the study will examine how you influenced changes that result in strong math performances for these two demographic groups of students, in which their performance exceeds the district, state and county average.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, your responses will be anonymous - that is, recorded without any identifying information that is linked to you. If you are interested in participating or have any questions regarding this study, please contact me at 770-265-5018. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at SDSU (619-594-6622; irb@msd.sdsu.edu) to report problems or concerns related to this study.

Institutional Review Board Approval Expires: 6/26/2012 Study Number: 656067
Dear Student,

My name is Stanley Munro and I am a doctoral student in the education department at San Diego State University. I am conducting a study to examine your high school, in which high percentages of Black and Latino students passed the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) on the first administration. In particular, the study will examine how the principal in conjunction with the teachers and relevant support staff influenced changes that resulted in strong math performances for these two demographic groups of students. I am asking you to spend approximately one hour answering questions in a focus group consisting of your fellow classmates. The results will be reported in a thesis that I will complete as a requirement of my doctoral program.

The focus group will include questions that will ask you to discuss the factors that helped you succeed in passing the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) on the first administration. In particular, the study will examine how the principal influenced changes that resulted in your strong math performance, in which you and your selected classmates' performance exceeded the district, state and county average.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, your responses will be anonymous - that is, recorded without any identifying information that is linked to you. If you are interested in participating or have any questions regarding this study please contact your principal, Dr. Ian Pumplin. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at SDSU (819-504-6122; irb@mail.sdsu.edu) to report problems or concerns related to this study.

Institutional Review Board
Approval Expires: 8/26/2012
Study Number: 656067
San Diego State University

Consent to Act as a Research Subject: Teachers and relevant support staff
Improving math CAHSEE scores: The role and responsibilities of school site leaders

Dear Teacher,

My name is Stanley Munro and I am a doctoral student in the education department at San Diego State University. I am conducting a study to examine your high school, in which high percentages of Black and Latino students passed the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) on the first administration. In particular, the study will examine how the principal in conjunction with the teachers and relevant support staff influenced changes that resulted in strong math performances for these two demographic groups of students. I am asking you to spend approximately one hour answering questions in a one on one interview. The results will be reported in a thesis that I will complete as a requirement of my doctoral program.

The interview includes questions that ask you to discuss your role in developing and promoting success in mathematics for Black and Latino high school students to the point where they passed the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) on the first administration. In particular, the study will examine how the principal influenced changes that resulted in strong math performances for these two demographic groups of students, in which their performance exceeds the district, state and county average.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, your responses will be anonymous - that is, recorded without any identifying information that is linked to you. If you are interested in participating or have any questions regarding this study, please contact your principal, Dr. Im Pumpsus. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at SDSU (619-594-6622; irb@mail.sdsu.edu) to report problems or concerns related to this study.
Appendix C
Interview Questions

Student Focus Group Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. Your school has achieved results on the CAHSEE math test that are better than most schools in the city. In particular, your school has achieved strong CAHSEE math results for Black and Hispanic high school students. I am conducting research to better understand your school’s success and to help other school leaders know how to support Black and Hispanic students in getting excellent results on the math CAHSEE.

Has everyone passed the math CAHSEE?

Tell me something that your school did to assist you in passing the CAHSEE

When did that help start for you? When did it end? How often was the help offered? How often did you take advantage of it? Who played in role in providing the help? What role did they play? How did they treat you?

Did your regular math teacher play any role in helping you pass the math CAHSEE? If so, what did they do?

Did the principal get involved in any way? If so, how?

When did you first learn about the CAHSEE? How did you learn about it? What did you think about the test when you first heard about it?

Did you always think that you were going to pass the math CAHSEE on the first attempt? If so, what made you think so? If not, what made you think that you might not pass?

1. Many students at your school passed the mathematics CAHSEE on the first try. Why do you think so many students at this school passed it?
2. What do you think helped you pass the mathematics section of the CAHSEE?
3. What was the atmosphere of the school around the time the CAHSEE was administered? Why?
4. What supports helped prepare you for the CAHSEE? Why do you think they were helpful?
5. What impact did your teacher’s delivery of instruction have on your CAHSEE preparation?
6. Was outside support (tutors, test prep companies, computer programs, etc.) available to assist you? If so, what kinds of support were available? What kinds of support did you use? How often did you use those supports?
7. Are teachers available to assist you when you need their assistance?
8. Can you recall any specific thing that a teacher at this school did to help you understand something in mathematics?
9. Did the principal do anything to help make sure that you were ready to pass the mathematics section of CAHSEE? If so, what?
10. What motivated you to exert the effort necessary to learn what was necessary in order to pass the CAHSEE?

**Administrator Interview Questions**

1. Describe your day-to-day management of Health Sciences High. In other words, what are some of the routine things you do each day or each week?
2. Describe the culture of the school in terms of the staff, students, and community. Describe your involvement with curriculum, instruction, and assessment in general, and specifically as related to the CAHSEE.
3. How is this school different from other urban high schools? In what ways is this school similar to other urban high schools?
4. Can you recall your first conversations with educators at your school about the CAHSEE? What prompted those first conversations? What did you discuss? What role did you play in those conversations?
5. Did you anticipate that your students would perform well on the first administration of the CAHSEE? Particularly, did you anticipate that your Black and Hispanic students would perform well on the first administration of the CAHSEE? If so, why did you anticipate strong results? If not, why not?
6. Explain how you went about preparing students for the CAHSEE? Did you specifically target any group of students? If so, which groups? What targeted assistance was provided? What, if anything, did you do to ensure that assistance would be available? What, if anything, did you do to ensure that assistance would be effective in helping students learn?
7. Did you have a goal related to student success on the CAHSEE? If so, what was the goal?
8. What did you anticipate that you would need to put in place in order to ensure that your students achieved strong rates of success on the math CAHSEE? *In response to whatever answers are given, you might ask the following: Did you put that in place? How? What did you do? How did you do it? Who did you involve? How did they
help? How did you monitor progress? What happened when you found that progress had been made? What happened when you found that progress was not being made?

9. Are you still trying to get better first-time CAHSEE results? If so, what goal are you trying to achieve? What are you to achieve that goal? Who have you involved? How are they helping? How do you know if you’re making progress toward the goal? What happens if you find that some students aren’t making progress? What happens if you find that some teacher or some aspect of the program isn’t helping students make progress?

10. Bottom line: What is it about Health Sciences High that makes it such that many Black and Hispanic students pass the CAHSEE math test on the first administration? What would leaders of other urban schools have to do in order to achieve similar results?

**Teacher Interview Questions**

1. How long have you been working at this school? What is your role?
2. Describe the culture of the school in terms of the staff, students, and community.
3. Describe your involvement with curriculum, instruction, and assessment in general, and specifically as related to the CAHSEE.
4. How is this school different from other urban high schools? In what ways is this school similar to other urban high schools?
5. Can you recall your first conversations at your school about the CAHSEE? What prompted those first conversations? Who initiated those conversations? What did you discuss? What role did you play in those conversations?
6. Did you anticipate that your students would perform well on the first administration of the CAHSEE? Particularly, did you anticipate that your Black and Hispanic students would perform well on the first administration of the CAHSEE? If so, why did you anticipate strong results? If not, why not?
7. Explain how you went about preparing students for the CAHSEE? Did you specifically target any group of students? If so, which groups? What targeted assistance was provided? What, if anything, did you do to ensure that assistance would be available? What, if anything, did you do to ensure that assistance would be effective in helping students learn?
8. Did you have a goal related to student success on the CAHSEE? If so, what was the goal? Did anyone or anything influence you in formulating this goal?
9. What did you anticipate that you would need to put in place in order to ensure that your students achieved strong rates of success on the math CAHSEE? In response to whatever answers are given, you might ask the following: Did you put that in
place? How? What did you do? How did you do it? Who helped you? How did they help? How did you monitor progress? What happened when you found that students made progress? What happened when you found that progress was not being made?

10. How does the administration factor into the high passage rates of Black and Hispanic students on the CAHSEE?

11. Are you still trying to get better first-time CAHSEE results? If so, what goal are you trying to achieve? Who or what has influenced your push to get better results? What are you doing to achieve that goal? Who is helping you achieve the goal? How are they helping? How do you know if your students are making progress toward the goal? What happens if you find that someone isn’t making progress?

12. Bottom line: What is it about Health Sciences High that makes it such that many Black and Hispanic students pass the CAHSEE math test on the first administration? What would leaders of other urban schools have to do in order to achieve similar results?

Follow-up Questions

Teacher 1 & Teacher 2 Questions

Explain the process that goes into disaggregating the CAHSEE data.

Who is involved?

Who coordinates/conducts the data meeting?

Are there individual meetings with the teachers that deal with the CAHSEE?

Who is in those meetings?

Describe the tenor of those meetings.

What is the format of your PLC’s?
Do you have PLC’s at HSHMC?

What is the purpose of the PLC’s?

Who attends? Who leads the PLC? What role do they play? Facilitator?

Who picks the person who leads the PLC’s?

What is the administrations involvement in PLC’s?

What role does the CAHSEE play in the PLC’s?

With the success that you experience on the CAHSEE, would you say that the PLC’s contribute to that? Why?

How do you maintain this culture of excellence on the CAHSEE?

What is the strength of the PLC’s?

Describe the culture of the PLC’s?

Are there defined roles in the PLC’s?

Does the administration encourage you to take risks?

In what way would you say that you are allowed to take risks w.r.t curriculum/instruction and preparing students for the CAHSEE?

Can you expand on the risks you specifically took? Was this done individually or collectively with the staff?

Explain the shared leadership practices that take place?

How would you describe your administrations leadership style?

How does the administration build capacity among the staff?

How does the administration empower you to be a teacher leader?

What PD have you attended/received that improved your instruction and contributed to the high CAHSEE scores? Who arranged it? Did the administration attend as well?
Why does HSHMC not employ a math resource specialist to assist the staff with instruction?

Is there any other information that you have to offer with respect to curriculum, instruction, disaggregation of data, PLC’s and the CAHSEE?

**Administrator 1 & 2 Follow-Up Questions**

Explain the process that goes into disaggregating the CAHSEE data.

Who is involved?

Who coordinates/conducts the data meeting?

Are there individual meetings with the teachers that deal with the CAHSEE?

Who is in those meetings?

Describe the tenor of those meetings.

Do you have PLC’s at HSHMC?

What is the format of your PLC’s?

What is the purpose of the PLC’s?

Who attends? Who leads the PLC? What role do they play? Facilitator?

What is the administrations involvement in PLC’s?

Who picks the person who leads the PLC’s?

What role does the CAHSEE play in the PLC’s?

With the success that you experience on the CAHSEE, would you say that the PLC’s contribute to that? Why?
How do you maintain this culture of excellence on the CAHSEE?
What is the strength of the PLC’s?
Describe the culture of the PLC’s?
Are there defined roles in the PLC’s?

Does the administration encourage the staff to take risks?
In what way would you say that you allow the staff to take risks w.r.t curriculum/instruction and preparing students for the CAHSEE?
Can you expand on the risks they took and why? Was this done individually or collectively as a staff?

Explain the shared leadership practices that take place?
How would you describe your leadership style?
How does the administration build capacity among the staff?
How do you empower your teachers to be leaders?

What PD have you attended/received that improved your leadership and your ability to motivate your staff and students to greatness and contributed to the high CAHSEE scores?
Do you attend the PD that the staff attends?

Why do you not employ a math resource specialist to assist your staff with instruction?
Is there any other information that you have to offer with respect to curriculum, instruction, disaggregation of data, PLC’s and the CAHSEE?
Appendix D

Certificate of Transcript

CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIPT

I, the undersigned, Laureen Minnich, do hereby certify:

That the audio recordings of interviews for Stanley Munro’s dissertation were transcribed by me to the best of my ability and were a true and faithful transcript of the interviews conducted using a digital recorder.

In witness whereof, I have subscribed my name this 9th day of January, 2012.

\[Signature\]
Laureen Minnich
Owner
Southern California Transcription Services
4354 Avon Drive
La Mesa, CA 91941
Phone: (619) 464-2553
Email: LMIN@COX.NET
Appendix E
Franklin Charter High School CAHSEE Results Compared to District, County, and State Results
Appendix F

A Structure to Instruction that Works

TEACHER RESPONSIBILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Lesson (Purpose &amp; Modeling)</th>
<th>“I do it”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guided Instruction</td>
<td>“We do it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>“You do it together”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>“You do it alone”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

A Structure for Instruction that Works

(c) Frey & Fisher, 2008
## Franklin Charter High School Expectations

### Expectations at the Best School in the Universe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Records</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Daily attendance is accurate and timely.  
• Grade books updated at least twice weekly.  
• Student work is returned within one week.  
• Routine paperwork is completed on time. | • Lunchtime supervision during non-office hours is maintained.  
• Attendance at extracurricular activities occurs regularly.  
• Hallway supervision during passing periods for non-instructional personnel is ongoing. |

### Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Daily purpose is posted.  
• Teacher modeling occurs in each lesson.  
• Application and productive group work is extensive and occurs daily.  
• Formative assessment is used to guide instruction.  
• Small group instruction and intervention occurs regularly.  
• Students read and write daily in every class.  
• Homework is used formatively (review, fluency, application, extension). |
| • Lessons are systematic and planned, and based on state standards.  
• Units are appropriately interdisciplinary and linked to essential questions and/or health topics.  
• Assessments and grading are competency-based.  
• Honors contracts are offered and executed.  
• Feature-length films are used minimally, judiciously, and are pre-approved by Nancy Frey. Short films include vocabulary and/or writing activities. |

### Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Choice words and non-verbal cues are used to build each student’s agency and identity.  
• Parents, students, and colleagues receive responses within 1 workday.  
• Departments, grade levels, and student support staff members interact regularly.  
• Restorative practices are used to solve problems.  
• When problems occur, we focus on the next right thing. |
| • Every adult is a learner and a teacher.  
• Coaching is essential to learning, and everyone is coached.  
• Professional development is essential to continuous improvement, and takes priority over other professional obligations.  
• Classrooms are welcoming of visitors who also help us to learn more about ourselves. |

### Student Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Office hours are posted and held twice each week.  
• Proactive engagement with students about their performance and recovery needs is ongoing.  
• Attendance at IEP meetings occurs regularly.  
• Students are spotlighted for positive accomplishments and areas of concern. |
| • Honest conversations occur regularly.  
• Choice words are used to build agency and identity between and among staff.  
• Mentoring and coaching relationships are supportive and ongoing.  
• Successes and achievements are celebrated. |