Principal self-efficacy : a qualitative exploration

Will Dwyer

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ABSTRACT

PRINCIPAL SELF-EFFICACY:
QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION

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The purpose of this qualitative exploration was to examine the environmental influences impactful to principal self-efficacy and the links between environment and efficacy. Participants for this study were identified from a pool of 125 school principals recognized by the Illinois Interactive Report Card for significantly increasing student achievement between 2011 and 2013. The study focused on six practicing principals in Illinois public k-12 schools and employed one 60-minute interview and three participant journal prompts for each participant.

The data from participant interviews and journal prompts were analyzed using grounded theory qualitative methods through the theoretical framework of Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory. Findings from this study indicate that principals have a large amount of control over their own self-efficacy through managing the following environmental influences: Gaining the buy-in of their staff, confronting and overcoming personnel challenges, having non-evaluative peer networks, creating successful school improvement processes, and directly observing student successes. This study also found superintendents/superiors exert a large amount of control over principal self-efficacy through direct verbal support and building consistent and trusting relationships with principals. The recommendations for future research and the field of principal self-efficacy are presented as well.
NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DEKALB, ILLINOIS

MAY 2017

PRINCIPAL SELF-EFFICACY:
A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION

BY

WILL DWYER
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
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Doctoral Director:
Elizabeth A. Wilkins
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I first wish to acknowledge my parents who always made education the greatest commodity in our household. They inspired me to be curious and hard working. I also want to acknowledge my extended family for lots of support and understanding during this process. In particular, my mother in-law, Terri, for supporting our family in so many ways and my grandmother-in-law and grandfather-in-law, Ann and Bill, for being so supportive of the sacrifices required in this journey.

A tip of my cap to my colleagues on this journey, Dr. Amy Howerton and Dr. Kristen Mattson, who helped push me and motivate me the last four years. I also wish to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Daryl Dugas and Dr. Kelly Summers. Their insights and support made me a better student and thinker. I want thank the six amazing principals who were a part of this study. Their words of wisdom continue to resonate. I especially wish to acknowledge my committee chair, Dr. Beth Wilkins. She is a true educator with patience, tenacity, and wisdom. I cannot express how lucky I am to have worked with her. Her guidance has meant everything. Finally, I want to acknowledge my son, Liam, and daughter, Josephine, for their patience and understanding about why Dad had to be gone so much. Thank you!
DEDICATION

To my wife Sara

If not for you, this never would have happened. I’m nothing without you.
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Decades of research have consistently found positive relationships between principal behavior and student academic achievement. (Cotton, 2003, p. 1)

Since the 2001 federal legislation known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), American public schools have operated under a culture of accountability. A pillar of the NCLB legislation is the public display of student achievement information to focus schools on improvement (Dee & Jacob, 2011). Since NCLB’s inception school leaders have assumed an increasing burden of demonstrating tangible improvements in achievement through increased standardized test scores (Azah, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Numerous research studies have found connections between the behaviors of principals and the achievement of students through both direct interactions with students and influencing those who directly interact with students (Cotton, 2003; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). While positive correlational relationships between principal behaviors and student achievement have been uncovered, “researchers have not attempted to identify the driving forces behind principal behaviors related to indirectly and directly affecting student achievement” (Szymendera, 2013, p. 78). Principal self-efficacy is a promising area of research that may contribute to understanding what drives some principals to practice the behaviors that influence student achievement and why others do not (Leithwood & Janztzi, 2008).
Self-efficacy is belief in one’s capacity to perform a task or meet a challenge. Research indicates one’s level of self-efficacy can directly affect what a person will do (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Research regarding school principal self-efficacy, which began in the 1980s, has consisted primarily of quantitative analyses of demographic factors such as relationships between gender, school characteristics, and principal self-efficacy (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Lovell, 2009; Szymendera, 2013). Research also asserts there is a need to identify ways for principals to confront the challenges of increasing student achievement, and increased principal self-efficacy may address that need (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). However, extant research in principal self-efficacy concludes there remains a lack of research identifying what environmental influences actually impact principal self-efficacy (Azah, 2014; Szymendera, 2013).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found that between 1983 and 2005 there were 15 empirical studies regarding principal self-efficacy, all of which were quantitative in design. Between 2005 and 2014, research in principal self-efficacy has maintained a primarily quantitative design with limited qualitative contributions from Leithwood, Strauss, and Anderson (2007) and Azah (2014). Despite varying research designs and findings regarding principal self-efficacy, both quantitative and qualitative research studies consistently identify three issues regarding principal self-efficacy in need of future exploration, as illustrated in Table 1.
Table 1
Areas of Future Research in Principal Self-Efficacy

<table>
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<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Supporting Research</th>
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<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Extant research has identified limited specific types of principal professional development that positively impact self-efficacy.</td>
<td>(Azah, 2014; Grissom &amp; Harrington, 2010; Leithwood, Strauss, &amp; Anderson, 2007; Lovell, 2009; McCullers &amp; Bozeman, 2010; Szymendera, 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Complex Interactions</td>
<td>Due to conflicting findings of numerous studies, many researchers have speculated there are unexplored and complex interactions at play between principal self-efficacy, environmental influences, and principal behaviors.</td>
<td>(McCullers &amp; Bozeman, 2010; Smith Guarino, Strom, &amp; Adams, 2006; Szymendera, 2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Role of School District Leadership</td>
<td>The relationship between school district leadership and conditions, and principal self-efficacy remains uncertain.</td>
<td>(Azah, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2007; Leithwood &amp; Jantzi, 2008; Lovell, 2009; Santamaria, 2008)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

To more deeply explore the issues identified in Table 1, research will need to expand beyond the demographic context of principals and schools and focus on events, experiences, relationships, and other environmental influences impactful to principal self-efficacy (Szymendera, 2013). This study seeks to contribute to the field of principal self-efficacy by identifying the environmental influences principals identify as impactful to their self-efficacy and provide insight regarding how principals describe those influences.

Definitions

This study used the following definitions of terms:
Direct Behaviors: Behaviors of principals that directly impact students without a third party intermediary. Examples include communicating with staff and students, creating an orderly environment, and being visible to the school community (Marzano et al., 2005; Szymendera, 2013)

Environmental Influences: Relationships, events, structures, rules or other external factors that may impact principal self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Indirect Behaviors: Behaviors of principals that impact students by affecting other parties that interact with students, i.e., teachers. Examples include providing intellectual stimulation, evaluating teachers, and effectively allocating resources (Marzano et al., 2005; Szymendera, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

People must have a robust sense of personal self-efficacy to sustain the perseverant effort to succeed. (Bandura, 1989, p. 1176)

Social cognitive theory is an overarching learning theory of how knowledge is cognitively constructed and thus impacts human behavior. Self-efficacy theory plays a contributing role within social cognitive theory because self-efficacy impacts the outcomes of different motivational thought processes, behaviors, and reactions to events that shape human behavior (Bandura, 1997). This study explored the interaction between environmental
influences, the self-efficacy of principals, and their resulting behaviors through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997).

Within social cognitive theory, Bandura (1997) offers a model of triadic reciprocal causation, which highlights the bi-directional interaction between one’s thoughts, one’s environmental influences, and one’s behaviors, as illustrated in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Bandura’s model of triadic reciprocal causation.](image)

The bi-directional relationships illustrated in triadic reciprocal causation represent a simplified conceptualization of social cognitive theory. These relationships also represent the role self-efficacy plays in human behavior because according to Bandura (1989), self-efficacy influences all three components of the above model. When self-efficacy is defined as an internal thought or feeling it becomes a key element within Bandura’s model of triadic reciprocal causation as illustrated in Figure 2. By viewing self-efficacy as a component of triadic reciprocal
causation, one can assume there are bi-directional relationships between self-efficacy, environmental influences, and exhibited behaviors.

This study explored the interaction between environmental influences and the self-efficacy of principals to practice the behaviors associated with improving student achievement. A more detailed description of the theoretical framework is expounded on in Chapter 2.

Figure 2: Bandura’s model of triadic reciprocal causation with self-efficacy as an internal thought or feeling.

Problem Statement

Given the perceived importance of leadership in schools and the central role of the principal in that leadership, one might assume that suggestions regarding leadership practice in schools are based on a clear, well-articulated body of research spanning decades. Unfortunately, this assumption is incorrect. (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 6)

The onset of the accountability era in American education occurred in 2001, with the advent of NCLB, and it has increased the demands upon school leaders to produce tangible
improvements in student achievement (Dee & Jacob, 2009; Moak, 2010). Principals are expected to not only manage the safe and orderly operations of schools but also serve as instructional leaders to facilitate improved student achievement (Fullan, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Marzano et al., 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Research has identified principals as centrally important to any attempts of significant educational system change on a district, state or federal level (Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, Levin & Fullan, 2004). Unfortunately, nearly one third of principals reported they were considering leaving their jobs because the expectations were unrealistic (Markow & Pieters, 2012). As the expectations on principals are raised, researchers continue to examine ways for principals to mitigate the demands of their roles while producing increased student achievement results (Azah, 2014; Fullan, 2007; Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Numerous research studies have found that increased levels of principal self-efficacy are correlated to specific principal behaviors; these behaviors are linked to increased student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005; Leithwood, et al., 2004). While self-efficacy represents a promising construct to explain the practice of such behaviors, there is a lack of understanding regarding the complex relationship between principals and what influences their self-efficacy.

The majority of existing research regarding principal self-efficacy is quantitative in design and primarily examines correlational relationships between school characteristics (such as school low-income student ratios, student body ethnicity, school achievement status), personal characteristics of principals (such as age or gender) and principal self-efficacy (Lovell, 2009; Szymendera, 2013). Until the causal environmental influences that impact principal self-efficacy
are identified and more deeply understood, efforts to elicit and understand the self-efficacy of principals will be uninformed.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the environmental influences principals identify as impactful to their self-efficacy to improve student achievement. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What environmental influences do principals identify as impactful to their self-efficacy to perform both direct and indirect behaviors to improve student achievement?

2. How do principals describe the mechanisms through which environmental influences impact their self-efficacy to improve student achievement?

Significance

Researchers have asserted that school principals are second only to classroom teachers in importance to improving student achievement (Azah, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Researchers have also uncovered the behaviors through which principals are most likely to improve student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). There is a need to help principals meet the expanding demands of their positions to improve student achievement (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). A deeper understanding of principal self-efficacy may help inform principals on how to navigate their roles to improve student achievement. However, there is a paucity of research
exploring what elicits self-efficacy within principals and why (Leithwood, Strauss, & Anderson, 2007). This study seeks to understand how certain environmental influences interact with thought processes to impact principal self-efficacy toward improving student achievement. Results of this study may help inform principal professional development activities, principal preparation programs, and institutional or statewide supports that should be made available to practicing principals.

**Delimitations**

This study was limited to six school principals in Illinois from schools recognized for consistent academic growth, by the Illinois State Board of Education from 2011 to 2013. To meet the criteria for consistent academic growth participants’ schools showed an upward trend in student achievement, including a 7.5% increase in standardized test scores (Illinois Student Achievement Test or ISAT for elementary or middle schools; Prairie State Achievement Exam or PSAE for high schools) in 2013 or a combined 15% increase in standardized test scores during 2011-12 and 2012-13 on the same assessments. Participants must also have scored a 6.0 out of 9.0 composite score on the Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale (PSES) designed by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004). This study was limited to six participants to allow for in-depth analysis of each participant (Stake, 2010). The study focused on Illinois schools to ensure
consistency in state-wide contextual factors that may have emerged as pertinent to principal self-efficacy in the data analysis phase of the study, such as the Illinois Performance Evaluation Review Act of 2010, which affects teacher evaluation (Millanowski, Scott, Finster, Doll, Lewandowski, Roseland & White, 2015). The current study focused on school principals recognized for improved student achievement and with self-efficacy scores in the top third of the score range on the PSES to increase the likelihood of studying principals with high levels of self-efficacy toward improving student achievement as recommended by Szymendera (2013). The study was also limited to gathering data from March 2016 until June 2016.

Methodology

This qualitative study used a grounded theory approach. Stratified purposeful sampling (Mertens, 2015) was used to identify participants. The participants were studied in two phases of data collection:

Phase 1: Intensive interviews (Charmaz, 2014)

Phase 2: Participant journal responses (Charmaz, 2014; Mertens, 2015)

Both phases of data collection utilized constant comparative analysis of data to inform or disprove emerging themes regarding the research questions (Charmaz, 2014).

This study employed data coding methods to organize the data. The researcher used In Vivo coding to initially code all data (Saldana, 2009) and memo writing to facilitate the analysis of data across the length of the study (Charmaz, 2014). The goal of the research was to construct
an explanatory theory that addresses the research questions using data gathered from the study as
the foundation of the theory (Charmaz, 2014; Mertens, 2015).

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction, theoretical framework, statement of the problem, purpose for the research, research questions, definitions of key terms used throughout the study, the significance of the study, the delimitations, and finally a brief description of the methodology of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature germane to the field of principal self-efficacy. Chapter 3 details the methodology employed in this study. Chapter 4 offers the results of the research, and Chapter 5 discusses the implications of this study and directions for future research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2008, the United States Department of Education released a follow-up study to the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report entitled *A Nation Accountable*. The report depicted the tenuous state of American education and made recommendations for improvement. In the report, the role of the principal was underscored as critical to improving student achievement, as principals in the 21st century are expected to not only manage schools but also provide instructional leadership. Also, educational researchers have called attention to the critical role of principal leadership, specifically as it affects student achievement (Fullan, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). This shift illustrates the importance placed on the principal in today’s schools.

The importance of the principal’s role has also been influenced by the accountability era in American education. The pillar of the accountability era has been mandatory standardized tests to compare all schools in each state based on student achievement. School accountability has been grounded in punitive sanctions for schools failing to make adequate progress toward proficiency by all students on mandatory standardized tests. Findings of multiple studies illustrate the changing role of the principal during the school accountability era, including pervasive expectations for principals to directly improve student achievement (Dee & Jacob, 2009; McCullers & Bozeman, 2010; Santamaria, 2008; Smith, Guarino, Strom, & Adams; 2006). In light of this changing role, the 2012 Metlife National Survey of Teachers and Principals found
that nearly one third of principals view their jobs as unrealistic and were considering leaving the field (Markow & Pieters, 2012).

As understanding of the role of the principal has evolved so too has research regarding principals and factors impacting their effectiveness. In the past two decades, research examining one such factor, self-efficacy, has ranged from devising methods to capture and measure principal self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis 2004) to examining the connections between principal self-efficacy, teacher satisfaction, and student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Educational research has uncovered principal behaviors correlated to increased student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) and the relationship between principal self-efficacy and those behaviors (Moak, 2010; Szymendera, 2013). However, research in principal self-efficacy is in very early stages (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008) and has been largely limited to correlational relationships regarding self-efficacy, principals, and student achievement. Extant research in principal self-efficacy identifies three enduring questions in need of further exploration:

- What are the effects of professional development on principal self-efficacy?
- What possible complex interactions may explain conflicting findings of extant research?
- What are the effects of district leadership on principal self-efficacy?

These three questions are rooted in a lack of deeper understanding regarding the antecedents of principal self-efficacy (Azah, 2014). This lack of deeper understanding is likely due to the almost entirely quantitative design of existing research (Szymendera, 2013). Until the approach to research changes, the interaction between self-efficacy, principal behavior, and environmental influences will remain uncertain. Until deeper understanding of principal self-
efficacy is gained, efforts aimed at supporting principals to effectively manage self-efficacy to confront the challenges of their role will be uninformed.

This chapter first provides a description of the theoretical framework for the study. Following the theoretical framework, this chapter presents the existing research around principal self-efficacy by closely analyzing research regarding the importance of principal self-efficacy, the impacts of principal behavior, environmental influences on principal self-efficacy, and finally an examination of the enduring questions in the field of principal self-efficacy.

Theoretical Framework

This review examines self-efficacy through the lens of Bandura’s social cognitive theory while focusing on principals as the unit of analysis. Social cognitive theory is an overarching learning theory of how knowledge is cognitively constructed and thus impacts human behavior (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy theory plays a contributing role within social cognitive theory because self-efficacy impacts the outcomes of different motivational thought processes, behaviors, and reactions to events that shape human behavior (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy theory provides a unified explanation of the sources of self-efficacy, how the sources are processed, and their effects (Bandura, 1989).

Nearly all of the research conducted in principal self-efficacy has been done under the theoretical framework of Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1986) and more specifically what he termed as triadic reciprocal causation (1997), which defines how environmental influences affect thoughts and feelings (self-efficacy) and how those thoughts and feelings affect actions and behaviors.
Within social cognitive theory, Bandura (1997) offers a model of triadic reciprocal causation, which highlights the bi-directional interaction between one’s thoughts, one’s environment, and one’s behaviors (see Figure 1).

The bi-directional relationships illustrated in triadic reciprocal causation represent a simplified conceptualization of social cognitive theory. It also represents the role self-efficacy plays in human behavior because, according to Bandura, self-efficacy affects and is affected by all three components of the above model (1989). For example, those with high self-efficacy set challenging goals, and when those goals are accomplished, their efficacy is reinforced. Those with low self-efficacy assume negative outcomes and show less perseverance towards tasks or avoid more rigorous tasks in general. As a result, these individuals rarely increase their efficacy (Schunk & Pajares, 2009). The following sections offer a review of how self-efficacy is shaped by experience and thought processes to ultimately demonstrate the link between self-efficacy and behavior.

Self-Efficacy Shaping Experiences

According to Bandura (1989, 1997) self-efficacy is shaped by four types of experiences: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional state. People gather information from these four experiences to inform their self-efficacy. The four types of experiences do not operate independently from one another. Azah (2014) concluded that leaders (including principals) are more effective when they stimulate self-efficacy in multiple areas and through multiple types of experiences. Often the dynamic interactions between all four types of experiences dictate the power or sway an experience will have.
Mastery Experiences

Mastery experiences produce the most powerful and enduring changes to self-efficacy because they provide direct evidence to an individual that one can succeed at a given task (Bandura, 1997). Azah (2014) identified various forms of mastery experiences for principals, including job-embedded professional development, involvement in special projects, and school-family sessions. Azah described the school-family sessions as opportunities for small groups of principals to meet regularly, share strategies, and collaboratively solve problems. Mastery experiences represent successful outcomes that result from perseverance and mastery of complex skills performed in succession. Similar to self-efficacy, mastery experiences are context specific. Mastery demonstration in one environment may not translate to self-efficacy of the same behavior or skill in another environment and is dependent upon the feelings of the individual. However, Murphy and Johnson (2011) concluded that successful mastery experiences for leaders did lead individuals to engage in future leadership experiences.

A mastery experience alone does not increase self-efficacy. Whether a mastery experience increases self-efficacy or has no effect is dependent upon how the individual processes the information from the experience. Individuals who focus upon successful experiences rather than failed attempts have higher self-efficacy than those who focus more on failures (Bandura, 1989).

Vicarious Experiences

Vicarious experiences, while not as statistically impactful upon self-efficacy as mastery experiences, still represent a significant source of self-efficacy (Schunk & Pajares, 2009).
Vicarious experiences are formed by the observation of social models performing tasks or demonstrating mastery of a task. By observing successful models, individuals can determine the skills and behaviors necessary for mastery, which increases self-efficacy. Vicarious experiences are more impactful if the model being observed is more similar to the observer. However, it is more impactful to self-efficacy if individuals can observe another individual modeling an undaunted attitude and perseverance no matter what challenges are presented. Conversely, observing individuals similar to oneself fail despite high effort can negatively impact self-efficacy by confirming internal doubts (Bandura, 1989). Azah (2014) found vicarious experiences for principals often take the form of mentor and mentee relationships between new and experienced principals.

**Verbal Persuasion**

Verbal persuasion represents a precarious form of self-efficacy enhancement. Verbal persuasion of one’s abilities or capacity is often provided through evaluative feedback and can help develop skills or attributes, particularly in the early stages of skill development (Bandura, 1997). However, persuasion must remain in the bounds of realistic appraisal of one’s abilities or the results can be contradictory. By overestimating one’s abilities they may place themselves in situations that are far above their actual abilities and then experience profound failure, thus lowering self-efficacy and discrediting the original source of verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion, when used to negatively assess one’s abilities or skill can significantly decrease self-efficacy. Harsh criticism that lacks constructive feedback can make an individual lose self-efficacy, motivation, and aspiration. As a result, those who have lost self-efficacy through verbal persuasion tend to avoid challenges and never build competencies or efficacy through mastering
a challenging situation (Bandura, 1989). Mellor, Barclay, Bulger, and Kath (2006) found that verbal persuasion was effective in persuading leaders to take on other leadership roles. Azah (2014) identifies principal colleagues and senior district officials as specific sources of verbal persuasion of principal self-efficacy but noted that, similar to Bandura’s findings, the credibility of the source of verbal persuasion is key to determining the impact on self-efficacy.

Physiological and Emotional State

When determining one’s abilities, feedback is gathered from different emotional and physical information. During particularly stressful or intense situations, individuals experiencing heightened anxiety or tension may perceive these emotional feelings as indications of vulnerability or ineptitude (Bandura, 1997). Similarly, bodily aches, pains or fatigue can lower one’s belief in his or her ability to perform a physical task. Such physical assessment can then increase emotional distress and further lower one’s sense of ability and lead to poor performance, thus confirming low levels of self-efficacy. Whether an individual perceives one’s emotional and physical state as invigorating or debilitating is dependent upon context. Similar to all efficacy-shaping experiences, one’s physical or emotional state alone does not determine self-efficacy, rather how one processes the information from the physical and emotional state of being (Bandura, 1989). Federici and Skaalvik (2012) found that principals with low self-efficacy tended to have higher levels of exhaustion than their more efficacious counterparts. The researchers found that more exhausted principals evaluated themselves more negatively. The next section will describe the four major thought processes through which efficacy-shaping experiences produce outcomes in behavior.
Efficacy-Shaping Thought Processes

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) assert that “what principals do is a direct consequence of what and how they think” (p. 573). Bandura (1989, 1997) asserts that how individuals think is determined by how they process their experiences. Bandura found that individual experiences are filtered through four types of thought processes: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes. These internal thought processes operate interactively to impact self-efficacy and thus human behavior.

Cognitive Processes

Goal setting and determining a course of action begin in one’s mind. A person with high self-efficacy tends to envision successful outcomes and chart correspondingly positive courses of action. These courses serve the individual as a map to mastery experiences. Individuals with low levels of self-efficacy do not envision successful outcomes and fixate on ineptitudes and skill deficiencies. As a result, they cognitively construct negative outcomes and courses of action, increasing the likelihood of an experience that detracts from self-efficacy. Lyons and Murphy (1994) found principals with low levels of self-efficacy were less likely to identify context-appropriate courses of action in challenging situations. Self-efficacy and cognitive processes work in tandem to reinforce one another by creating positive or negative outcomes that either enhance or diminish self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989, 1997; Schunk & Pajares, 2009).
Motivational Processes

Motivation is generated through cognitive foresight regarding one’s current state of attainment and future goals. Self-efficacy plays a key role in the cognitive generation of one’s motivation (Bandura, 1989, 1997). Bandura identifies three types of cognitive motivating theories that describe individual motivational processes. The first theory, attribution theory, describes the way efficacy influences to whom or what individuals attribute their successes or failures. Individuals with high self-efficacy attribute failures to a lack of effort or to conditions. Individuals with low self-efficacy attribute their failures to their own lacking ability (Bandura, 1989, 1997). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) found principals with low self-efficacy were more likely to blame others when challenged by adversity. The second theory, expectancy value theory, describes the value people assign to outcomes and the likelihood of a course of action to produce such outcomes. If an individual believes a course of action can produce a desired outcome, she or he is more likely to pursue said course. One’s perceived level of self-efficacy impacts one’s determination of likely success in a constructed course of action (Bandura, 1989). The third theory, goal theory, asserts individuals with high self-efficacy will set challenging goals for themselves, increase effort and perseverance to meet their goals, and thus increase self-efficacy when their goals are realized. Conversely, individuals with low self-efficacy will appraise their abilities at a low level and therefore set less challenging goals. When pursuing such goals, individuals with low self-efficacy will not persist in the face of challenges and thus not increase self-efficacy through goal attainment (Bandura, 1997). Again, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) found that principals with low self-efficacy were unlikely to persist in a course of action in the face of failure.
Affective Processes

The ability individuals possess or believe they possess to control their environment and their thoughts toward their environment form a critical mental process. Those who believe they control their environment fixate on the possible and do not distress over threats or challenges. These individuals have less anxiety and maintain higher levels of performance. Those who believe they cannot control their environment or manage any threats within their environment tend to dwell on negative situations and outcomes. This tendency to dwell on the negative can create distress and thus impair performance within one’s environment. These individuals tend to have higher levels of depression because they are more likely to be socially isolated (Bandura, 1989). Federici and Skaalvik (2012) found principals with low levels of self-efficacy viewed challenges as threatening and were less likely to overcome difficult situations.

Selection Processes

Selection processes refer to the choices individuals make as a result of their internal thoughts and beliefs. These choices comprise the environment in which an individual resides. Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy will choose an environment that is challenging. By choosing such an environment, highly efficacious individuals are exposed to more opportunities for mastery experiences that in turn will increase their self-efficacy. Individuals with low self-efficacy will avoid situations they feel exceed their abilities and as a result are rarely challenged and do not have as many efficacy-reinforcing experiences as their highly efficacious counterparts. Selection process is perhaps the most direct way by which efficacy impacts environment and environment impacts efficacy, as illustrated in Bandura’s (1997) model of
triadic reciprocal causation. Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee (1982) found that selection processes impact principals because principals tend to select approaches suited to their setting, knowing that different behaviors have different impacts in different environments.

McCormick (2001) explored the implications of selection processes when he applied Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory to the role of a leader. He found a strong positive relationship between leadership self-efficacy and leadership success by tracing the cognitive experiences of successful leaders to increased self-efficacy. His research employed triadic reciprocal causality as a lens. While McCormick did not specifically examine the role of the principal, his work contributed to future research in principal self-efficacy (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Leithwood, Strauss & Anderson, 2007; Lovell, 2009; Moak, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004).

The theoretical framework of social cognitive theory and its explanation of the interactive relationship between internal thoughts and environmental influences offer a lens to examine the role of the principal. Bandura’s (1995, 1997) work shows how our behaviors simultaneously shape our environment and are shaped by the same environment. Additionally, his research creates the connection between task effectiveness and internal thought processes. This review examines the role of the principal as an intersection of the factors contained within social cognitive theory, i.e., internal thoughts and feelings, environment, and actions and behaviors. The remainder of this review will examine what is known about principal self-efficacy based on extant research in the following four areas: (a) importance of principal self-efficacy, (b) the impacts of principal behaviors, (c) environmental influences impacting principal self-efficacy and, (d) enduring questions regarding principal self-efficacy.
Importance of Principal Self-Efficacy

Extant research has found principal self-efficacy correlates to several key areas of school leadership. High principal self-efficacy has been linked to increased perseverance (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012) and engagement (Federici & Skallvik, 2011). Principal self-efficacy also has links to more effective leadership styles toward improving student achievement. Studies assessing the importance of principal self-efficacy have relied on valid tools to measure principal self-efficacy.

Principal Perseverance

The expectations placed upon principals to achieve measurable increases in student achievement have been acknowledged by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), Fullan (2007), and Marzano et al., (2005). In the face of such work, perseverance plays a key role in successful outcomes. Bandura’s (1995) work underscores the role self-efficacy has over one’s ability to persevere through difficult and arduous tasks. Bandura asserts that human accomplishments are dependent on positive self-efficacy beliefs, which in turn affect one’s ability to set and achieve long-term goals. McCollum and Kajs (2007) and Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) found self-efficacy to be strongly related to the ability of school leaders to set and achieve goals regardless of setbacks, an essential quality in successful principals. Researchers also found that the increasing role of assessment accountability in determining principal effectiveness heightens the role of their sense of self-efficacy because it “plays a critical role in meeting the expectations and demands of the position” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004, p. 582).
In addition to setting and achieving goals and helping to persevere, self-efficacy has also been shown to increase work engagement in principals. Federici and Skaalvik (2011) found a significant and positive correlation between levels of engagement in work and high self-efficacy. They found principals who were self-efficacious toward instructional leadership were more likely to engage highly in their work. They used the term “work engagement” (p. 579) as a combination of motivation and perseverance toward tasks associated with the work of a principal. The same study found that principals with high self-efficacy in specific areas of school leadership will focus on the areas where they are most self-efficacious and avoid others.

Federici and Skaalvik (2012) also found principals with high levels of self-efficacy had lower rates of job dissatisfaction and burnout and stayed in the same roles for longer periods of time than their counterparts with lower self-efficacy. The researchers found a statistically significant negative correlation (-.400) between self-efficacy and motivation to quit. Conversely, they found a significantly positive correlation (.547) between self-efficacy and job satisfaction. It should be noted that Federici and Skaalvik’s research (2011, 2012) was conducted in Norway and may not be generalizable outside of the Norwegian context.

**Leadership Styles**

Leadership style has numerous impacts on the actions and approach a principal will take toward his or her job. This may be most prominently demonstrated in the work of Lyons and Murphy (1994) and the correlation they found between principal self-efficacy and use of leadership style. The authors assert that principals with high self-efficacy desire to be held accountable for student achievement and rely upon their own expertise and relationships as a power base for influencing their organization. They termed this leadership style as “expert
leadership” (p. 4). Conversely, they found principals with lower self-efficacy relied upon policies, district administrators, and other external sources as their power base for decision making, in a leadership style they defined as “referent leadership” (p. 4).

Nearly a decade after Lyons and Murphy’s study two other researchers measured the impact of self-efficacy on principal leadership styles by examining the principals of restructuring schools. Marks and Printy (2003) studied the effects of both instructional leadership and transformational leadership on school and student achievement. Their research shows that while instructional leadership had a larger effect on student achievement than transformational leadership, a combination of both leadership styles was in fact most effective. The researchers assert that “the efficacious principal works simultaneously at transformational and instructional tasks” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 377). They termed these combined styles of leadership “integrated leadership” (p. 388).

The leadership style Lyons and Murphy (1994) termed “expert leadership” (p. 1) and the leadership style Marks and Printy (2003) labeled “integrated leadership” (p. 388) share similarities. Both terms define leadership that is focused on collaboration and staff empowerment. Marks and Printy (2003) found integrated leadership to have a .59 correlation to increased pedagogical quality and therefore increased student achievement. Lyons and Murphy found a significant correlation of .4847 between principal self-efficacy and the use of expert leadership.

Both sets of researchers were able to demonstrate the impact of principal self-efficacy on the use of a particular leadership style by principals. More importantly, Marks and Printy (2003) demonstrated the effect of the leadership style on student achievement through the actions of the principal and how those actions are correlated to increased student achievement.
Measuring the Construct of Principal Self-Efficacy

Two studies separated by 10 years demonstrate the difficulty in capturing the construct of principal self-efficacy in a valid and reliable manner. The first study, conducted by Lyons and Murphy (1994) examined the impact of self-efficacy on the principal and how it can influence decision making. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) saw value in the work of Lyons and Murphy but lamented the unpopularity of the measurement tool Lyons and Murphy (1994) used in their study. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis conducted research to devise a consistent and reliable principal self-efficacy measurement tool. The researchers tested two existing measurement tools of principal self-efficacy and after conducting statistical analyses for relevancy and validity they synthesized and tested a third tool for validity and reliability. The authors found the new tool they developed to have the highest reliability and validity and asserted the third tool, the Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale (PSES), was able to embed context within quantitative survey questions and corrected errors of previous attempts to measure self-efficacy within principals.

The PSES has become the predominant measurement tool in the field of principal self-efficacy. As of March 2015, the research was cited in over 192 studies. The ability to capture the construct of principal self-efficacy with statistical reliability and validity has expanded the field of study and sparked numerous statistical analyses of principal self-efficacy. While the work of Tschannen-Moran and Gareis has expanded the field of principal self-efficacy through identifying the presence of the construct in principals, research has been slow to shift away from measuring principal self-efficacy and more toward investigating the antecedents and reasons behind principal self-efficacy. The current study used the PSES as a screening device to identify
efficacious participants and then investigate the sources of their self-efficacy through qualitative techniques.

While the work of Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) remains popular, it is not the only measurement tool for principal self-efficacy. McCollum, Kajs, and Minter (2005) developed a measurement tool, the School Administrator Efficacy Scale (SAES), to measure principal efficacy in eight dimensions of leadership. They conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (2006), which found strong construct validity. While the SAES has not enjoyed the same widespread use as the PSES, it has been used in 15 empirical studies since 2005.

Principal self-efficacy impacts the behaviors of principals in complex ways. This section reviewed existing research concerning how principal self-efficacy impacts student achievement through principal perseverance and leadership styles. The following section will explore the impacts of principal behaviors, particularly on student achievement.

Impacts of Principal Behaviors

The previous section examined research showing that principal self-efficacy impacts principal behaviors by affecting perseverance and leadership decisions. This section explores the findings of extant research on how principal behaviors impact student achievement, thus establishing a connection between principal self-efficacy and student achievement. Research has demonstrated connections between the behaviors of principals and improved student achievement (McCollum & Kajs, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). This section examines the types of principal behaviors and their impacts to student achievement.
Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) conducted a meta-analysis to measure the impact a principal’s behaviors can have upon student achievement. They were able to extract or infer leadership scores for principals in all 69 studies and then compared the leadership scores to student achievement data. In their analysis of empirical studies, they found that principal behaviors have a .25 correlation with student achievement. The authors acknowledged the conflicting findings of a similar meta-analysis conducted by Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) that found no correlation between principal leadership and student achievement. The authors attributed the disparate findings to the subject samples. WitzierS et al., (2003) used a majority of schools outside of the United States while Marzano et al., (2005) used only studies focused on U.S. schools. When only U.S. schools from Witziers et al., ’s (2003) study were examined in isolation, a correlation between leadership and student achievement did exist (Marzano et al., 2005).

Marzano et al., (2005) identified 21 measurable principal behaviors from their meta-analysis and computed a statistical effectiveness score for each behavior. According to Szymendera (2013), only three of the behaviors identified in the Marzano et al., (2005) study can be considered as directly affecting student achievement. The other 18 behaviors in the study all relied upon mediators to later influence student achievement and were defined as indirect behaviors as represented in Table 2. Based upon Szymendera’s analysis, the correlation between principal behaviors and student achievement found by Marzano et al., (2005) is largely through indirect principal behaviors.
Table 2

Indirect and Direct Principal Behaviors

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<tr>
<th>Indirect Principal Behaviors with Effects on Student Achievement</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Direct Behaviors with Effects on Student Achievement</th>
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<td>Affirmation</td>
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<td>Change Agent</td>
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<td>Situational Awareness</td>
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Note. Adapted from Szymendera (2013)

The impact of principal behaviors upon student achievement was also found by Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004). The researchers traced the effects of school and district conditions as they interacted with the role of the principal. The researchers, working from the 2003 presentation by Marzano et al., found that many of the behaviors Marzano et al., (2005) outlined were in fact impactful upon student learning. Specifically, they found that setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the structure were the three most impactful behaviors principals could take. These behaviors are similar to the behaviors of focus, resources, and change agent outlined by Marzano et al., (2005).
However, Leithwood, Seashore et al., (2004) also found that appropriate application of the behaviors was important and more consideration of district and school conditions were needed to understand the time and place when such behaviors were warranted. Their research is significant because it indicates that not only are the behaviors of the principals impactful to student achievement but the timing and sequencing of their application are critical.

In a meta-analysis of 11 different studies, Robinson (2007) examined the impact of principal behaviors on student achievement and found both direct and indirect effects. Robinson was able to identify five dimensions of leadership within the examined studies, which were broken down into general principal behaviors/responsibilities. Only one of the behaviors/responsibilities (planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum) can be classified as directly affecting student achievement. Robinson found this principal behavior to have the second largest effect size (.42) of all the behavior/responsibility dimensions identified, second only to participating in teacher development (.84). The other behavioral/responsibility dimensions (establishing goals and expectations, strategic resourcing, teacher learning and development, and ensuring a safe and orderly environment) were classified as indirect behaviors of principals that influence student achievement. Robinson acknowledged the research only analyzed a relatively small number of studies (11) and attributed this to the complex relationship between leadership and student achievement and a lack of constructs by which to compare the two variables in a timely and systematic manner. Robinson also identified a lack of specificity in the behavioral/responsibility dimensions of leadership identified as most impactful. For example, the most impactful leadership dimension, participating in teacher development, is only an identified behavior in her study and did not have specific descriptions
showing what made that behavior effective, i.e., type of development or how the principal participated in the development.

**Indirect Principal Behaviors**

There are many examples of indirect principal behaviors that affect student achievement by impacting the efficacy of teachers. Goddard (2001) found that student achievement was positively and significantly correlated to staff efficacy. He asserted that staff efficacy was tied to principal self-efficacy based on his assumption that the principal significantly impacted the school environment for staff members. In a review of research Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) confirmed this connection when they traced the link between the effects of principal leadership behavior upon factors within schools, i.e., teacher professional development, school goals and culture, class size, and pedagogy. Their review revealed correlations between how and to what extent principals impact student achievement through the school conditions their actions create for staff members. They found the behaviors of principals to have significant impact on staff working conditions and efficacy which greatly impacted student achievement. One indirect behavior the researchers found impactful was productively planning and implementing school improvement courses of action. The researchers pointed to this behavior as providing opportunity to distribute leadership to teachers, which has been shown to increase teacher efficacy and effectiveness (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Principal behaviors also indirectly impact student achievement by affecting the implementation of large-scale reform aimed at improving student achievement (Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, & Fullan, 2004). The researchers found that when implementing a large-scale change, such as England's literacy and numeracy reform, it was the actions of school
leaders that were impactful on the success of such reforms. The researchers found that school leaders, when faced with implementing a reform, were tasked to set direction for the school, develop the capacities of the people in the organization, and redesign the organization so the reform could be accomplished. These three tasks would be classified by Szymendera (2013) as indirect ways school principals can support a large-scale reform aimed at improving student achievement. The behaviors of the principal are found as essential to the success or failure of such initiatives and their ensuing impact on student achievement.

Direct Principal Behaviors

While principals can influence many factors that indirectly impact the achievement of students, Gentilucci and Muto (2007) examined how principals directly affected student achievement by exploring the impact of principal behaviors through the lens of student perception. They found that students perceived certain principal behaviors, such as interaction with students and visiting classrooms, as conducive to a better learning environment. The researchers also found that tasks considered as more managerial in nature were considered non-conducive to improving student achievement, i.e., administering student discipline, making school announcements, and attending school events. However, the qualitative design of the study relied completely upon the subjective lens of student perceptions. Quantitative support for their findings would confirm if the identified behaviors significantly impacted achievement or perceptions of achievement.

Szymendera (2013) identified communication, order, and visibility as three direct principal behaviors with impact on student achievement. According to Marzano et al., (2005),
communication is comprised of being accessible, helping staff communicate with one another, and maintaining effective lines of communication with all staff.

Marzano et al., and Robinson (2007) defined order as establishing an environment that supports learning inside and outside the classroom and protects time for teachers and students alike. According to Marzano et al., (2005), “We defined order in our meta-analysis as the extent to which the leader establishes a set of standard operating principles and routines” (p. 57, emphasis in original).

The third direct behavior identified by Szymendera (2013) as having impact on student achievement, visibility, is similar to the behaviors identified by Gentilucci and Muto (2007). This principal behavior is comprised of visiting classrooms, talking with students and teachers and being highly visible to stakeholders to interact around substantive matters. According to Marzano et al., (2005), a principal exemplifies visibility when “she attends school football, basketball, and baseball games as frequently as possible. This responsibility is also demonstrated when the principal makes daily visits to classrooms simply to ask teachers and students how things are going” (p. 61).

Environmental Influences and Principal Self-Efficacy

When considering the role of the principal and the effects of self-efficacy upon principals, it is important to consider what is already known. The previous sections discussed how self-efficacy impacts the level of perseverance a principal will demonstrate (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011), the type of leadership style a principal may utilize, and the behaviors associated with those leadership styles (Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lyons & Murphy, 1994; Marks & Printy, 2003). This review has also examined research revealing the
statistical correlations between principal behaviors and student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). It is important to also review what is known regarding the environmental influences of principal self-efficacy. The following section offers a review of research focusing on what has already been uncovered regarding the impact of environmental influences on principal self-efficacy. These environmental influences include the accountability era, school characteristics, personal characteristics, and district leadership and conditions. This section also offers a definition of the term “mechanism” as it will be used when answering Research Question 2.

Accountability Era

The impact of the accountability demands, particularly the mandates of NCLB, on principal self-efficacy have garnered research in the past decade. In 2011 and 2013, Diane Ravitch claimed the principal had become the bearer of accountability for the failure of a school, thanks in large part to the era of accountability. One attempt to measure the impact of the accountability era on principal self-efficacy was undertaken by McCullers and Bozeman (2010). The researchers found that nearly 80% of 112 surveyed principals in Florida felt it was impossible to attain the goals of NCLB. The researchers found a .254 Pearson r correlation between belief in achieving the standards of NCLB and efficacy toward achieving gains in student achievement. Their findings suggest the context of the accountability era negatively impacted the efficacy principals experience toward improving student achievement.

Previous to McCullers and Bozeman’s (2010) research, Santamaria (2008) and Lovell (2009) both undertook studies concerning principal self-efficacy in the accountability era. Lovell conducted a quantitative analysis of numerous factors and how they were related to the self-efficacy of principals in the state of Georgia. He found a significant correlation between
school status toward Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under NCLB mandates and principal self-efficacy toward instructional leadership. His research found principals of schools that were identified as underperforming, according to NCLB mandates, experienced lower self-efficacy than their counterparts in schools which were making AYP.

Santamaria (2008) found results similar to Lovell when conducting his quantitative examination of low-achieving schools in California. His research also found a significant positive correlation between low student achievement under NCLB and low principal self-efficacy. Santamaria’s research showed that schools falling under the bar of AYP in California had principals who felt less self-efficacious toward improving student achievement and school mastery than principals in schools who were meeting the mandates of NCLB.

All three of the quantitative studies discussed above (Lovell, 2009; McCullers & Bozeman, 2010; Santamaria, 2008) were limited by responder bias, response rate, and a lack of generalizability outside of their respective states. Additionally, the findings of all three studies cannot be construed as causational in any manner. It is not possible to determine if the context of the accountability era caused low self-efficacy among the principals in all three studies, if their low self-efficacy caused the schools to have lower student achievement. Or if other unidentified factors were at play.

**School and Personal Characteristics**

Many of the quantitative studies reviewed so far (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Lovell, 2009; McCullers & Bozeman, 2010; Santamaria, 2008; Szymendera, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004) include examinations of the relationship between various demographic characteristics of schools, principals, and self-efficacy. There are very few consistent patterns
regarding the demographic characteristics of principals or schools that reveal significant relationships to principal self-efficacy.

While Lyons and Murphy (1994) found a negative correlation between years of service and lower self-efficacy, Lovell (2009) and Santamaria (2008) both found opposite correlations between years of service and principal self-efficacy toward school management and instructional leadership in their respective samples. The disparity between findings may be explained by the 15-and 14-year gaps between Lyons and Murphy’s (1994) study and the work of Lovell (2009) and Santamaria (2008) respectively. No study covered in this review found a significant relationship between gender or ethnicity and principal self-efficacy. This is demonstrated in Tschannen-Moran and Gareis’s (2007) survey of 558 principals that found no significant relationship between any demographic characteristics of principals and their self-efficacy.

When examining school characteristics, Smith, Guarino, Strom, and Adams (2006) posited that principals of schools with high numbers of low-income students would feel less self-efficacy than principals of schools with fewer students identified as low income. Their findings contradicted their original conjecture when they found a significant positive correlation between the ratio of low-income students and principal self-efficacy. Lovell (2009) found similar results that led the researcher to assert that the challenge of educating low-income students may ignite efficacy within school leaders. While demographic factors of both schools and the individual leaders may play a role in principal self-efficacy on an individual basis, existing research does not reveal a significant and generalizable relationship between any demographic elements and self-efficacy of principals.
District Leadership and District Conditions

In their review of research, Leithwood, Seashore et al., (2004) found evidence indicating district-level conditions had an impact on the self-efficacy principals experience. In a follow up study, Leithwood et al., (2007) conducted a qualitative investigation of the impact district factors and district level leadership played upon principal self-efficacy. They found evidence that indicated a negative relationship between unions focused upon teacher working conditions and principal self-efficacy. They also found that ineffective personnel policies and the failure to acknowledge the academic gains of schools were associated with decreased self-efficacy of principals. District conditions associated with higher principal self-efficacy included providing financial and human resources when and where needed, as well as the communication of high expectations to school leaders.

In a large-scale study, Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) attempted to connect the links between district conditions and principal self-efficacy, principal self-efficacy and school conditions, as well as principal self-efficacy and student achievement and whether any of these factors were influenced by organizational characteristics. While not all of the connections were found to be statistically significant, the researchers did uncover a connection between district leadership and principal self-efficacy (.32) and principal self-efficacy and school conditions (.38), which in turn were found to significantly affect student achievement. When their entire study is viewed from a wider perspective, principal self-efficacy is seen as a mediating factor between district leadership and conditions and student achievement.

Azah (2014) continued on the thread of examining how district factors affect principal self-efficacy and sense making. Azah examined how districts could improve principal
instructional leadership through increasing self-efficacy. Specifically, Azah found that involvement in district-level decision making, high levels of trust with district leadership, and high levels of autonomy were important antecedents to high levels of principal self-efficacy.

**Mechanism**

When answering Research Question 2 of this research study it is important to define the term “mechanism.” For the purposes of this study, a mechanism is defined as the linking relationship between two related variables, i.e., an input and an output as illustrated by Bunge’s (1997) black box model as illustrated in Figure 4.

![Figure 3: Representation of Bunge’s black box mechanism (1997).](image)

Bunge (1997) uses the example of poverty being correlated to unemployment to further illuminate the definition of a mechanism. In Bunge’s search for causational links between unemployment and poverty, he demonstrates that the correlation between poverty and unemployment is due to the causational mechanism of malnourishment. In his example, poverty causes malnourishment and malnourishment causes a lack of productivity resulting in unemployment. This example can be illustrated when considered in the context of Bunge’s black box mechanism model. Figure 5 provides a visual representation of malnourishment as a mechanism linking an input (poverty) with an output (unemployment).
Enduring Questions

Despite what is already known about principal self-efficacy, extant research identifies three vital areas in need of further exploration: effects of professional development on principal self-efficacy, complex interactions affecting principal self-efficacy, and the role district-level leadership plays on principal self-efficacy.

Professional Development

Research has identified very few specific professional development experiences or strategies that enhance principal self-efficacy. Grissom and Harrington (2010) found that principal professional development workshops, university coursework, and professional mentoring/networking had insignificant (and perhaps negative) impacts on principal self-efficacy. A lack of significant findings led the researchers to recommend that principal professional development providers design opportunities that enhance principal self-efficacy. However, their research was unable to offer specific examples. Leithwood, Strauss, and Anderson (2007) found no specific data regarding the type of professional development experiences that might enhance principal self-efficacy in their qualitative research. Leithwood et al., (2007) and Lovell (2009) recommend future researchers identify professional development experiences that increase principal self-efficacy. The researchers assert a need to create the types of experiences identified by Bandura (1997) as impactful to self-efficacy (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional/physiological state). McCullers and

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Figure 4: Representation of malnourishment as a linking mechanism between poverty and unemployment.
Bozeman (2010) speculate that mastery experiences would be the most effective type of professional development to increase principal self-efficacy; however, they too recommend future research to identify what form mastery experiences might take for principals to gain efficacy toward their role. Azah’s (2014) mixed-methods study focused on the effects of school district leaders on principal self-efficacy and sense making and found that professional development around data interpretation could help improve principal competence and thus efficacy, but that more research was warranted.

**Possible Complex Interactions**

Extant research in principal self-efficacy has found conflicting results regarding the relationships between principal self-efficacy and school or personal characteristics such as age, years of experience, school level, and student body demographics (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Lovell, 2009; Lyons & Murphy, 1994; Santamaria, 2008; Szymendera, 2013). Conflicting correlations regarding years of service and principal self-efficacy were uncovered by Lyons and Murphy (1994) when compared to Lovell (2009) and Santamaria (2008). Lovell found significant positive correlations between years of service and principal self-efficacy for moral leadership (β=.15), instructional leadership (β=.16), as well as management (β=.10). Lyons and Murphy found a negative correlation of -.543 in their study when comparing experience and principal self-efficacy.

Another area of conflicting extant research is in the effect of low-income student populations on principal self-efficacy. Lovell (2009) and McCullers and Bozeman (2010) found the ratio of low-income students in a school to have no significant impact on principal self-efficacy. However, Smith, Guarino, Strom, and Adams (2006) found a positive correlation
(β=.320, p<.001) between principal self-efficacy and higher ratios of low-income student populations.

As a result of such conflicts, two recent studies in principal self-efficacy by McCullers and Bozeman (2010) and Szymendera (2013) assert that unidentified complex interactions may be at play and warrant more scrutiny. Smith, Guarino, Strom, and Adams (2006) and Santamaria (2008) as well as Szymendera, recommend qualitative approaches to principal self-efficacy research in the future to uncover possible unexplained factors that quantitative studies may not be designed to capture. Szymendera specifically notes that quantitative survey questions are not designed to explore complex interactions. Azah (2014) acknowledged the possibility of complex interactions at play regarding principal self-efficacy and also recommends other qualitative investigation measures as well.

**Role of School District Leadership**

The relationship between school district leadership and the self-efficacy of principals remains unclear. Two contributions both focusing on the impact of district leadership were conducted by Leithwood et al... (2007) and Azah (2014). Leithwood et al., found that districts that provide appropriate and meaningful professional development to school leaders stand the best chance to increase principal self-efficacy. However, their work lacked specificity regarding the type and design of efficacy-enhancing professional development. The researchers assert the likelihood of complex interactions between district leadership conditions and principal self-efficacy but also found their research design limited the scope of study because it was not originally designed to examine principal self-efficacy. In a follow-up study, Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found district leadership could indirectly influence principal self-efficacy by
creating an environment conducive to self-efficacy. They recommend future research into more 

specific district leadership behaviors that elicit self-efficacy in principals.

Azah’s (2014) mixed-methods study identified similar district leadership actions taken 

across multiple high-performing districts. Azah found that principals cited direction setting and 

using evidence as the two most impactful things a district could do to increase principal efficacy, 

with mean scores of 3.28 and 3.30 out of a possible 4.0 respectively (Azah, 2014, p. 321). 

However, the researcher did not determine if certain district actions were in any way causal to 

increased self-efficacy. Azah’s work concludes that the dynamic between school district leaders 

and principal self-efficacy warrants more investigation.

Conclusion

The research examined within this review highlights the current findings around principal 

self-efficacy. Extant research in this field has found valid and reliable means to measure 

principal self-efficacy and as a result have uncovered the links between principal self-efficacy, 

principal behaviors, and student achievement through various avenues. Additionally, research 

has revealed the relationship between various environmental influences and the reported self- 

efficacy of principals. However, as Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) wrote, “Formal inquiry about 

leader efficacy is in its infancy” (p. 498). While this research field has yielded numerous 

correlational relationships, it has not yielded deeper understandings of the intersecting elements 

found in Bandura’s (1995) model of triadic reciprocal causation within the principal, specifically 

how and why environmental influences impact self-efficacy. The work of Azah (2014) and 

Leithwood et al., (2007) represent the initial journeys into qualitative explorations of principal 

self-efficacy. However, these explorations have been focused on the conditions created at the
district level and place principals as mediators between conditions external to them and their resulting impact on student achievement. The holes in extant research are the reason why the current study examines what environmental influences impact principal self-efficacy and why.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Methods are merely tools. However, some tools are more useful than others. (Charmaz, 2014, p. 26, emphasis in original)

The purpose of this study was to explore the environmental influences principals identified as impactful to their self-efficacy to improve student achievement. This study employed a qualitative design and utilized a grounded theory approach to address the following research questions:

1. What environmental influences do principals identify as impactful to their self-efficacy to perform both direct and indirect behaviors to improve student achievement?

2. How do principals describe the mechanisms through which environmental influences impact their self-efficacy to improve student achievement?

This chapter includes the following sections: research design, participants, data collection, data, data integrity processes, and limitations of the study.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to discover the essence of individual experiences of principals in regards to self-efficacy (Creswell, 2003). Bandura (1997) contends that humans interpret their surroundings and social constraints in a complex manner that
contributes to their actions. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research seeks to understand “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). Qualitative research provides an opportunity to study the complex interactions between humans and their environment that impact behavior.

The majority of existing data regarding principal self-efficacy is quantitative in nature and does not provide rich and deep insight into the complexities of how principals build self-efficacy (Azah, 2014; Szymendera, 2013). This study examined the interactions of environmental influences, principal self-efficacy, and principal behaviors. This study employed a grounded theory approach to “depict the complexity, variation, and nature of the relationships between the variables in the study” (Mertens, 2015, p. 249). Simply put, grounded theory research consists of flexible guidelines for gathering and analyzing data in qualitative studies by repeatedly comparing data with and among emerging ideas and theories about the data. The end goal of grounded theory research is to construct an explanatory theory or theories “grounded” in the data itself (Charmaz, 2014). While grounded theory research involves constantly comparing and contrasting data, it also requires the occasional application of overarching theorems to the data to test for fit and relevance. The current study employed grounded theory methods, specifically constant comparative analysis, to explore the data by comparing gathered data to previous and subsequent data sets throughout the research study.

The theoretical framework used in this study, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), centers on the complexities of human behavior and the interaction of many simultaneous factors and thought processes within humans. A qualitative approach was used to establish a clearer understanding of the complexities of self-efficacy within the framework of social cognitive theory (Szymendera, 2013). This methodology was used to contribute to the existing field of
research by uncovering theories not yet considered in regards to principals and self-efficacy and to help explain some of the inconsistencies found in extant research (Lovell, 2009; Santamaria, 2008; Szymendera, 2013).

Participants

Participants for this study were chosen using stratified purposeful sampling, which Mertens (2015) describes as identifying members of a subgroup, dividing the subgroup into strata and then choosing participants from each stratum. Participants were principals from Illinois public schools who met the following criteria:

- 7.5% student achievement growth from 2012 to 2013 based on Illinois standardized test results, or
- 15% student achievement growth from 2011 to 2013 based on Illinois standardized test results.
- Participants also attained a score of 6.0 or higher out of a possible 9.0 scale on the Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale (PSES) as constructed and scored by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004).
- Participants were principals in their schools during the period in which qualifying student achievement growth occurred.

School principals meeting the above criteria were identified through the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC), which tracks student achievement data for recognition. Principals of schools meeting the above criteria were recognized by the IIRC as Academic Improvement Award winners in 2013. Principals of these schools were selected because schools experiencing improved student achievement had a higher likelihood of being led by information-
rich participants who provide insight regarding the research questions (Mertens, 2015; Patton, 2001; Szymendera, 2013). Additionally, schools led by principals with high self-efficacy scores (PSES) toward improving student achievement provided confirmation that participants were indeed efficacious and could provide insight toward the research questions.

According to IIRC (2015), there were 125 school principals that met the four criteria listed above. Principals of the 125 Illinois schools meeting the above criteria were identified through school contact information available from iirc.niu.edu and were contacted by email with a brief description of the study and why they met the criteria to participate in the study. Principals were prompted to complete an electronic survey through a link to a Google Form that gauged their interest, age, gender, ethnicity, and dates of employment as principal. The same survey also included the PSES (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Scores from this portion of the survey were used to determine if principals met all criteria for study participation (See Appendix A). Due to principal turnover between 2013 and the current research study, as well as non-responsiveness to the survey, a sufficient number of participants was not identified in the initial emailing. A follow-up email was resent once a week for three consecutive weeks until a sufficient number of participants was identified.

Participants were selected based on their interest in the study, qualifying score on the PSES, and agreement to participate in all phases of the study. The researcher identified six total participants: one elementary school principal, one principal of a K-8 grade school, and four high school principals for a total of six participants. It should be noted that of the six participants only one is an elementary school principal because only eight of the possible 125 original participants completed the interest survey and PSES. The other two principals who completed the survey
were excluded from the research study due to their unwillingness to participate in interviews.

Table 3 illustrates the sampling method employed to identify participants.

Table 3
Stratified Purposeful Sampling for Participant Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1: Population</th>
<th>3,794 Illinois Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2: Academic Achievement Status</td>
<td>125 Illinois Principals from Schools Recognized for Increased Student Achievement (2011-2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3: Stratified Criteria of School Level</td>
<td>36 High School Principals, 5 Middle School Principals, 84 Elementary School Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4: Composite PSES Score of 6.0 or Higher</td>
<td>4 participants, *1 participant, 1 participant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The participant designated as a “middle school” principal was principal of a school with both elementary and middle school grade levels.

By focusing on schools and principals where increases in student achievement and high PSES scores for principals already existed, this study was able to address Lovell’s (2009) recommendation for future research to move away from demographic investigations of self-efficacy and focus on cases with pre-existing trends.

Data Collection

The qualitative description allows the reader to envision and experience what he or she has not experienced directly. (Eisner, 2002, p. 235)

Data for this study were collected in two phases: participant interviews and participant journal responses. Information from both phases of data collection were used to inform and help shape the design of subsequent phases of data collection (Charmaz, 2014). Table 4 depicts the
alignment of the research questions in the study to the data collection methods as well as the
timeline for data collection.

Table 4
Research Questions and Data Collection Alignment with Time Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What environmental influences do principals identify as impactful to their self-efficacy to perform both direct and indirect behaviors to improve student achievement?</td>
<td>Participant interviews provided an opportunity for principals to provide input on their own internal feelings and descriptions relating to environmental influences on self-efficacy.</td>
<td>Participants provided validation regarding answers given during interviews about environmental influences impactful to their self-efficacy to perform direct and indirect behaviors to increase student achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do principals describe the mechanisms through which environmental influences impact their self-efficacy to improve student achievement?</td>
<td>The researcher relied on probing questions during the interview phase of data collection to elicit data from the principals regarding internal thought processes.</td>
<td>Journal responses allowed the participants another opportunity to describe environmental influences. However, the absence of the researcher’s presence may have allowed for non-self-serving responses or confirmation of previous responses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 1: Interviews

The first phase of data collection consisted of participant interviews. Participant interviews allowed for directed, yet flexible inquiry of participants (Charmaz, 2014). The notes and analysis of each interview informed the direction of subsequent interviews. Interviews provided the opportunity for the unique interpretations of the participant, in this case principals, that might otherwise have been inaccessible to a researcher (Stake, 2010). Interviews comprise a
central data collection method of most qualitative research and have the advantage of taking many forms (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2011). Because the study used constant comparative analysis to generate and test theories, interviewing provided a flexible method to confirm or challenge emerging theories throughout the study (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2011).

The challenges of conducting interviews are numerous. Designing a valid interview structure and questions that elicited information rich responses are two challenges outlined by Merriam (2009). Interviews represent information interpreted by the participant. As such, the data gathered are subject to participant bias due to anger, anxiety, self-serving responses, recall error and the nature of the interactions between the interviewer and interviewee (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2001). Another concern for conducting interviews is the difficulty in conducting good interviews. Interviews require not only a strong design but strong execution as well. An interviewer must be observant, impartial, attentive, and a good listener. All of these traits must be combined with asking the right questions and in many instances constructing the right probing questions at the right moment (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam, 2009).

Despite any drawbacks, interviews remain a central component of qualitative research because “interviews…permit the observer to go beyond external behavior to explore feelings and thoughts” (Patton, 2001, p. 306). Conducting high-quality interviews is challenged by the prospect of poor question design and execution by the researcher. I attempted to overcome this challenge by conducting pilot interviews prior to interviewing the principals. Additionally, I used the second phase of data collection, principal journals, to verify or refute data that may have been subject to participant distortion by asking follow-up and probing questions not asked during interviews (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2001; Stake, 2010). The peers used to pilot the interviews were sitting principals and engaged in the same interview process as the study
participants and provided input on the interview structure and how to refine the experience prior to participant interviews.

The interviews in this study were modeled after what Charmaz (2014) terms “intensive interviews” (p. 85). These interviews allowed for open discourse between each principal and me and were flexible enough for the researcher to “pursue ideas and issues immediately that emerge during the interview” (p. 85). While Charmaz advocates open-ended time limits on intensive interview, for the purpose of practicality, interviews in this study were limited to 60 minutes.

I used an interview protocol and guide designed to elicit data regarding the two research questions (Appendix B). I used probing questions to explore the extent to which principals believed they contributed to improved student achievement and to identify what impacted their self-efficacy to make such contributions. I used follow-up questioning to identify what environmental influences contributed to their self-efficacy for any identified contributions. Examples of follow up and probing questions are listed below:

- When asked about important contributions principals made to the student achievement in their schools, probing questions included:
  - Who and/or what helped you make that contribution?
  - What was difficult about making that contribution?
  - Did anything hinder you from making that contribution?
  - How did it make you feel to know you made that contribution?

The interview phase of the study allowed for inquiry into sources of self-efficacy and exploration of the second research question, which dealt with how principals described the environmental influences they identified as impactful to their self-efficacy. The interview phase
of data collection was used to inform the prompts for principal journaling that comprised the final phase of data collection.

I audio recorded all interviews using an iPhone voice record application and took observational notes during the interviews. The notes were time stamped to later incorporate my observation notes into the transcribed interview record. The combination of the notes and transcribed recordings are addressed in the data section of this chapter.

**Phase 2: Principal Journaling**

Principal journal entries comprised the final phase of data collection in this research study. Many grounded theory studies employ only interviews. This study complemented the data gathered from interviews with written principal responses (Charmaz, 2014). Participants all received the same three journaling prompts after the interview phase of data collection at regular one-week intervals. The journal prompts were sent electronically with responses returned through a Google Survey. Each journal prompt directed the participant to respond in writing for approximately three to five minutes. All journal responses were downloaded to a Microsoft Excel file for storage and future coding. The texts of each journal prompt are listed in Table 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt #</th>
<th>Question Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal Prompt # 1</td>
<td>What data do you most use to inform you about the growth of student achievement in your district? How does this data inform your actions? What data do you wish you had access to that would better inform you about how to improve student achievement in your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Prompt # 2</td>
<td>As principal, what evidence best informs you whether or not student achievement is improving? In what ways do you use this evidence to change how you act as principal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Prompt # 3</td>
<td>As principal, how have your immediate supervisors (superintendent, assistant superintendent or other district office personnel) shown that they trust you to perform your job? (If you are able to list specific experiences, situations or interactions that evidenced trust from your supervisor(s) please feel free to do so). Please recount one experience in the past year in which you knew you had the trust of your supervisor and how that trust influenced your actions. (This could be how you approached a contentious parent, addressed a personnel issue or other difficult matter)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Journal prompts provided an opportunity for the researcher to make up for questions not asked or poorly phrased during the interview process. Journal entries are subject to some of the same pitfalls as interviews: recall error, anger, and personal bias. However, journal responses offer an opportunity to overcome another drawback of interviewing which is interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2001). Interviews are an intimate
dialogue, which are greatly influenced by the interactions between participant and researcher. Participant journal responses allowed for a type of discourse between participant and researcher that may have elicited responses or analyses from the participants that the researcher’s presence inhibited during the interview phase of data collection (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

Objectivity is a function of intersubjective agreement among a community of believers. (Eisner, 2002, p. 237)

This section of the chapter provides an overview of the data recording, transcription, coding, and constant comparative analysis used in the current study.

Data Recording and Transcription

All interviews were audio recorded using an iPhone voice record application and transcribed by the researcher. The transcribed interviews and researcher’s notes taken during the interviews were combined into a Microsoft Word document. All principal journal entries by participants were gathered by electronic communication (Google Forms) and downloaded as a Microsoft Excel file. All gathered data were combined into one stored file folder and kept password protected to ensure participant confidentiality (Yin, 2011).

Coding

Qualitative researchers present various ways to conduct grounded theory data coding (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2011). Yin (2011) advocates for a three-step approach that uses open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Charmaz (2014) describes a more ambiguous process
consisting of open coding followed by focused coding. In Charmaz’s design, the researcher, using his/her knowledge of the study and then determines if a third phase, theoretical coding, is warranted. This study employed Charmaz’s more contemporary approach to grounded theory data coding because it strives for objectivity while acknowledging the presence of researcher interpretation and biases. Charmaz’s constructivist approach allowed me freedom to at times apply the theoretical framework of this study, social cognitive theory, to the collected data. I did not artificially impose the construct of social cognitive theory on the data, but at times I explored whether social cognitive theory offered an encompassing explanation of the data or supported a theme that confirmed or refuted emerging theories. Additionally, Charmaz’s approach to grounded theory research views the components of grounded theory as guidelines and not rigid rules. This flexible framework offered a practical and autonomous approach for me to utilize in the current research study.

**Open Coding**

All data were explored and reviewed immediately after transcription to search for quotes or other connective themes in the data (Mertens, 2015). Data was then coded using open-coding methods. Open coding refers to categorizing data into groups or themes based on similarities and assigning those themes codes (Charmaz, 2014). More specifically, I employed In Vivo coding that captured direct quotes and literal meanings from the words of the participants to identify recurring codes in the data. In Vivo coding is recommended for grounded theory research because it honors the voice of the participants (Saldana, 2009). I gathered and highlighted the direct quotes that formed codes when transcribing the data. The researcher concluded the open coding phase of analysis when all recurring codes had been identified and
coded. These codes were compared to one another after and during each subsequent phase of data collection to either create new codes or add dimensions or evidence within existing codes (Charmaz, 2014).

**Focused Coding**

After the data were coded using open-coding methods described above, I used focused coding. Focused coding compared the themes from the open coding phase to find relations to larger, organizing theorems or paradigms in the data (Charmaz, 2014; Mertens, 2015). The goal of focused coding was to determine the open codes with the most “analytical power” to determine which codes could be combined to form categories that encompassed multiple themes from the open coding process (Charmaz, 2014, p. 140). I conducted the focused coding phase by gathering all the In Vivo codes from the first phase of data analysis and organizing the codes into related categories. I then explored what was implied from the categories as well as what the interactions between the categories conveyed about the data (Charmaz, 2014; Saldana, 2009). The resulting information was used to form theories surrounding the research questions and formulate three major themes and eight total subthemes from the data.

**Theoretical Coding**

Theoretical coding is a higher level order of coding that seeks to develop encompassing explanatory theories of the gathered data. When applied judiciously, theoretical coding can help bring coherent theories or frameworks to a field of data. However, when used overzealously, theoretical coding can make a study “opaque and impenetrable” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 150). Many researchers make the mistake of using a preconceived paradigm that does not explain all of the
data gathered when searching for theoretical codes. As acknowledged earlier, social cognitive theory was applied to determine if it serves as a theoretical code. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of social cognitive theory in relation to this research study.

**Constant Comparative Analysis**

One of the pillars of grounded theory research is the use of constant comparative analysis methods to find emerging themes in the data and to drive subsequent data collection activities (Charmaz, 2014; Mertens, 2015). After both phases of data collection, data was coded using open and focused coding strategies (described in detail earlier in this section). Data codes were then compared to one another and analyzed to identify possible emerging or divergent themes in the data to help drive the direction of subsequent data collection activities.

The researcher used the data to compare codes, code categories, and emerging concepts or theories about the data. This process was conducted by memo writing during data collection and coding phases of this research study (Saldana, 2009). Charmaz (2014) describes memo writing as an opportunity to “become actively engaged in your materials, to develop your ideas, to fine-tune your subsequent data gathering, and to engage in critical reflexivity” (pp. 162-163). Memo writing provided me the opportunity to reflect on any preconceived notions brought to the current study. The function of memo writing is critical in grounded theory studies and allowed me to use constant comparative analysis during the entire research process and provided a guide for analyzing and tracking the emergence of theories throughout the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher analyzed collected data by documenting reflections and thoughts on what data was indicating and then gathered subsequent data against which previous data was compared. Memo writing allowed me to view the chronological development of thoughts around
the data sets and analyze the methodologies, events, and directions of the entire research process. This deep and comparative form of analysis allowed me to drill down into the implicit meanings being expressed by principals. Memo writing allowed me to analyze multiple data points over an extended period of time and to form and refine theories that address the research questions (Charmaz, 2014).

Data Integrity Processes

The integrity of the qualitative data collection, coding, and analysis in this study was verified by two strategies: member checks and peer debriefing (Mertens, 2015).

Member Checks and Educational Peer Debriefing

All interview transcripts were shared with the participants prior to coding. Allowing participants to verify their own interview answers increased the data validity (Yin, 2011). Educational peers were used to review all phases of data coding and provide feedback on the data gathered, the analyses of the data, and the conclusions drawn by the researcher (Mertens, 2015). This step in the research involved two current educational colleagues who did not participate in the study but were able to critique the analysis of the researcher. The peers were encouraged to provide probing and critical questions of the research.

Limitations

This study was limited by several factors common to qualitative studies. These limitations included a lack of generalizability, participant pool limitations, researcher bias, and a lack of truthfulness by participants. Charmaz (2014) highlights the likelihood of some
untruthfulness from participants, particularly during interviews. Charmaz indicates participants don’t tell malicious lies as much as create alternative versions of themselves or an event to maintain a connection with an ideal representation of himself or herself or the past. While it is impossible to generalize the results of this study to a larger population due to the sample size of six participants, it should be noted that generalizability was not a goal of the current study. I place the burden of deciding if the results of this study apply on the readers themselves. It is the reader’s responsibility to determine if this study is transferable (Eisner, 2002; Merriam, 2009). It should also be noted that the pool of six participants only included one principal from an elementary school level. This lack of school-level diversity among the participants furthers the challenge of transferability. To aid the reader in determining transferability I used thick and rich text to provide as much context as possible to allow readers to make informed decisions regarding transferability (Creswell, 2003).

As disclosed during the section on data analysis I brought some pre-conceived theories of explanation to the research questions. One example is Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1997), which served as the theoretical framework for this study. I relied upon educational peers to help determine if the application of pre-conceived theories was appropriate or ill-suited to the emerging data (Mertens, 2015).

Conclusion

This qualitative study employed a grounded theory approach to explore the identified research questions. The data were gathered through interviews and principal journaling. All data collection was driven by the results of previous data and emerging theories. Data were coded using open coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding and analyzed by comparing the
codes through memo writing. The study employed member checks and peer debriefing to support the validity of the data. The results of the data collection and analysis will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the participants involved in this research study, a summary of the coded and themed data, and the findings of the study presented in three major themes and relevance to Research Questions 1 and 2. This chapter is organized into four major sections: participants, major themes and subthemes relevant to research questions, Research Question 2, and a conclusion. The data for this study were gathered from participant interviews and journal prompts, transcribed and coded by the researcher, and verified by two peer reviewers. The six participants for this study were selected using purposeful sampling and were identified for their recognition by the Illinois Interactive Report Card as principals of schools that showed improved student achievement on standardized tests for the 2011-13 school years. The participants varied in age, school level and gender as shown in Table 6. All names have been changed to pseudonyms.

All participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in all phases of the study and their average score of 6.0 or higher on a 9.0 scale of the Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The next section provides detailed descriptions of each participant, their backgrounds, and the schools in which they serve.
Table 6

Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>School Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Sandy Paul</td>
<td>Neil Armstrong Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary K-4</td>
<td>3/5/2016</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Charles Pete</td>
<td>Nearway Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary K-8</td>
<td>3/10/2016</td>
<td>African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Paul Max</td>
<td>East Moore High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>3/28/2016</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Joy Williams</td>
<td>Valley High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>3/15/2016</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Jackie Moss</td>
<td>Coneville High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>3/25/2016</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>John Brownstone</td>
<td>Water Springs High School</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>4/20/2016</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

Sandy Paul

Sandy was a 55-year-old woman with short blonde hair, glasses, and an easy smile. She used long pauses and was reserved during the initial minutes of the interview. However, when talking about Neil Armstrong Elementary -- especially the staff with whom she worked--her body language became animated, her tone relaxed and her voice rose and fell with great inflection. She often assumed the persona of her teachers when retelling stories or situations she had experienced with them, and her excitement about past successes and future projects was apparent as well as her regard for the school and children. She did not have an assistant principal
in her school, and in her words, “it’s just me, and I could not make it work if I didn't have the
team of teachers that I have” (Interview, March 5, 2016).

Sandy has been the principal of Neil Armstrong Elementary School for 11 years. She
completed her undergraduate work at a midwestern university and taught special education
students for nine years before teaching in Tokyo for six years. Upon her return to the United
States she completed a Masters of Educational Administration degree from a different
midwestern university and worked as an early childhood special education coordinator for an
educational co-op. After two years in that position, she came to her current district and four
years later became the principal of Neil Armstrong Elementary.

The school is located approximately 70 miles south of a major city and has approximately
500 students in grades K-4. Fifty-five percent of the students are low income, and 25% are
Hispanic or African American, with the majority of the student body (72%) Caucasian. Of the
35 staff members, 57% of them have a master’s degree or higher, and on average 88% of the
teachers remain at the school from one year to the next (iirc.niu.edu).

**Paul Max**

Paul was 32 years old with short dark hair, a broad grin, and a strong presence on social
media, particularly Twitter. He was precise with his words, and his responses to questions were
often complex, yet rapid, and offered great insight into his thinking and the unique context of his
position. He spoke quickly but deeply and sought understanding to questions prior to answering.
His answers were to the point and did not take many bends or tangents. He was direct, serious,
and focused. He spoke of nothing other than his work and did not make references to anything
ancillary to his school, staff, or students. He was quick to laugh but quickly returned to the topic
at hand and used a very stoic and serious tone when discussing his profession and the challenges of urban education. His reverence for his staff was obvious from the words he used when discussing them. When asked why his school experienced success in student achievement, Paul credited the culture of the school for its success. “Every single team works to make themselves better every single year, so I think because of that, because of that culture (the school improved)” (Interview, March 28, 2016). While he valued his staff highly, he was every bit as respectful when discussing the systems and processes he believed in as well.

Paul earned a bachelor’s degree in biology from a large city-based university and joined Teach for America after college, where he served in an urban school. While working with Teach for America he earned a master’s degree in education with a concentration in science. He then left education to earn an MBA and work as a product line manager. After a year away from teaching he returned to the classroom in another impoverished urban community. His experiences in that community inspired him to earn a degree in educational administration. His program in educational administration brought him to East Moore High School as a resident principal for two years, assistant principal for one year, and now as principal for the past two years.

East Moore High School is located in the heart of a large midwestern city and serves approximately 1,000 urban students in grades 9-12. While not considered a magnet or charter school, East Moore’s student body is comprised of approximately 50% of students from the surrounding neighborhood and 50% from all around the City of Chicago. The student body is 84% low income, approximately 90% of whom are Hispanic or African American and 10% Caucasian or Asian. The student body has been recognized as high achieving, with test scores
that exceed both the district and state averages. Additionally, the school is highly rated by staff and students according to the state survey of school environment (iirc.niu.edu).

Charles Pete

Charles Pete, with his shaved head and goatee, did not look anywhere near his 54 years of age. His voice was deep, even toned, and calm. He paused frequently before answering questions. He verbally expressed his passion for the power of education to transform a community immediately and his answers varied from broad philosophical approaches to specific examples of students, teachers, and families. He spoke openly of his passion and love for educating students when discussing the transformative power of schools. He was energetic when discussing the quality of the staff he worked with, and he did not once utter a negative reference about students, parents, colleagues, staff, or superiors. His answers were often extensive and crossed from one area to another seamlessly as he wove together a tapestry he had constructed over his 30-year career.

Charles earned a bachelor’s degree in history from a southern university and after graduation entered an educational certification program at a midwestern university and then earned a Masters of Educational Administration degree from a similar midwestern university. He had taught at Nearway Elementary for 15 years before becoming assistant principal at Nearway. After a year in that role, he filled the role of assistant principal in other nearby schools before returning to Nearway two years later as principal. He became an administrator because, in his words, “I just really enjoyed having an impact on students who traditionally had not done well, who often times did not pursue a secondary education” (Interview, March 10, 2016).
When Charles came back to Nearway Elementary as principal, it was a low-performing (level 3, the lowest possible) neighborhood school in an urban neighborhood. The school served approximately 400 pre-K-8 grade students. The student body was virtually all low income and African American. During his first year at Nearway the school was designated as a turnaround school with a STEM focus. During Charles’s time as principal the school rose from a level 3 school to level 1 the highest possible, with over 70% of students completing algebra in eighth grade. While standardized test scores are still below the state average, the growth in scores during Charles’s time as principal earned recognition from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (iirc.niu.edu).

Joy Williams

Residing in a small rural community in southern Illinois, Joy Williams was a 60-year-old principal who started her career as an educator over 35 years ago. She has dark brown hair and a passion for her pets, which she used as a bridge with some co-workers (e.g., bringing her dog to school to win over a difficult staff member). She spoke in a very serious tone and used long pauses and careful words. She was blunt and straightforward and did not sugarcoat difficult situations, particularly when describing challenging staff members. Her transparency was evident when she invoked the words of her father: “You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear” (Interview, March 15, 2016). Her answers were concise and did not stray from the topic at hand, and she was respectful in her tone and words. Joy spoke with an even tone and used specific examples in her school when discussing the inequities of educational funding for rural schools in Illinois. She gave no indication of winding down her career until the very end of the interview when she briefly noted she had a little over one year remaining before retirement.
Joy began teaching in 1980 as a high school English teacher. Her bachelor’s and master’s degrees are from separate midwestern universities, and she has spent her entire career in small rural schools as either a teacher, assistant principal, or principal. Her husband’s work took the family to different parts of the state, and she moved jobs and positions when he did.

Joy’s school, Valley High School, is a small rural high school of approximately 500 students, virtually all of which are Caucasian and 50% designated as low income. Joy spoke of the lack of financial and structural supports available to the school because of limited state and local funds and the effects she feared for students. The school is over 100 years old with numerous safety concerns. Ironically, we spoke on the same day her community voted down a referendum to build a new high school that would have had adequate facilities for the students. The test scores of the student body had improved in recent years but still lagged slightly behind the state average. One of Joy’s concerns was not being able to afford administration of the ACT exam the following year as it would hamper her ability to track the longitudinal growth and improvement of the school as a whole.

Jackie Moss

Jackie Moss was a tall woman with dark brown hair and an ever-present smile. Her demeanor was relaxed and her tone calm. Despite the loud background noise of the coffee shop where we met, her voice was clear and easy to hear, yet never loud or raised. Her five children are all products of Coneville schools, as she and her husband are proud members of the community. Jackie did not speak about systems, numbers, or data but rather about people and the importance of investing in those around her and nurturing others in the workplace. Her focus was on the children in the school, and she described her work as a calling to give back to her
community. Her answers were often extended and tied to either an example or another critical aspect of the school. She was in no hurry with her answers and could talk in detail about specific plans and successes from years back. She was upfront about the challenges she faced.

She received a scholarship to a university in a rural part of the Midwest to be a special education teacher. She taught elementary school briefly in Michigan before returning to Illinois in the early 2000s, where she taught in three different high schools before coming to Coneville High 13 years ago. In 2000 she earned a Masters in Educational Administration degree from a private midwestern university and although she did not intend to use the degree, she quickly found herself in a leadership position. While at Coneville she had been a teacher, department chair, assistant principal, and principal.

Coneville High School is on the far outreaches of a large metropolitan area. It serves nine municipalities over a large geographic zone. The school simultaneously draws from attendance areas resembling suburban sprawl and unending farmland. Because of the remoteness of the high school, all of the students either drive or are bused to the campus because no students live within walking distance. With over 1,300 students Coneville was the largest school in this study with a student body composed of 20% low-income students, 14% Hispanic students, and approximately 80% Caucasian students. Over 80% of the students enrolled in some form of college immediately after graduation, and while the school had seen improvement in its standardized test scores since Jackie became principal, she was concerned with the lack of test data for high schools in Illinois. “In the future I hope we find value in our PARCC scores, and we look forward to receiving SAT scores and eventually those trends” (Journal Prompt #1, May 14, 206).
John Brownstone

In his matching tie and suspenders paired with an unbuttoned collar and rolled up shirt sleeves, John Brownstone was reminiscent of a trial lawyer preparing a closing argument. He sat at his desk in a high-backed chair, wearing round glasses. He had an easy-to-talk-to manner similar to a local politician. He was not a tall man, but he quickly filled the room with his facial expressions, hand gestures, words of wisdom, and laugh. He spoke about his dedication to Water Springs High School and how it was such a great fit for him and he for it. As he conveyed in one answer, “The time for John Brownstone was right” (Interview, April 20, 2016). His answers to questions were thoughtful and often laced with anecdotes, examples, or historical references as support. His focus was for the school and the community, and his confidence in his staff and their work was evident throughout his interview. He was eager to discuss his school and his engagement throughout the entire interview never wavered.

John earned a bachelor’s degree from a midwestern state university in political science and immediately entered law school. After seven years in law he returned to school and became a classroom teacher in a large urban city. He spent eight years in urban classrooms before becoming a suburban high school department chair for four years, followed by three years as an assistant principal of a junior high school. He had been the principal of Water Springs High School for seven years, and in his words, “I’m here as long as I can make a difference” (Interview, April 20, 2016).

Water Springs High School had an enrollment of 220 students. The student body was approximately 90% Caucasian, and 14% were classified as low income. The community was predominantly rural, and the school had a total of 20 staff members. John cited the small number
of students and staff as both a challenge and a strength. The student body was particularly high achieving, with PARCC scores nearly double the state average for 2015. John saw the scores as confirmation of the school’s focus but not as a point of pride or a source of bragging, as he knew how quickly landscapes could shift.

Major Themes and Subthemes Relevant to Research Questions

Despite the uniqueness and differences of all six principals, three major themes emerged as a result of the research study. These three themes and eight supporting subthemes, comprise the environmental influences participants found impactful to their self-efficacy to improve student achievement and directly address Research Question 1: What environmental influences do principals identify as impactful to their self-efficacy to perform both direct and indirect behaviors to improve student achievement? Each of the themes and subthemes emerged from the participants’ responses and identify environmental influences impactful to principal self-efficacy through the words of the participants. Each of the three themes contained separate subthemes as displayed in Table 7.

Appendix D contains representative examples of qualitative comments that substantiate the themes and subthemes. Findings will be presented by theme and subthemes.
Table 7
Themes and Subthemes Including Number of References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-themes &amp; Sample Quotation</th>
<th># of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Role of Personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 of 6 participants</td>
<td>A. <em>Having the Right People</em></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It took me years to get the right people in the right positions.” (Sandy, Interview, March 5, 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 of 6 participants</td>
<td>B. <em>Having the Buy-in of Staff</em></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think the other thing is you have to get the buy-in from your staff.” (Joy, Interview, March 20, 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 of 6 participants</td>
<td>C. <em>Overcoming a Personnel Challenge</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My initial hurdle in the district was getting over the fact that I was removing a very popular teacher for good reason.” (John, Interview, April 20, 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Supportive People</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 of 6 participants</td>
<td>A. <em>Superintendent Support and Autonomy</em></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My first day on the job he told me ‘it’s your building, run it.’” (Joy, Interview, March 20, 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 of 6 participants</td>
<td>B. <em>Non-Evaluative People to Turn To</em></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“She is able to give me really good coaching and good feedback and things to consider.” (Paul, Interview, March 28, 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 of 6 participants</td>
<td>C. <em>Support of Elected Officials</em></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We built connections with the alderman and we were able to secure a huge funding.” (Charles, Interview, March 10, 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Impact of Success</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 of 6 participants</td>
<td>A. <em>Establishing a Schoolwide Focus Through a System of Continuous Improvement that Garners Success</em></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Our school improvement efforts have been meaningful as opposed what some people will say are jumping through hoops.” (John, Interview, April 20, 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 of 6 participants</td>
<td>B. <em>Seeing Students Succeed</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I saw firsthand. I saw how changing instruction can be better suited to student outcomes and better student learning.” (Paul, Interview, March 28, 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1: Role of Personnel

With a total of 49 references across all six participants, the role of personnel was the most frequently cited theme in the research study. This theme consists of three separate sub themes: a) having the right people (27 references); b) having the buy-in of staff (15 references), and c) overcoming a personnel challenge (7 references), all of which were identified by participants as impactful to self-efficacy to improve student achievement.

Subtheme 1 A: Having the Right People

All six participants referred directly or indirectly to having the right people in their organization as being critical to improving student achievement. As John put it, “I spend an inordinate amount of time screening people [for open positions], thinking about who’s best for our community” and as a result of that time intensive screening process John was able to say “we hire great people” (Interview, April 20, 2016). John justified his heavy investment in the hiring process by depicting the negative impact of bad employees. “When you have 20 teachers on your staff, you can’t have one that’s dead weight. You can’t. It’s too much. It’s 5%” (Interview, April 20, 2016). The selection of the right people was a critical component of Charles’s success as well.

Twenty-four [hours per day] seven [days a week] I’m recruiting, and I’m always looking for top-notch talent. That inspires me. So when I can I’m working on another staff member joining our staff. As a matter of fact, I’m going to start the transfer process tonight. And I’m excited about that. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

Both John and Charles described a passion for the hiring and recruitment process because they saw the importance of hiring the right people into the organization. Other participants described the importance of placing the right people in the right positions.
Both Sandy and Paul described the importance of placing people in the right roles. Sandy talked passionately about finding the right spots for people when she stated, “We have lots of good teachers. They weren’t necessarily in the places they needed to be and then in looking at the teams they needed to be working on, so that was a piece of it” (Interview, March 5, 2016). When asked about the challenges of being able to do this, Sandy offered, “It took me years with my staff to get the right people in the right position” (Interview, March 5, 2016). Paul echoed Sandy’s sentiment about the right people in the right places. In his response to the question, “What was difficult about improving student achievement?” he offered, “If you don’t have the right people in the right places and you don’t know how to retain the right people in the right places and get the wrong people out, you know that’s critical” (Interview, March 28, 2016).

John also saw the same importance in proper employee placement when describing how he selected teachers for leadership positions for improvement initiatives. He described the most essential component as “picking the right people, then [having them become] the experts before they ever shared work with the rest of the staff” (Interview, April 20, 2016).

While identifying the right people and placing them correctly in the organization were key components, all six participants described the impact the right people had on student achievement. Charles was very specific when describing the cross-graded intervention program Nearway Elementary established: “So that was a testament of how impactful, how staff members could take on a leadership role themselves and utilize the limited resources that we had in an extremely efficient manner” (Interview, March 10, 2016). While Paul did not provide as specific an example as Charles, he did share the same sentiment when he provided, “I look back often and say ‘Well if it wasn’t for this person and this person in this area we wouldn’t have been successful or as successful’” (Interview, March 28, 2016).
Sandy provided an example of how missing the right people in the right places impacted her as a principal and her predicted ability to impact student achievement when she described the district’s decision to stop using certified reading specialists as reading interventionists but instead use uncertified para-professionals:

No more certified teachers as reading assistants. So now we get less qualified people. We still have some good people, you know. Just because they’re not certified teachers doesn’t mean they’re not good. But they’re not all the quality I would like. (Interview, March 5, 2016).

When asked to expand on this situation and how it would impact student achievement, Sandy stated,

They’re getting our toughest kids because of pulling them [out of class]. You know they’re having an intervention group; they’re having a tier 2 intervention group with kids. A lot of time there are behavior kids. They’ve got mischievous kids for reading, and I think that’s kind of been a hindrance to us. (Interview, March 5, 2016)

Sandy also provided an insight into the prospect of losing the right people when describing the impending retirements of four people she considered unofficial leaders in her building. “Every time I see them, it’s just ‘I can’t talk to you, I miss you so much, I’m already grieving the loss of you’” (Interview, March 5, 2016). When asked to elaborate on how losing those people would impact her school, Sandy described the importance of finding new leaders to step up.

We start the school year and it’s like ‘okay, they're gone. Whose stepping up?’ I’ve got that in my brain that needs to be happening over, actually, starting now and into next school year so that when those people are gone I’ve probably got people who are moving into those slots. (Interview, March 5, 2016)

The importance she placed on identifying new leaders was similar to the importance John and Charles described in the hiring process.

While Charles, Sandy, and Paul described the impacts the right people could have programmatically, Jackie and Joy both described the emotional impact those people had on their
optimism toward future improvement. When asked about what would be key to continue to improve student achievement at Coneville High School, Jackie identified the need for staff to reflect on their practices to grow instructionally as her biggest challenge. When asked what would make it possible to do that she stated, “I’ve got enough people that are passionate about Coneville and making it better” (Interview, March 25, 2016). When she dug down even further, Jackie spoke of how those passionate people would embody the change she hoped for.

I think there is enough people who truly do have a desire to get better than they are. When they’re getting that feedback, they are going to stop and say, ‘I think I want to be a little more involved in this’ (Interview, March 25, 2016).

Joy also described a general sense of optimism her staff gave her when asked what inspired her and what made her believe she could overcome challenges. She offered, “I have to say it’s my staff and my assistant principal” (Interview, March 20, 2016). She discussed how she and the staff shared a mantra that they were all in it together and how that shared belief affected her: “I think that makes us feel like we can do anything that needs to get done” (Interview, March 15, 2016).

As Joy alluded to in the previous paragraph, having the right assistant principal was a key support she and Paul both identified. When again asked about the specific things in her job that made her successful, Joy gave even more credit to her assistant principal: “My AP and I have a very good relationship that I’m like his big sister, if you will. I think I would not be successful in this job without him” (Interview, March 20, 2016). Paul shared a similar view of his assistant principals when asked about the things that helped him improve student achievement: “I think another critical thing is hiring two assistant principals right as we came in. And those two hires were critical” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Paul then elaborated on how his assistant principals
helped him: “If you don't have a solid administrative team you can't do anything, right?”

(Interview, March 28, 2016).

No matter if they be teachers, administrators, or para-professionals, all participants were specific that having the right people was critical to improving student achievement. In addition to having the best fitting personnel, the participants also spoke of having the right people in the right places. The next subtheme examines the importance all the participants placed on having the buy-in of staff.

Subtheme 1 B: Having the Buy-in of Staff

All six participants referred directly to the importance of having the buy-in of staff members as a critical component of their ability to improve student achievement. All six participants described buy-in similarly, but John perhaps best defined the term by likening it to commitment in his description of the school improvement process. “So it’s a process that yields the first step. Commitment. Some people call it buy-in. That’s crucial” (Interview, April 20, 2016). While all six participants defined buy-in similarly, they all described having staff buy-in in regard to different factors. For example, John and Joy described the importance of staff buying in to their improvement processes as critical to their self-efficacy. Jackie and Paul both described the important moments when they knew their respective staffs had bought in to their leadership styles. Charles described the importance of his staff buying into his vision, while Sandy described a moment when her staff bought into her competencies around managing the building schedule. Despite the different factors around which participants described buy-in, all described the impact that having staff buy-in had on their self-efficacy to improve student achievement.
When John discussed his school improvement process in depth and what challenges he encountered to the improvement process, he offered,

I've got people in here who just simply buy into this stuff and made it their responsibility to learn about it and not only share it with their kids in their classroom but with other teachers. (Interview, April 20, 2016)

While John described having the continued buy-in from a staff he had been with for seven years, Joy provided a perspective about gaining initial buy-in from staff when she first came to Valley High School. The first time she engaged staff in looking at achievement data, she could sense it was a new experience for them. She noted, “I worked side by side with the teachers and when the teachers realized that I was putting in as much work as they were, they were all about it” (Interview, March 20, 2016). While the initial investment in data analysis was difficult and Joy was side by side with her staff, her description of future data analysis portrayed the importance of buy-in for staff to see the relationship between data and instruction. “So after they saw the relationship, then they were more than willing to buy-in and make decisions based on that data” (Interview, March 15, 2016).

Charles, while not as specific as John and Joy, did share the importance of having staff buyin to his vision when he stated, “So I will say that what was huge at Nearway Elementary was # 1, recruitment of staff members who bought into the vision” (Interview, March 10, 2016). While Jackie did not speak to a specific instance where staff buy-in was critical, she did share her belief that she had buy-in when she stated, “I think there is a huge level of trust that the community, students, and the staff have in me” (Interview, March 25, 2016). She remarked how that belief was a result of the embedded role she played in the community and helped her gain the job as principal.
Sandy shared an example where she believed she had the buy-in of staff members when trying to implement an intervention plan that would be difficult to schedule. “My teachers are always saying, ‘I totally can’t believe you made this work in our schedule’” (Interview, March 5, 2016). Sandy went on to share that once the program was implemented and staff saw that it could be scheduled, “they started to see the benefit of it within the first school year” (Interview, March 5, 2016).

Paul also shared the value he placed on having staff buy-in when describing his own philosophy of school leadership:

> You have to ensure that you do things in a way that allows for buy-in. I have to have good relationships with my team members. I can't come across as being the person who knows everything, and this is the way it’s going to be. Otherwise it’s not a team, but it’s a top down model that’s not authentic. You’ve got to fight that. You don’t want everything to be compliance, you want it to be authentic and meaningful. (Interview, March 28, 2016)

When Paul was asked to describe the benefit of having this style of leadership that resulted in buyin, he responded,

> Because I have people who will go above and beyond for me because we have those relationships, and if we didn't have those relationships then I'd be wasting my time doing a lot of stuff that I shouldn't be doing probably. (Interview, March 28, 2016)

Joy also shared the importance of a principal having buy-in when she stated, “If you don’t have that kind of personality that makes people want to work with you, and you have to show them you’re a team player, you’re going to drown and be dead in the water” (Interview, March 15, 2016). John, however, may have put it best when he discussed the aftermath of a challenging personnel situation he faced in his first year as principal. He described the removal of a teacher who was very popular with the community and the impact that process had on his staff’s belief in him: “On the other side came a staff who believed that I was the right person for the job”
(Interview, April 20, 2016). John would credit this belief from the staff as a critical component to his success in improving student achievement and his longevity at Water Springs High School.

Subtheme 1 C: Overcoming a Personnel Challenge

While less frequent in reference than the previous two, the subtheme of principals overcoming a personnel challenge was a distinct pattern for five of the six participants, with a total of seven references. Those five participants all described encountering various challenges around personnel early in their tenure and how overcoming that challenge was critical to their future success in improving student achievement. John described a particularly difficult situation with one staff member: “My initial hurdle in the district was getting over the fact that I was releasing a very popular teacher” (Interview, April 20, 2016). For John, overcoming that challenge taught him important lessons he would apply to his job as principal. “It really taught me that if you have courage and if you stick to things, people will see and people will know” (Interview, April 20, 2016). Jackie also described a personnel challenge she encountered the first year she became principal: “There were concerns with our director of athletics. And everybody knew I was very much a part of [addressing] that [concern]. I think that also kind of calmed some fears and they needed to know someone was in charge” (Interview, March 25, 2016). Jackie was able to take the challenge of an underperforming staff member and address it in a way that people were aware of her actions and, therefore, calmed anxiety in her staff.

Joy also described an individual personnel problem, but not one that required removal of a staff member. She described one particularly challenging staff member and her efforts to send him to a workshop and convert him into a supporter:
He was a cynic. Let’s just call him that. He was very cynical about change. So he also liked...as far as I knew he was trying to impress me a little bit. So he agreed to go and he actually came back and became one of the biggest cheerleaders and really thought that what she [workshop presenter] said was so practical. (Interview, March 15, 2016)

In this instance, Joy overcame a personnel challenge in a way that helped her gain the buy-in of other staff members, which is another impactful environmental influence to principal self-efficacy to improve student achievement.

While John, Jackie, and Joy described situations with individuals, Paul and Charles dealt with more systemic problems of personnel. Paul described a very opaque school improvement team comprised of department chairs and an instructional leadership team (ILT) prior to his becoming principal. When asked what was difficult about setting up his own school improvement process, he said, “So what I decided to do was hire a brand new ILT...not hire but recruit from the teaching pool. So I did that. Got brand new teacher leaders in” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Charles also described a personnel challenge on a broad scale that involved his overall staffing process.

We were a small school and received funding based upon the number of students enrolled. And so you know, it could be one teacher out if you lose a whole day [of enrollment], and you're moving people around [combining two classes under one teacher]. Every interview I had after, I was always thinking cost and being cost effective. I was always looking at people and candidates and how versatile and flexible they were. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

Charles met the challenge of a small staff driven by small enrollment by changing the hiring criteria and bringing in more dynamic people. Charles described how having dynamic and flexible staff members helped him develop programming that improved student achievement in Nearway Elementary.

While all of the participants described different personnel challenges, they all acknowledged the later benefits of having been through that challenge. For John, he vividly
defined the end result of having dismissed a popular teacher for what he termed valid reasons: “I had to go through the challenge and stick to it. But on the other side came a staff [whole school staff] who believed that I was the right person for the job” (Interview, April 20, 2016). Jackie similarly listed the long-term benefits of dealing with the situation involving her athletic director:

So any naysayers or questioners, I was fortunate and unfortunate that there was a thing that ‘Jackie took charge of this and we're going to be okay.’ And I think that also kind of calmed some fears and they needed to know someone was in charge. Someone had a vision. It was good to model that right away. (Interview, March 25, 2016)

For Joy, winning over a cynic had long-term benefits because, as she said, once the cynic was on board, momentum built. “And so the message got out there, and we started seeing a little improvement. And then after we had been doing that for a year or so we went on to find some more things” (Interview, March 15, 2016). This sentiment that once a challenge was overcome principals were able to have some momentum was echoed by John when he stated, “The easy answer is that getting a few wins gives you some confidence” (Interview, April 20, 2016).

Paul articulated the benefits of having overcome his personnel challenge when he described what life looked like two years after making the drastic changes to the school’s leadership structure that he did:

I meet regularly, every single week with each of the teams. I meet with the department chairs weekly and the ILT weekly, and we do professional readings together. We work on our strategies and action items together that we created from our retreats that are in line with our theory of action. And it’s a continuous work in progress, and you redo your cycle of inquiry or whatever you want to call it on a regular basis. (Interview, March 28, 2016)

This structure and continuous improvement cycle was one of the most important components of East Moore’s success, according to Paul’s interview.

As evidenced from the above excerpts, five of the six participants found that addressing and overcoming a personnel challenge was significant to their ability to improve student
achievement. Paul had to address his leadership structure to have a continuous improvement cycle that worked. Charles overcame his staffing challenges in a way that created a more dynamic staff. For Joy, converting one person and convincing him to become a cheerleader helped build momentum for other initiatives down the road. For Jackie and John, addressing challenges around one person’s poor performance resulted in their respective staffs believing in them as leaders and giving them the credibility to do more things down the road.

Theme 2: Supportive People

All six participants in the study mentioned specific people who were supportive of them and whom they accessed for input, support, or simply advice. These supports came from three distinct sources: a) superintendents/superiors or district office officials (19 references), b) non-evaluative people to turn to (11 references), and c) elected officials (9 references). All three categories of supportive people were impactful to participant self-efficacy to improve student achievement.

Subtheme 2A: Support and Autonomy from the Superintendent

One of the most powerful subthemes in the research study, with 19 references across all six participants, was having support and autonomy from their superintendent or superior to do the job of principal. This theme was particularly pervasive to John and affected him deeply as illustrated when he said,

Essentially, my supervisor will not review/reverse the ‘what,’ but will hold me accountable for the ‘how.’ Knowing this, I can do my job without looking over my shoulder. Impossible to lead if you have to constantly consider anything more than the right thing to do. This job becomes impossible if, as principal, I have to be worried about being publicly overruled. (Journal Prompt #3, June 1, 2016)
Sandy voiced a similar sentiment regarding the effect of her superintendent’s support when recounting a situation in which she could not reach her superintendent:

> When my superintendent got back to me, he said ‘I trust you, whatever decision you made was a good one.’ I have many experiences like this with him, and it gives me the confidence to make decisions rather than put things on hold until I get further direction. I know he would back me even if it wasn't the right decision.  (Journal Prompt Number 3, May 24, 2016)

Joy also painted a picture of the strong bond between her and her superintendent that began when “on my first day he told me ‘it’s your building, run it.’ Anytime I’ve called and said I want to do this and I need your support, I’ve always had it” (Interview, March 15, 2016). After that first day Joy continued to enjoy her superintendent’s support, especially in a difficult parent situation she was tasked with handling. After she delivered difficult news to a parent and was thinking about her boss’s response, she stated, “I knew that if the parent complained further, he would support me 100%” (Journal Prompt # 3, May 23, 2016). While Jackie did not describe a relationship with her superintendent as deeply rooted in trust as Sandy’s, John’s, and Joy’s, she did describe the importance of having support and autonomy from district office leaders and the superintendent:

> We've had a lot of support from district admin, from the board on just our RtI and supporting us. And actually more than support, a lot of freedom to do things. There’s....the whole three-semester plan was developed by the superintendent and the high school and the district was like ‘whatever you guys feel like you need.’ (Interview, March 25, 2016)

Interestingly, Jackie also described the downside of having a lot of autonomy from district leaders when she stated, “…but there’s pieces that it would be nice if there were a little more driving and pushing from them” (Interview, March 25, 2016). However, she also understood the advantages of her situation because in her words, “it’s rare as a high school administrator to have the freedom to do what we are doing” (Interview, March 25, 2016).
Charles and Paul operated in a much larger organization than the other four participants and therefore did not have traditional superintendent supervisors. Nonetheless, both reported the positive effects of having the support of their higher ups. Charles described his supervisor as like a superintendent who was over about 30 schools, and she had a system that was really deep in curriculum, and we were really monitoring data. We had various types of practice programs that helped to generate the data [which] was [then] targeted to [help create] customized instruction. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

Paul, whose supervisor was chief of approximately 40 schools, also described a positive dynamic with his boss. “I’m really fortunate that she gives me a lot of autonomy and doesn’t really manage me too much” (Interview, March 28, 2016). When given the chance to more deeply define the relationship between his boss and him, Paul noted how essential her support had become: “So, she's just been kind of a really good support in times of need. Like a counselor or something like that” (Interview, March 28, 2016).

While all participants acknowledged the importance of the support of their superintendents to differing levels, perhaps none stated the importance as bluntly and succinctly as John when he said, “One of the things you talk about why John Brownstone believes he can be successful is I know I have the support of my superintendent” (Interview, April 20, 2016).

All six participants reported that with the support of their superintendents or other bosses they were able to focus on the work of improving student achievement. Charles stated this directly when he credited his superior’s system of curriculum and data analysis for his school’s improved achievement. He stated they were “very successful in improving student achievement … and … we would sustain the changes there” (Interview, March 10, 2016) because of the data-driven system she put in place.
When discussing what initiatives John believed had an impact on student achievement in his school, he described creating teacher collaborative time:

Regular devoted time to their collaboration as a teacher leadership group. So I carved out that time for them. What I did is they taught one less class. And I don't ask permission for stuff like that. (Interview, April 20, 2016)

When asked to provide more insight about why he did not need permission, John suggested that, “when my intent is good I can get away with it, if my intent is bad somebody will call me on it. But if my intent is good I know that I have the support of the superintendent” (Interview, April 20, 2016).

Sandy also discussed how having autonomy from her superintendent afforded her the opportunity to find things that worked and didn’t work: “I am given leeway to try new programs, interventions” (Journal prompt #3, May 24, 2016). The experiences of all six participants offer different examples of how the support and autonomy of the participant’s supervisors led to opportunities for improved student achievement. Charles, John, Jackie, and Sandy each discussed how having autonomy and support from their superiors allowed them to experiment with and implement effective initiatives. Joy talked about a trusting relationship with her superintendent that gave her the confidence to manage difficult situations. Finally, Paul found a supportive supervisor who counseled him in his role.

Subtheme 2B: Non-Evaluative People to Turn To

Five of the six participants referred specifically to mentors, coaches, colleagues, or other non-evaluative people they relied on for advice, direction, feedback, or support a total of 11 times. While the forms of support looked different for each participant, the subtheme resonated for all five. Paul discussed his relationship with his district-appointed mentor: “I have a
leadership coach…Dr. Candace Nearren (pseudonym). She's a former principal of two schools, and she's also a former [district office official], kind of like a superintendent” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Paul spoke about how his coach was able to support him because in his words, “She is able to give me really good coaching and good feedback and things to consider along the way so I don't make those mistakes that I might have made without her coaching” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Later in the interview Paul credited a paucity of mistakes, such as the ones Dr. Nearren helped him avoid, as a reason why he enjoys broad support, isn’t attacked often, and therefore doesn’t deal with “frivolous things” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Charles echoed Paul’s sentiment about the impact of having someone to turn to when discussing the improvements at Nearway Elementary:

That was huge and that really led to us being able to speed up the success that took place at Nearway because he and I [a supportive colleague] would spend hours on the phone at night kind of strategizing different approaches to deal with personnel issues, addressing concerns with students, parents, and so on. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

Joy spoke to the power a mentor had on her when discussing a previous boss who, in her words, “helped me a lot and helped me to learn to do things the right way and have high expectations for staff” (Interview, March 15, 2016).

While Paul, Charles, and Joy all found support from individuals they could directly access in a non-evaluative coaching or mentoring capacity, Jackie and Sandy both spoke passionately about the impact a group of peer colleagues had on them and how important they found help from their peers. Sandy perhaps said it best when she stated,

I look forward to administrator meetings that we have. We seem like we get to a certain time of year, right before January, the weeks between November and February where we don't have as many of them. We’re really busy, and I really miss that sitting in the same room. Everybody who’s got the same sort of focus and the same issues, you know whether it be custodians or whatever it is we're talking about. (Interview, March 5, 2016)
When encouraged to go further, Sandy spoke of how connecting with a group of colleagues lessened her feelings of isolation because, as she put it,

There’s something about being around principals that … to me if there’s a down side to the principalship, it’s that you’re like you’re an island, and we don’t see each other often enough to be able to say, ‘What are you doing? How are you able to make this program work?’ for student achievement. Even when we are together we’re solving problems or management issues. I want more of that. (Interview, March 5, 2016)

Jackie, like Sandy, discussed finding solace in a group of colleagues. Her description of her principal peer group provided great insight:

The thing that I value most about that group [of colleagues] is it’s the most authentic, humble, honest group. There is never a false arrogance of ‘I’ve got this figured out’ but everybody is capable of saying, ‘What are we gonna do guys? They just said we have to do this PARCC test, and how do we go about doing this?’ And just really working through the logistics, which has been huge. (Interview, March 25, 2016)

Beyond the support of finding solutions to challenges, participants also referred to how mentors and colleagues helped spark creative insights. Sandy embodied this phenomenon most graphically when she described hearing about a system of intervention a colleague designed and thought to herself “‘That’ is going to work in my school. That is going to be hard, but it is going to work and 10 years later we’re still doing it” (Interview, March 5, 2016). All five participants who depicted the importance of non-evaluative people to turn to described different experiences, but all five discussed how these supportive people helped them solve problems or modeled specific actions and behaviors that impacted their self-efficacy to improve student achievement by providing them inspiration, guidance or a road map.

**Subtheme 2 C: Support of Elected Officials**

While not as extensively referred to as subtheme 2 A, the support of superintendents, or subtheme 2 B, non-evaluative people to turn to, four of the six participants did explicitly identify
the importance of having the support of various elected officials a total of nine times. Responses around this subtheme varied in context from participant to participant, but all references shared the common thread of elected officials as a critical factor in principal’s belief in their ability to improve student achievement.

Jackie referred to the support her local elected officials gave her when she described their support for a schoolwide initiative: “We’ve had a lot of support from district admin, from the board on just our RtI and supporting us” (Interview, March 25, 2016). More than just the Board of Education members, Jackie also described her efforts to make connections with additional elected officials because, in her words, “usually the high school principal and the mayor would have a strong connection” (Interview, March 25, 2016). In her case, she understood the importance of the support of each mayor and tried to gain it by holding a rotating homecoming parade in each of her nine municipalities.

John also explained the importance of knowing where elected official support was, because according to him,

I always knew I had two board members I could ruffle because as long as I had five...because I'm not a 4-3 guy. I don't like 4-3. Those two always look like outliers and I had them. When it’s 5-2, I sleep very well. (Interview, April 20, 2016)

While John and Jackie wrestled with the politics of seven-member boards of education, Charles and Paul identified more complex waters to navigate in their urban settings. Charles’s experience with urban aldermanic politics was a positive one because he “built connections with the aldermen, and so we were able to secure huge funding in terms of TIF grants to turn Nearway into a STEM school” (Interview, March 10, 2016). According to Charles this funding played a huge role in Nearway’s future success as it led to more political connections and support:
So [by] the alderman supporting us, we were pulled into Board of Education meetings. We pulled in the mayor in terms of accomplishments. We were always able to say not only are we doing well in chess, but we always correlated it back to academic achievement. We went from a level 3 to a level 1. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

While the support of the alderman and mayor were very positive, Charles also discussed some of the political challenges in a large urban educational system. He described the local schools council (LSC) system in his school district where all schools have a local council of seven people comprised of citizens, parents, students, and teachers who made decisions regarding principal retention and other school initiatives. In Charles’s words, “I always was supportive of the local school[s] councils because in my mind it gave community voice, and all the parents, community [members, and] then you have representation from the teachers and now you have the non-teachers [as well].” (Interview, March 10, 2016). However, Charles also painted a realistic picture of the challenges such a complex system comes with when he stated,

That is something that [my city] is still working on in terms of how to make sure that the LSCs, the local board districts, are supportive of the true interest of the students and that it doesn't become heavily politicized. So that became a challenge for us, but in spite of that, we were able to bring about some tremendous success at Nearway. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

Paul also noted the downside of the LSC model based on his same observations of the heavy politicization that Charles alluded to in his interview. In Paul’s words, the LSC model introduced a layer of danger some principals could not control.

Schools that have principals that moved data across every metric at their school, but the LSC now has teachers on it who weren't working very hard, and the principals pushed them out and then they got on the LSC, and they voted not to renew the contract, you know? So that happens. That happens. There’s a lot of stories like that out there so you've got to manage that well. (Interview, March 28, 2016)

While Paul was well aware of the pitfalls of the system, he also was aware of where he stood in regard to the support of elected officials and the benefits such support afforded him.
I do have a strong base of support with the alumni, with the local alderman, with people on our local school council, so that helps. That helps me in the sense that I don't waste a lot of time dealing with frivolous things that I might have to deal with if I didn't have their support, right? If you're a leader who’s being attacked, then you're really not being able to spend your time on the things that you really want to be spending your time on. You're just defending yourself. (Interview, March 28, 2016)

All four participants dealt with different contextual challenges when gaining and managing support from their elected officials. However, despite the possible downfalls, all four found benefit such support brought them, particularly in regard to making structural changes such as the re-visioning of Nearway Elementary Charles described or even the RtI initiative Jackie’s Board of Education supported her to do.

**Theme 3: The Impact of Success**

“The easy answer is that getting a few wins gives you some confidence” (John Brownstone, Interview, April 20, 2016). John’s summarizing statement regarding the importance he placed on overcoming the difficulties of removing a popular staff member directly speaks to a theme all six participants brought up during the research study: successes impacted participant self-efficacy to improve student achievement. These impactful successes varied among all participants but together formed two distinct subthemes: a) establishing a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that generated successful results (23 references) and b) seeing students succeed (8 references). The following sections depict how participants described the impact of these successes on their self-efficacy to improve student achievement.
Subtheme 3 A: Establishing a Schoolwide Focus Through a System of Continuous Improvement that Generated Successful Results

All six participants provided unifying commentary regarding the importance their respective focus-driven processes for school improvement played in their efficacy to impact student achievement. Participants identified the importance of systematic school improvement as well as finding a focus around which the school could funnel its efforts. Participants spoke specifically to the importance of carrying out a focus through an established and effective system of continuous improvement.

John demonstrated the importance of a school improvement process with a focus when he stated that “our school improvement efforts have been meaningful as opposed to what some people will say are ‘jumping through hoops’ and those kinds of things. That was a personal goal of mine to make it a meaningful school improvement process” (Interview, April 20, 2016). When asked what specifically made the process meaningful and why it was successful, John stated, “The process has integrity. People go through it [the improvement process] knowing that in the end we’re going to have something that’s going to make a difference” (Interview, April 20, 2016). When asked how the process manifested in improved student achievement, John described how he was able to focus his school on a reading initiative through their school improvement process and what that initiative did for kids. “The power of seeing it all over the place. They understood something was happening to them. They might not have liked it, but at least they understood what was happening to them” (Interview, April 20, 2016). John went on to provide a direct connection between the focus on literacy, the improvement process, and increased student achievement when he stated,
And did it translate into higher test scores? Absolutely it did, but that was just one hoped-for outcome. I think we really helped kids not only become more literate, whatever that would mean to them, but believing they could walk in and access something a little more challenging than they used to. (Interview, April 20, 2016)

John spoke passionately about the importance of a focus in Water Spring High School’s improvement process when he stated,

I’m really good about helping other people keep the rest off their plate. In other words, once it’s there, the rest... there’s no flavor of the day. John Brownstone doesn’t read an article and pass it on to somebody and say, ‘Hey, maybe we should do this.’ I don’t even pass it on if it’s interesting. I pass it on if it relates to our school improvement goal. (Interview, April 20, 2016)

John also spoke about the difficulty of maintaining the focus but how his approach left no room for ambiguity:

Every conference that you want to go to or every faculty meeting or institute or SIP day is developed and aligned to that [goal]. There's no ‘Let’s bring in an outside motivational speaker. Oh, this person wants to come and talk to us about X or Y.’ Those are nice things, but they're not aligned to the goal. I am militaristic about making sure that that school improvement goal is what we are doing. (Interview, April 20, 2016)

John was able to focus his school on a literacy initiative through a meaningful improvement process that he called “our most impactful” (Interview, April 20, 2016) initiative.

Sandy described the student-centered focus her school’s improvement process took when she discussed Neil Armstrong’s data-driven intervention program.

We have a very systematic approach to looking at student data and giving students interventions. One is fit and the other piece that we have done in my school for years and has just grown is that, especially at a specific grade level, we have teachers at that grade level own all students at that grade level rather than just in their classroom. (Interview, March 5, 2016)

When asked to go further about why the system of improvement that Sandy employed at Neil Armstrong improved student achievement, Sandy commented,

What you need is the data. That’s what my intention is. To go over the data of the kids of each of those reading assistants and say ‘Look at this’ and maybe I’ll learn a few
things. Maybe that’s all I think is happening, you know? Maybe I would learn something. We’ll see. (Interview, March 5, 2016)

Sandy elaborated on the difficulty and importance of keeping her school focused on the student-centered system of improvement she built when she described how she conceived the idea after seeing it presented at a conference. “‘That!’ That is going to be hard but it is going to work’ and 10 years later we are still doing it” (Interview, March 5, 2016).

Both John and Sandy’s comments spoke to how their focus-driven improvement processes impacted their efficacy to impact student achievement. John demonstrated belief in how his improvement process impacted student achievement because when asked what the most impactful initiative to come out of his improvement process, without hesitation he answered, “Our most impactful was a literacy initiative” (Interview, April 20, 2016). Later in the interview John added that “we do school improvement planning really well because I start it and I know how to manage it” (Interview, April 20, 2016). The success of the initiative to improve student achievement gave him belief in the focus on literacy and the process of continuous improvement and his ability to manage it. Sandy spoke to how the student centered focus increased staff ownership of student learning. Later in the interview she credited that initiative and approach with her subsequent nomination and winning of a local principal of the year award.

As a matter of fact, that’s the initiative I got the Principal of the Year Award. The same year, 2012-13 school year, it was the following school year, the 3 Rivers IPA, that’s why I was nominated, was for that, so yeah. (Interview, March 5, 2016)

When Paul was asked to identify some of the successes his school had experienced in the area of student achievement he noted that

our graduation rate is now the 3rd highest in the entire district. Our school rating has gone from a level 2 to a level 1 to a level 1 plus. You know we just keep on breaking scholarship records, college enrollment records. We just keep on doing better and better. So, I’m really happy about that.
When asked what he believed contributed to those improvements, Paul described how in his first year as principal he restructured the leadership teams of his building by instituting an instructional leadership team and conveyed how this team was critical to his continuous improvement cycle because, in his words,

we work on our strategies and action items together that we created from our retreats that are in line with our theory of action. And it’s a continuous work in progress, and you redo your cycle of inquiry or whatever you want to call it on a regular basis. (Interview, March 28, 2016)

While John and Sandy discussed how their processes impacted students (John’s literacy initiative) and staff (Sandy’s student data process), Paul depicted how his improvement process, which he referred to as a theory of action, impacted the culture of the building:

The theory of action is part of who I am and what I value, and so every single team works to make themselves better every single year. So I think because of that because of that… culture we end up doing better every single year because that is everyone's mindset: to improve things and make things better than the year before. (Interview, March 28, 2016)

Paul then described how he was able to create a focus for the school through the improvement process he put in place. “So our IST is working on our whole school priority which is our TIA or targeted instructional area. And that is academic perseverance through disciplinary literacy” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Paul described how the school operated prior to finding a focus:

Before that, the ILT and the department chairs were kind of one and the same, and it was too many people, and it was kind of sprinkled in and it was too many people doing too much, and it resulted in doing almost nothing at all. (Interview, March 28, 2016)

Paul also spoke of the importance in maintaining the focus that was established:

Now two years later as we've learned more, a lot of the work is centered on making sure we have regular retreat check-ins. So we take a day away from the school, and we re-evaluate our theory of action and our strategies that are aligned to that theory of action. Kind of re-frame and re-center ourselves in the work. (Interview, March 28, 2016)
When asked what was difficult about maintaining the focus he had created for East Moore High, Paul encapsulated the importance of having an organizationwide focus, as “there's no big obstacles or hurdles other than the things you would normally think [when] implementing or forming any type of team. That is trying to get organized around a common problem and common cause” (Interview, March 28, 2016). That summarizing statement showed the importance Paul placed on having a focus for the school which he maintained through a system of continuous improvement.

Joy described the initial difficulty in establishing a focused improvement process that would lead to teachers making data-driven instructional decisions at Valley High School. “I started to understand that they didn’t see the link. They understood it was there, but no one had ever explained why this was so significant” (Interview, March 15, 2016). Soon after Joy realized her staff did not see the link between data and instruction, she had another realization about her staff’s data literacy.

I communicated to the staff that we absolutely had to increase our test scores because we had some very good students here, but they were just not performing. They were underperforming on standardized tests. And the first thing I realized was that my staff did not how to read data. (Interview, March 15, 2016)

Joy used these realizations as an opportunity to focus her staff on data analysis and literacy.

So we had to start at the beginning [with data]. How do you read it? What does it mean? How do you tear it apart? So after we got through that then we were able to look to see some of our deficits. What we found was a consultant who came in and worked directly [with the teachers], and I went to every meeting. (Interview, March 15, 2016)

When asked how she transitioned from data competencies and awareness to an improvement process that impacted student achievement, Joy discussed matching professional development with the needs identified by data. She found a consultant with a reading and literacy focus and focused her staff on low-hanging fruit first. “So we started off with the easy stuff. Things we
could do, everybody could do, that really wasn’t that difficult” (Interview, March 15, 2016). As her staff started to incorporate the changes she sought, Joy also found difficulty in maintaining the focus, one time telling staff, “Look, it’s not going away. This is a commitment. We’re all doing this” (Interview, March 15, 2016). Joy then followed up and validated how maintaining the focus helped her staff see improvement and continue to want to improve elsewhere. “And then after we had been doing that for a year or so we went on to find some more things. What else can we do?” (Interview, March 15, 2016). For Joy and her staff, the focus on data through a school improvement process generated success in student achievement, which in turn generated momentum for additional efforts.

So once we got past that [data illiteracy] I now had a couple of people who eat data up. That’s their lives now. They really like it. I can't say that it’s my favorite thing to do, but it’s certainly extremely necessary and very important in making decisions. So after they saw the relationship then they were more than willing to buyin and make decisions based on that data. (Interview, March 15, 2016)

After recounting her staff’s willingness to make data-driven instructional decisions, Joy went on to immediately describe the current student achievement at Valley High School. “So we were very pleased with our PARCC scores in reading and writing this year. We felt that what we're doing, we're doing it right. So we had a little celebration with that” (Interview, March 15, 2016).

Charles and Jackie also depicted the importance of a focus-driven continuous improvement process in their efforts and efficacy to improve student achievement. Charles spoke about the improvement process he used under the guidance of his supervisor when he stated, “She had a system that was really deep in curriculum, and we were really monitoring data. We had various types of practice programs that helped to generate the [student] data [which] was targeted to [create] customize[d] instruction” (Interview, March 10, 2016). When Charles elaborated on the impact this process had on student achievement, he provided, “Over
the years we were able to move Nearway Elementary School from a level 3 school, which is the lowest performing level, to eventually a level 1 school, and it was using the data to really make our decisions” (Interview, March 10, 2016). Charles then articulated how the data-driven improvement process Nearway used created a focus on differentiated instruction to meet the needs identified in student data.

So one particular initiative we had in place would be differentiated instruction. But it was differentiation where it could be within the classroom, and in this particular situation, it was across classrooms or grades...cross grades where students at certain levels of achievement in terms of reading and math they weren't restricted to be with their grade-level peers during this intervention period. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

When asked about the impact of this focus on student achievement Charles detailed how it allowed his staff and him to make decisions and set priorities about the school as a whole:

As it relates to where do we direct our resources, how we build our teachers’ capacities and what the unique part of what we did was we understood that we had to address those who were most in need because of the home conditions they were in. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

Charles then dug deeper and elaborated on how this focus on at-risk students impacted student achievement. “We were looking to work with the whole child. So we were very successful in improving student achievement with the students and then we would sustain the changes there” (Interview, March 10, 2016). Charles then tied this sustained success back to the differentiated instruction focus when he said, “We really came to understand that to bring about effective, sustained, positive change that the staff members had to have a vested interest in the initiatives, so I would speak about some of the initiatives” (Interview, March 10, 2016). For Charles and Nearway Elementary, an improvement process grounded in data created a focus on differentiated instruction across grade levels, which led to improved student achievement.
Jackie’s process of improvement was long term, took a three-semester approach, and was focused on instructional strategies.

For now, we are mostly using the data we collected in our 3 semester plan. This included a student survey, staff survey, walk-thru data, and unit plan collection. From these we are monitoring our use of learning targets, daily assessments, and staff/student ability to plan for the following day using this information. We also got a baseline of instructional practices and social/emotional needs that we will further investigate next year. (Journal Prompt # 1, May 14, 2016)

Jackie stated that her focus had shifted to monitoring and improving instructional strategies as opposed to student achievement because there was a lack of available student achievement data in the state of Illinois with the elimination of the mandatory ACT test. “The evidence that has changed how I act as principal is actually that lack of evidence” (Journal Prompt # 2, May 17, 2016). Despite the shift in what she was monitoring, she still believed in a focused improvement process because, according to her,

there’s a lot of schools out there that will say ‘We made sure every single student in our school knew this reading/writing strategy.’ That wasn’t the key to their academic success. The fact that they’re all on the same page, they’re all working together, they’re all making this movement. That’s what caused the success. I think we just, we need more consistency to help support that. (Interview, March 25, 2016)

When asked about the evidence that her process was garnering improved student achievement, Jackie stated that “by October of that year we were having parents and students report just a change in the climate of the building and the teachers positiveness and the impact that it was having on the class” (Jackie Moss, Interview, March 25, 2016). For Jackie, no matter what the focus was, she believed in a process to make it happen.
Subtheme 3 B: Seeing Students Succeed

Four of the six participants spoke directly about how seeing students succeed gave them inspiration or confidence in their work to improve the student achievement at their respective schools. Paul spoke very precisely when asked what gave him the belief that as a principal he could improve student achievement:

When I was at Team [omitted] my students saw three points…three and a half points growth on the science ACT in one year. And that was the highest growth in our network. I saw firsthand. I saw how changing instruction can be better suited to student outcomes and better student learning. (Interview, March 28, 2016)

Charles also talked about the impact that seeing students achieve at higher levels had on his motivation as principal:

I've got some social media now, I can see my kids, they're graduating from college, see my kids who are off with various companies and making an impact in society. So it’s those things that really super inspire me from a day-to-day perspective. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

Seeing his past students and current students succeed led Charles to state, “I get a lot of my inspiration from my students” (Interview, March 10, 2016). When he elaborated on how seeing his students succeed actually inspired him, Charles referred to his practice of having past students help support and mentor current students:

Now I know that child [a graduate] is going to be going on to the high school, and I'll have them come back and share what their experiences in high school are and have them come back and share that with the other kids. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

Charles was inspired by the success of past students to develop a program for current students to see what high achievement can look like for them.

Charles was not the only one who drew inspiration from student achievement. Joy spoke about how seeing her students succeed gave her the feeling that being principal is “What I’m
supposed to be doing, so I’m doing it” (Interview March 15, 2016). Joy provided this genuine response after speaking about what inspired her:

It inspires me when I see one of our students getting their Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in Stem Cell research. It inspires me when I see one of our students going off and studying at Notre Dame. It inspires me when I see a kid graduate who I absolutely wanted to send them to the department of corrections their freshman year. (Interview, March 15, 2016)

While Sandy did not provide examples of past students succeeding as what inspired her to improve the achievement of students, she did speak passionately about current students:

It’s people that keep me [motivated], and kids of course. You know you stand at that front door, and they're so happy to see you even if they had a bad day, but when they're leaving I'm thinking, ‘I made you miss recess today, yet you still want a hug goodbye?’ That kind of thing. (Interview, March 5, 2016)

For Joy and Sandy, seeing the students engaged with school and successful inspired them to continue their work of improving student achievement. Paul, Charles, Joy, and Sandy all saw students succeeding in different ways. Paul drew from the memory of students he taught as evidence that everyone can learn, while Charles was inspired by recent students and their successful navigation of high school. Joy and Sandy both found confirmation in their work by the success of students, even ones who struggled.

**Summary**

Environmental influences were defined in Chapter 1 as relationships, events, structures, rules, or other external factors that may impact principal self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The eight emergent subthemes described thus far in this chapter form the environmental influences participants identified as impactful to their self-efficacy to improve student achievement:

- Having the right people
- Having the buy-in of staff members
• Overcoming a personnel challenge
• Having the support and autonomy of the superintendent/superior
• Having non-evaluative peers to turn to
• Having the support of elected officials
• Having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered success
• Seeing students succeed

These environmental influences directly address Research Question 1: What environmental influences do principals identify as impactful to their self-efficacy to perform both direct and indirect behaviors to improve student achievement? These environmental influences were drawn from the responses of all six participants during interviews and in response to journal prompts.

The following section will address Research Question 2.

Research Question 2
How do principals describe the mechanisms through which environmental influences impact their self-efficacy to improve student achievement?

When answering Research Question 2 it is important to revisit the definition of mechanisms from Chapter 2: the linking relationship between two related variables, i.e. an input and an output as illustrated by Bunge (1997). In Bunge’s model, an input (I) results in an output (O) because of a mechanism ([M]). See Figure 3 in Chapter 2.

For the purpose of this study, environmental influences served as the inputs and participant self-efficacy served as the outputs. Figure 5 provides a visual representation of mechanisms linking environmental influences and self-efficacy.
Environmental Influence \[\rightarrow\] Mechanism \[\rightarrow\] Self-Efficacy

Figure 5: Representation of environmental influence as an input and self-efficacy as an output with undefined linking mechanism.

Research Question 2 addresses how the participants described the mechanisms linking the input of environmental influences to the output of self-efficacy (i.e., how participants describe the black box in Figure 5). Data addressing Research Question 2 were gathered from participant interviews and responses to journal prompts.

The participants described the mechanisms connecting the environmental influences to self-efficacy using four distinct linking relationships. These linking relationships were predictive relationships, cause and effect relationships, confirming relationships, and seeing an exemplar model. Predictive relationships are comprised of excerpts in which the participants predicted future successful outcomes based on the presence of an environmental influence, predicted what others thought of their abilities, or predicted failure in the absence of an environmental influence. Cause and effect linking relationships are those excerpts in which the participants described how an environmental influence directly impacted their efficacy. Confirming relationships are examples in which the participants described how an environmental influence reinforced or verified a pre-existing belief in their own ability. Finally, the participants described some environmental influences as exemplar models that impacted their self-efficacy because the models portrayed a successful outcome they could emulate or provided evidence that certain goals were in fact attainable.

The following section is organized by linking relationship and provides a definition and examples of each linking relationship as well as excerpts and data from the participant interviews.
and journal prompts. A summary of which linking relationships were used by each participant to describe the mechanisms through which each environmental influence impacted participant self-efficacy is provided below in Table 8.

Table 8

Linking Relationships Used by Participants to Describe Mechanisms of Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Predictive Relationships</th>
<th>Cause and Effect Relationships</th>
<th>Confirming Relationships</th>
<th>Seeing an Exemplar Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>4 times (1B; 2A; 2A; 2A)</td>
<td>2 times (1A; 2A)</td>
<td>2 times (1C; 3B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>3 times (1B; 1C; 2B)</td>
<td>1 time (2A)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>4 times (1A; 1B; 2A; 2A)</td>
<td>3 times (2A; 2A; 3B)</td>
<td>2 times (1C; 3B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>3 times (1A; 2A; 3A)</td>
<td>1 time (3A)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 times (2B; 3B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>4 times (1A; 3A; 3B; 3B)</td>
<td>2 times (3A;3A)</td>
<td>1 time (2B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>2 times (2B; 2C)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 time (3B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>16 times</td>
<td>10 times</td>
<td>7 times</td>
<td>4 times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The top number in each cell indicates the number of times a participant used a linking relationship and the bottom number/letter codes indicate which environmental influences, identified by subtheme code, each participant described with each linking relationship.

Predictive Relationships

Participants in the current study used predictive relationships to describe a link between an environmental influence and their self-efficacy to improve student achievement in three distinct ways. First, the participants described an environmental influence with a predictive relationship in which they anticipated a successful future outcome because an environmental influence was present. An example of this included when a participant assumed the presence of needed resources for staff and students based on the presence of a supportive superintendent.
The second way participants used predictive relationships was when assuming failure or a lack of success in certain areas or initiatives had an environmental influence been absent. An example of this includes when a participant postulated about a lack of job effectiveness if not for the support of elected officials. Finally, the participants used predictive relationships when forecasting or assuming the thoughts others had about them or their abilities. Examples include assumptions about the positive thoughts of staff members regarding how a personnel challenge was addressed by a participant. Predictive relationships were those in which participants postulated about an alternate reality as a result of the presence or absence of an environmental influence or when participants omnisciently predicted the thoughts of others. Five of the six participants in this study described environmental influences as impactful to their self-efficacy through a predictive relationship a total of 16 times.

Paul succinctly described the links of having the right people and having the support of elected officials to his efficacy through predictive relationships. He did so by predicting success in the presence of those environmental influences. When describing having the right people, Paul stated, “I think that [having the right people] allows me to be able to do things that I wouldn’t be able to do otherwise”’ (Interview, March 28, 2016). Paul used a predictive relationship as the mechanism linking having the right people to his efficacy because he postulated that he would not be as effective were it not for them. When discussing the environmental influence of the support of elected officials to his self-efficacy, Paul again did so through a predictive relationship when he discussed the support he received in the political community from the local alderman and the Local Schools Council. Paul stated, “I don’t waste a lot of time dealing with frivolous things that I might have to deal with if I didn’t have their support” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Paul then illustrated how this affected his efficacy when
he immediately stated, “I think also by having a broad base of support I’m able to get things
done in a much faster way than I would be able to otherwise” (Interview, March 28, 2016).
Because Paul had the support of elected officials, he was able to predict that he was faster at
accomplishing tasks than he would be without the support of elected officials because he did not
have to waste time.

Paul also used a predictive relationship between his self-efficacy and the environmental
influence of a non-evaluative peer to turn to when describing his mentor: “She is able to give me
really good coaching and good feedback and things to consider along the way so I don't make
those mistakes that I might have made without her coaching” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Paul
predicted more mistakes on his part if that environmental influence had been absent.

John demonstrated the impact of a supportive superintendent on his self-efficacy using a
predictive relationship when he stated, “It’s easy to say ‘it’s my fault’ or ‘I made a mistake’ or
‘it’s on me’ because I know I’ll pull it out” (Interview, April 20, 2016). Here John predicted his
success on future struggles because he anticipated the presence of a supportive superintendent
based on the presence of a supportive superintendent. Joy expressed a similar predictive
relationship when linking her supportive superintendent to her self-efficacy: “If I can tell him it’s
for kids and this is how kids are going to benefit he'll try very much to make sure I can do it”
(Interview, March 15, 2016). By assuming a positive response from her superior based on the
presence of his support, Joy demonstrated the impact her supportive superintendent had on her
efficacy to improve student achievement through a predictive relationship. Joy again used a
predictive relationship to describe the mechanism linking her supportive superintendent to her
self-efficacy when describing the aftermath of a difficult confrontation with a parent at her
school. Joy stated, “I knew that if the parent complained further he [the superintendent] would
support me 100%” (Journal Prompt # 3, May 23, 2016). Because Joy had previously experienced support from her superintendent, she was confident in predicting his support if a parent had taken their complaint further.

Jackie used a predictive relationship when describing her belief that the staff, students, and community trusted her: “So I think there is a huge level of trust that the community, students, and the staff have in me” (Interview, March 25, 2016). By assuming what they thought of her, Jackie used a predictive relationship about the beliefs of others. Jackie also identified the impact her non-evaluative people to turn to had on her self-efficacy through a predictive relationship when she considered a hypothetical situation in which she would be presented with a challenge: “I’ve never thought about that [hypothetical challenge], but I should and now I’ve got all the resources to answer that question” (Interview, March 25, 2016). In her narrative, Jackie predicted her ability to problem solve in the future because of a supportive colleague network she would be able to access. The presence of this environmental influence allowed her to predict success in yet unnamed future challenges.

Five of the six participants identified environmental influences as impactful to their self-efficacy to improve student achievement through predictive relationships a total of sixteen times. The participants most frequently described subtheme 2A (having the support/autonomy of their superintendent) with predictive relationships (6 total times). It should, however, be noted that subtheme 2A was referred to six times by only three participants, with one participant representing three of the six occurrences. Subtheme 1B (having non-evaluative supportive people to turn to) was also mentioned by three participants using predictive relationships a total of three times.
Cause and Effect Relationships

Five of the six participants in this research study used cause and effect relationships when identifying the mechanisms linking an environmental influence to their self-efficacy to improve student achievement a total of 10 times. The participants used cause and effect relationships when describing environmental influences that directly and immediately impacted their self-efficacy. Participants specifically did this using terms such as “inspiring,” “gave me confidence,” “believe,” “showed me,” or “excites me” when discussing environmental influences through cause and effect relationships. Cause and effect relationships differed from predictive relationships because participants directly linked the environmental influence (cause) to the resulting efficacy (effect) as in predictive relationships participants postulated the effect of an environmental influence on self-efficacy.

Charles provided an example in which the environmental influence of having the right people impacted his efficacy to improve student achievement as he described his recruitment efforts of high-quality individuals. He stated, “24 [hours a day] 7 [days a week] I’m recruiting, and I’m looking for top-notch talent always. That [talented people] inspires me” (Interview, March 10, 2016). In this example Charles used a cause and effect relationship (i.e., “inspiration”) to label the mechanism linking the environmental influence of the right people to his efficacy.

In a later portion of the interview Charles described an instance that linked having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered success and his self-efficacy through a cause and effect relationship. He discussed how the data-driven process of improvement used by Nearway Elementary produced attendance data and how that data
impacted his efficacy: “So I look at that [attendance data] and it inspires me because it tells me the kids want to come to school” (Interview, March 10, 2016). For Charles, improved attendance caused his efficacy to increase because it convinced him that students wanted to come to school.

Jackie described the mechanism linking her supportive superintendent/superiors to her self-efficacy using a cause and effect relationship when she illustrated the decision-making process her district used when disciplining staff members:

I knew they [superintendent and assistant superintendent] supported my needs as principal, but even more importantly, they wanted my input before forming their own thoughts on the situations. This gave me the confidence to move forward with what I felt was best, knowing they were a sounding board for me and they had my back. (Journal Prompt # 3, June 1, 2016)

The support of her superiors gave her confidence to continue a course of action that she felt was best. Because of their support, her belief in her own ability and her decisions were positively impacted.

John also described how the support of his superintendent impacted his self-efficacy through a cause and effect relationship when he stated, “One of the things that you talk about why John Brownstone believes he can be successful is I know I have the support of my superintendent” (Interview, April 20, 2016). John attributed his superintendent’s support to making him believe he could be successful. He discussed the cause and effect relationship between his superior and his self-efficacy by stating, “The guy who hired me made me believe this was a right fit and he supported me to do it” (Interview, April 20, 2016). Both of these statements illustrate how an environmental influence directly elicited John’s belief in his abilities.
John also discussed how having the right people in his organization impacted his efficacy when he stated, “But I knew where I wanted people to get to and I knew I had the right people doing it” (Interview, April 20, 2016). In this excerpt John demonstrated how having the right people impacted his efficacy because it allowed him to be able to chart a successful path forward because, in his words, “I knew where I wanted people to get to” (Interview, April 20, 2016).

Similar to John and Jackie, Joy also connected her supportive superintendent to her self-efficacy using a cause and effect relationship. Joy described her first superintendent in her own words as “an excellent mentor superintendent, Dr. Josephine Welk [pseudonym], who really helped me a lot and helped me learn to do things the right way and to have high expectations in staff” (Interview, March 15, 2016). Joy discussed how Dr. Welk helped her and showed her how to do things the right way, which directly impacted her self-efficacy. When considering her current superintendent, Joy again used a cause and effect relationship when describing how his support impacted her self-efficacy: “My first day on the job he told me, ‘It’s your building, run it.’ Anytime I’ve called and said I want to do this and I need your support I’ve always had it” (Interview, March 15, 2016). His direct verbal support on that first day impacted her efficacy because she knew she was backed.

Charles described how seeing students succeed impacted his self-efficacy through a cause and effect relationship. Charles shared that when he visited classrooms, he saw students engaged in learning, which caused him to note “that’s the inspiration because now you’re touching the future” (Interview, March 10, 2016). Having first-hand observations of student success led Charles to say, “So I get a lot of my inspiration from my students” (Interview, March 10, 2016). Charles identified the link between seeing students succeed and his self-efficacy as direct cause
and effect via his inspiration. Charles then noted that seeing past students succeed in high school also had a cause and effect relationship on his self-efficacy:

And that excites me because now I know that child is going on to the high school and I'll have them come back and share what their experiences in high school are and have them come back and share that with the other kids. (Interview, March 10, 2016)

In this example Charles tied the success of students to his self-efficacy through a cause and effect relationship when he described his own excitement at their success.

Joy described the mechanism linking the environmental influence of seeing students succeed and her self-efficacy with a cause and effect relationship as well. When asked what contributed to her belief that she can improve the achievement of students, Joy answered,

It inspires me when I see one of our students getting their Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in stem cell research. It inspires me when I see one of our students going off and studying at Notre Dame. (Interview, March 15, 2016)

Joy labeled the direct cause and effect between seeing students succeed and her self-efficacy using the term “inspire” as the connection to her efficacy.

Participants described environmental influences as impactful to their self-efficacy through cause and effect relationships a total of 10 times. Three of the five participants acknowledged that having a supportive superintendent was impactful to their self-efficacy through a cause and effect relationship a total of four times. The participants identified seeing students succeed as impactful to their self-efficacy through a cause and effect relationship a total of three times across two participants, second most in occurrence.

Confirming Relationships

Four of the six participants in this research study employed confirming relationships a total of seven times to describe the environmental influences they found impactful to their self-
efficacy to improve student achievement and to affirm their pre-existing beliefs in their own abilities. Confirming relationships provided evidence in one’s abilities and previous decisions. Examples included seeing the success of students as confirmation in their course of action and their ability to improve student achievement as well as winning over a difficult staff member as confirmation of their ability to gain the buy-in of staff.

When describing how he felt after overcoming a difficult removal process of a staff member, John stated, “Wow. I survived. But now I understand why I survived because I was the right guy for this place, and it was right for me” (Interview, April 20, 2016). In this example, John credited the mechanism linking the environmental influence of overcoming a personnel challenge and his self-efficacy through a confirming relationship, since he was able to overcome the challenge he was the right person for the job.

John again used a confirming relationship to identify the link between the environmental influence of seeing students succeed and his self-efficacy. When John described the successful standardized test results of Water Spring High School’s students he stated,

Eventually you get to the big piece when you get ACT results or PSAE results or AP results. It’s a lot of big-ticket items that have gone by the way and I knew that was going to happen because we were doing the right thing and we were doing it the right way (Interview, April 20, 2016).

In this example John used the success of students to confirm his efficacy in the improvement process at Water Spring High School as the right thing done the right way.

Joy also identified seeing students succeed through a confirming relationship when discussing her school’s standardized test results: “So we were very pleased with our PARCC scores in reading and writing this year. We felt that what we're doing, we're doing it right (Interview, March 15, 2016). Like John, she used student success on standardized tests as
confirmation of the course of action she and her staff had plotted, which impacted her efficacy to improve student achievement.

Joy also very directly described how overcoming a personnel challenge confirmed her efficacy to improve student achievement. When discussing her success in working with a particularly difficult staff member, Joy stated, “If I can get this lady to cooperate, shoot, I can sell snow to Eskimos” (Interview, March 20, 2016). Joy then recounted the verbal confirmation she received from colleagues and her superintendent regarding the same staff member:

They would say things like ‘Jeez, Molly (pseudonym) really likes you, what did you do?’ I would say ‘Oh you just have to listen to her and work with her.’ The superintendent told me at the time, she said ‘Well congratulations, you’ve done what nobody else has ever been able to do with that woman. I hope you stick around.’ (Interview, March 15, 2016)

In this statement Joy used a confirming relationship to describe how winning over one person and the ensuing confirmation from staff members and her superior impacted her efficacy to gain the buy-in of anyone. This linking relationship is classified as confirming because she is directly quoting the feedback of others rather than assuming or predicting their thoughts.

Charles described the environmental influence of having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered success as impactful to his self-efficacy through a confirming relationship. When Charles was asked how he felt about being a part of improved student achievement, he talked first about the system of improvement: “And to get to be a part of that program or process that was tremendously successful was just…I mean a beautiful thing” (Interview, March 10, 2016). After declaring the beauty of being part of the process, Charles went on to express how his efficacy was impacted: “I get to continue to relish the great feeling of the hard work because we worked hard. Many long hours at Nearway and on weekends…experiencing success and you know you were part of giving kids these
opportunities” (Interview, March 10, 2016). Charles acknowledged the success he “relished” was a product of the improvement system and confirmed why, in his words, “I do what I do” (Interview, March 10, 2016).

Sandy also depicted the impact her schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered success had on her self-efficacy through a confirming relationship. She discussed how she felt after implementing the student intervention program at Neil Armstrong Elementary:

And that’s when it kind of started taking off and now I usually don’t even [need to] attend two of the data meetings during the year. I go to the first one and the teachers run the other two just on their own. (Interview, March 5, 2016)

Sandy described the success of the intervention program and how it ran without her immediate attention as confirmation that her course of action was successful and thus impacted her self-efficacy to improve student achievement.

Four of the six participants in this research study used confirming relationships a total of seven times to describe environmental influences impactful to their self-efficacy. Two participants described establishing a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered success a total of three times, while two other participants described overcoming a personnel challenge and seeing students succeed two times each through confirming relationships.

Seeing an Exemplar Model

Three of the six participants in this study described environmental influences as impactful to their self-efficacy to improve student achievement through the relationship of seeing an exemplar model a total of four times. The participants identified exemplar models as examples
or evidence that a successful course of action and outcome were possible. The participants credited these models as informative to their belief in a course of action to improve student achievement. Examples included seeing colleagues create sustainable programs or seeing typically underperforming students learn at high levels as a model of how to improve student achievement.

When Sandy talked about the inspiration for the intervention program she and her team built at Neil Armstrong Elementary, she recalled seeing a non-evaluative colleague present on a similar model in a different school district. When she saw the model presented, she thought “That is going to work in my school” (Interview, March 5, 2016). By seeing a successful model to emulate from a non-evaluative peer she could turn to, Sandy was able to build a similar model that was still in place 10 years after seeing the original exemplar model.

Charles used the relationship of seeing an exemplar model to describe the mechanism linking his self-efficacy to the presence of non-evaluative peers he could turn to. Charles noted one individual in particular: “I had access to him and what I saw him do was just being innovative. Innovative and thinking outside the box” (Interview, March 10, 2016). Charles later credited that person’s innovative thinking and his other colleagues with helping him become more flexible in his own thinking because he had an exemplar to emulate. For Charles and Sandy, non-evaluative peers they could turn to provided road maps of successful outcomes they both emulated.

Sandy and Paul both shared transformative experiences in which seeing students succeed provided them with exemplar models that impacted their efficacy. Sandy described the transformative experience of observing non-English-speaking students in an American school overseas. In her words, “That experience made me understand that every child can learn”
Seeing students with limited English proficiency learn at high levels impacted Sandy’s efficacy to improve student achievement because, in her words, “I can’t take excuses anymore because I saw it happen” (Interview, March 5, 2016). Paul shared a similar situation in which seeing struggling learners succeed provided a model for him and impacted his efficacy when he described his first teaching experience: “I saw firsthand. I saw how changing instruction can be better suited to student outcomes and better student learning” (Interview, March 28, 2016). That experience provided a model that impacted his efficacy because in his words, “I learned that any student from any background from any school can learn at high levels no matter what anybody says” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Both Sandy and Paul expressed self-efficacy to improve student achievement based on the exemplars they were able to observe throughout their careers.

Three participants identified environmental influences as impactful to their self-efficacy through the linking relationship of seeing an exemplar model four times. Two participants described the environmental influence support of non-evaluative peers to turn to as exemplar models twice. Two participants also acknowledged seeing students succeed as exemplar models twice.

**Summary of Research Question 2**

The data used to answer Research Question 2 were gathered from participant interviews and responses to journal prompts. In analyzing the data, it was evident that the participants used four linking relationships to describe the mechanisms through which environmental influences impacted their self-efficacy: predictive relationships (16 occurrences), cause and effect relationships (10 occurrences), confirmation relationships (7 occurrences), and seeing an
exemplar model (4 occurrences). All eight environmental influences were described at least once by one or more participants using at least one of the above linking relationships. These linking relationships provide insight into the mechanisms connecting environment and principal self-efficacy, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

This study included six participants and was driven by two research questions. This chapter detailed the findings of the data gathered during the research protocol. Three themes comprised of eight subthemes emerged in the analysis of the data gathered from the participant interviews and responses to journal prompts. These eight subthemes comprised the environmental influences identified by the six participants as impactful to their self-efficacy to perform impactful principal behaviors. Numerous instances of an environmental influence impacting the efficacy of a participant to perform an impactful behavior were uncovered through analysis of the emergent themes and subthemes. Upon further analysis, four distinct linking relationships emerged as the ways in which participants described the mechanisms linking environmental influences to self-efficacy.

The findings of this study offer specific categories and examples of environmental influences impactful to principal self-efficacy. This study goes beyond uncovering the correlations between environment and principal self-efficacy to reveal the mechanisms by which environmental influences elicit self-efficacy in principals. A discussion of the results of this study as well as implications for professional practice and future research are presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter contains a discussion of the findings from the current research study drawn from the gathered data. The emergent themes of this study will be discussed as they relate to past research in the field of principal self-efficacy and the conceptual framework of this study. The findings of the current study point to specific supports and structures that, when available, impact the self-efficacy of principals to improve student achievement. This study was based on three key findings from past research. First, principal behaviors affect student achievement (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Second, principal self-efficacy affects principal behavior (Bandura, 1997; Federici & Skaalvik, 2011, 2012; Lyons & Murphy, 1994; Marks & Printy, 2003; McCollum & Kajs, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Third, environment affects principal self-efficacy (Azah, 2014; Bandura, 1997; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Szymendera, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Specifically, the current study sought to understand which environmental influences principals found impactful to their self-efficacy and how they described the mechanisms linking those environmental influences to their self-efficacy. The findings of the current study confirm the work of previous research, offer possible explanations for holes in extant research as discussed in Chapter 2, point to recommendations for practices of principals and school districts, and provide new directions for future research to continue to broaden the field of principal self-efficacy.
The major findings of this research study confirm a critical component of self-efficacy theory, which is the malleability of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Bandura asserts that self-efficacy is a flexible and changing construct within every individual that can be enhanced or diminished as time goes on. The findings of this study confirm that self-efficacy is malleable in principals. However, this study goes further to reveal that malleable principal self-efficacy may largely be because half of the environmental influences identified in this study as impactful to principal self-efficacy are flexible and changeable by principals themselves. Findings from this study identify eight environmental influences as impactful to the self-efficacy of the participants in this research study. The identified environmental influences are listed below in order of most controllable by principals (items 1-4), moderately controllable by principals (items 5 & 6) to those not controllable by principals (items 7 & 8).

1. Having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered success
2. Having the buy-in of staff members
3. Overcoming a personnel challenge
4. Having non-evaluative peers to turn to
5. Having the right people
6. Seeing students succeed
7. Having the support and autonomy of the superintendent/superior
8. Having the support of elected officials

The first four environmental influences identified above are to a large degree within the control of practicing principals. The fifth and sixth environmental influences are also within the control of principals but to a lesser degree than the first four, but the last two environmental influences are within the control of school community stakeholders, i.e., superintendents/superiors and elected officials. These findings suggest that principal self-
efficacy is controllable to a significant degree by principals creating, enhancing, or manipulating the first four environmental influences identified to elicit principal self-efficacy as well as the next two to whatever degree possible based upon local circumstances. This research study recommends that principals would be wise to focus their efforts toward creating or enhancing the first four environmental influences within their own domains of operation and the next two to whatever extent possible. Additionally, the current study also recommends specific supports district leaders can enact or provide to principals in the field to produce an environment conducive to increased principal self-efficacy. For example, school stakeholders such as superintendents and elected officials would be wise to focus on providing or conveying support to principals when addressing personnel matters and in their school improvement efforts to create the last two environmental influences listed above. All of these actions contribute to the predictability of superintendents in the eyes of the principals which contributed to principal self-efficacy. Additionally, superintendents/superiors and other stakeholders should also focus on efforts to connect principals to supportive colleagues, mentors and other non-evaluative resources in order to enhance principal self-efficacy to improve student achievement.

The environmental influences identified in this study vary from those examined in previous studies that focused primarily on principal and school demographic factors, most of which were uncontrollable by principals. One exception is the research by Azah (2014) that identified two of the same environmental influences as this study (having non-evaluative peers to turn to and having the support and autonomy of the superintendent/superior) as impactful to principal self-efficacy. Past research has not, however, explored the other six environmental influences identified in this study as impactful to principal self-efficacy (having the right people, having the buy-in of staff members, overcoming a personnel challenge, having a schoolwide
focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered success, seeing students succeed, and having the support of elected officials).

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Research

The findings of previous research in the field of principal self-efficacy are confirmed and in some case expanded upon in this research study. Similar to previous studies, the current study confirmed the link between the environmental influences of supportive superintendents or superiors, involvement in personnel decisions, professional development, colleague networks, and principal self-efficacy. This study expands on past research by offering explicit examples of those impactful environmental influences. Where previous research focused on the correlations between environment and principal self-efficacy, this study describes the mechanisms linking environmental influences to principal self-efficacy.

Role of Supportive Superintendents/Superiors

Supportive superintendents/superiors play an equally vital role in the self-efficacy of principals when compared to principals themselves. Extant research has explored the relationship between principal self-efficacy and district office officials and superintendents (Azah, 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Azah (2014) found that “trust between district leaders and principals was critical to principals’ efficacy” (p. 259). Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) speculate that “district conditions are likely to be antecedents of leader efficacy” (p. 506). Findings from the current study confirm Azah’s (2014) finding and Leithwood and Jantzi’s (2008) speculation. Participants directly credited the explicit and implicit support of their superintendent or superiors with their efficacy to perform specific behaviors correlated to
improved student achievement. Additionally, this study found that principals with a supportive superintendent not only felt empowered to act on their own, they felt supported to create systems to improve student achievement. Having supportive superintendents allowed participants to predict success and support on initiatives that positively impacted participant self-efficacy.

The support of a superintendent is an environmental influence that is largely outside of the control of principals. Past research and findings from the current study point to ways in which principals can compensate for the absence of having a supportive superintendent/superior. Azah (2014) found that principals and superintendents built trusting relationships through collaboration on school improvement efforts. The current research study found having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement was the second most referred to environmental influence by participants as impactful to self-efficacy. These combined findings suggest principals could seek to build a supportive and trusting relationship with their superintendent/superior’s by working collaboratively to establish a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement. Jackie, the principal from Coneville High School, referenced an example where collaboration on school improvement created trust between her and her superintendent/superiors:

We’ve had a lot of support from district admin, from the board on just our RtI and supporting us. And actually more than support, a lot of freedom to do things; there’s...the whole three-semester plan was developed by the superintendent and the high school and the district was like ‘whatever you guys feel like you need.’ (Interview, March 25, 2016)

Charles, the principal of Nearway Elementary, depicted a similar experience where he was able to collaborate with his superior on school improvement:

She was like a superintendent who was over about 30 schools, and she had a system that was really deep in curriculum, and we were really monitoring data. We had various types of practice programs that helped to generate the data [which] was [then] targeted to [help create] customized instruction. (Interview, March 10, 2016)
These excerpts from Jackie and Charles represent examples of how practicing principals could establish a supportive relationship with their superintendents/superior if it does not already exist.

Azah (2014) and Leithwood, Strauss, and Anderson (2007) found principals who were given autonomy to choose their methods of enacting district initiatives reported higher levels of self-efficacy. Findings from this study also confirm the findings from past research that giving principals autonomy to act in the best interests of their respective schools is impactful to self-efficacy. This was directly illustrated when John, Sandy, Joy, and Jackie (study participants) indicated they had autonomy and support from their superintendents when enacting school improvement initiatives. This research points to principals’ confidence in predicting their superintendent’s stance or reaction as impactful to their self-efficacy to act autonomously in the best interests of the school. When principals felt confident in their superintendent’s support, they were able to envision and enact plans with successful outcomes.

For principals not fortunate enough to have the support of their superintendents/superiors, the analysis of findings from this research study points to methods that principals can use to build trust/support with their superiors. All participants in this study described frequent opportunities for dialogue with their superintendents/superiors as impactful to their self-efficacy. This study also found that opportunities for frequent dialogue often emerged as a result of a principal taking on a personnel challenge or dealing with a difficult parent. These findings suggest that principals who are willing to address personnel challenges should use the opportunity to create consistent dialogue with their superintendent/superiors and use the personnel challenge as an opportunity to build trust and support with their superintendent or superiors, as discussed in the next section.
Involvement in Personnel Decisions

Leithwood et al., (2007) found a significant correlation among districts with flexible personnel policies that allowed schools to select the best people for open positions and increased principal self-efficacy. Similar to Leithwood et al.,’s (2007) findings, McCullers and Bozeman (2010) found decreased principal self-efficacy in districts where union contracts prohibited flexible personnel policies. Findings from the current study confirm the findings of both Leithwood et al., (2007) and McCullers and Bozeman (2010) as all six participants identified having the right personnel as impactful for their self-efficacy. Five of the six participants illustrated specific examples where they were able to be flexible with personnel procedures that impacted their efficacy for other critical principal behaviors to impact student achievement.

John and Sandy identified examples where they were allowed to use personnel in ways different than other schools in their district and how that impacted their systems of improvement, which impacted their self-efficacy. Paul and Charles both identified how reorganizing their staff and hiring practices resulted in an organization better positioned to meet their unique challenges, which impacted their efficacy. The current study recommends principals become familiar with existing personnel policies in their district so they can either make informed recommendations for change or utilize the existing policies effectively. Additionally, findings from this study recommend that district leaders allow for flexible use of personnel by principals within their own schools.
Not mentioned in past research, the current study found that principal self-efficacy for improving student achievement was impacted when principals were able to directly address underperforming staff members with support from superintendents. Jackie identified having input on personnel discipline at the district level as impactful to her efficacy because she knew she had a say in how personnel matters would be handled in her school:

I knew they [superintendent and assistant superintendent] supported my needs as principal, but even more importantly, they wanted my input before forming their own thoughts on the situations. This gave me the confidence to move forward with what I felt was best, knowing they were a sounding board for me and they had my back. (Journal Prompt # 3, June 1, 2016)

These findings suggest collaboration between superintendents/superiors and principals in personnel decisions as an opportunity to build a trusting and supportive relationship.

Professional Development and Colleague Networks

Most previous research had not identified specific professional development experiences to enhance principal self-efficacy (Leithwood, Strauss & Anderson, 2007; Lovell, 2009; McCullers & Bozeman, 2010). Azah (2014) came closest by recommending professional development in data interpretation as impactful to principal self-efficacy. The current study supports Azah’s (2014) findings on the value of professional development in data interpretation as all six participants identified the importance of having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement (all of which were rooted in data interpretation to varying degrees) as impactful to self-efficacy. Joy, Sandy, Charles, Jackie, and John all specifically pointed to the availability and analysis of data as critical components to their schoolwide focus and improvement efforts. Since all five of these participants identified data and data analysis as critical to having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement, professional
development in this area would be impactful to practicing principals’ abilities to create or enhance this particular environmental influence.

While this study did not uncover specific professional development examples to enhance principal self-efficacy, it does point to skill sets to be developed through professional development that could then enhance principal self-efficacy. Specifically, professional development in developing systems of continuous school improvement and dealing with personnel challenges could give principals a skill set to create environmental influences impactful to their self-efficacy. Paul offered insight into professional development in the area of continuous school improvement that was impactful when he referred to the nearby university he and his team collaborated with on their improvement efforts. He spoke directly about the program when he stated, “I give a lot of credit to [university name omitted], their urban education leadership program that I'm a part of. I think they're phenomenal” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Paul went on to credit the university’s urban education leadership program with giving him a mentor who in his eyes gave him “really good coaching and good feedback and things to consider along the way so I don't make those mistakes that I might have made without her” (Interview, March 28, 2016). Paul also credited his affiliation with the university as the forum in which his team took annual retreats to revisit their plans for each upcoming year.

Professional development through universities or other outside agencies that give principals coaching on school improvement or a venue for school improvement could be as impactful to principals’ efforts in school improvement and significant to self-efficacy to improve student achievement. In the area of dealing with personnel challenges, of the five participants who described the environmental influence of overcoming a personnel challenge, none described a specific skill set or body of knowledge that was helpful. However, all five participants did show
a willingness to address personnel challenges when presented with them. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude professional development in how to address personnel challenges would increase principals’ likelihood to address personnel challenges when confronted with them. The current research study recommends that school districts offer professional development in the area of personnel policy and procedures so principals have a skill set and body of knowledge to access and are more likely to address personnel challenges. To overcome a personnel challenge, principals must first address the challenges. Principals would be wise to do so through creating dialogue with their superintendent/superiors (assuming the personnel challenge requires district-level collaboration), which could lead to another impactful environmental influence (having a supportive superintendent/superiors). Additionally, superintendents should note that creating consistent and open dialogue with principals around school improvement and addressing personnel concerns can greatly enhance principal self-efficacy toward improving student achievement. Increased principal-to-superintendent dialogue showed an increased ability for principals to predict the input of superintendents and to therefore act confidently and decisively even in the absence of the superintendent.

In addition to the above recommended professional development in school improvement and dealing with personnel matters, three of the six participants pointed to the value of professional development opportunities experienced with principal colleagues. All three of those participants identified learning alongside their colleagues as impactful to their self-efficacy when describing their non-evaluative peers because it created a resource they could later access for assistance.

Sandy: There’s something about being around principals that ....to me it’s like you're an island and we don't see each other often enough.
Charles: We [colleague network] would go out to a restaurant and we would sit down and have conversations and that was so important because again you're wrestling with problems and issues and challenges and someone else has done it and now we can utilize one another as a support.

Jackie: The thing that I value most about that group [of colleagues] is it’s the most authentic, humble, honest group. There is never a false arrogance of ‘I've got this figured out’ but everybody is capable of saying, ‘What are we gonna do guys? They just said we have to do this PARCC test, and how do we go about doing this?’ And just really working through those logistics which has been huge.

This finding suggests that the delivery method of professional development must be considered by professional development providers such as regional offices of education, school district leaders, universities, and other service providers along with the professional development content to be impactful to principal self-efficacy to improve student achievement. Professional development should be designed and delivered in a way that principals are able to access the content with non-evaluative colleagues facing the same challenges in a manner in which they will be able to access one another in the future. Additionally, principals should also be cognizant of the audiences at professional development venues and may be wise to attend professional development opportunities with colleagues they can later access for reflection or support regarding the content.

Low-Income Students

When considering the impact of working with low-income students on principal self-efficacy, Smith, Guarino, Strom, and Adams (2006) found a positive correlation between higher ratios of low-income students and principal self-efficacy. Their finding contradicted the researchers’ assumptions and the later findings of Lovell (2009) and McCullers and Bozeman (2010), prompting speculation from Smith et al., (2006) as to why there was a positive
correlation between high ratios of low income students and high principal self-efficacy. The current study offers guidance in that area as participants who worked with predominantly low-income students (Paul and Charles) pointed to increases in their self-efficacy when they saw low-income students succeed and learn at high levels. For example, Paul described seeing students from impoverished backgrounds excelling in school as particularly impactful to his self-efficacy because it proved that education was more powerful than any other forces at play. Charles expressed a similar sentiment when discussing the power of seeing students from a low-income community do well and learn the skills they would need to “fulfill their God-given purpose” (Interview, March 10, 2016). He credited this phenomenon as “why I do what I do” (Interview, March 10, 2016). The current study suggests that the environmental influence of seeing students succeed has more significant impact on principal self-efficacy than the income status of students and therefore may explain the conflicts in extant research around student socio-economic status and principal self-efficacy.

**Years of Service**

In addition to conflicting findings regarding low-income students and principal self-efficacy, extant research has found conflicting results regarding the relationship between principal self-efficacy and several school or personal characteristics. These include principal age, school level, student body demographics, and principal years of service (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Lovell, 2009; Lyons & Murphy, 1994; Santamaria, 2008; Smith, Guarino, Strom, & Adams, 2006; Szymendera, 2013). These conflicting findings led McCullers and Bozeman (2010) and Szymendera (2013) to assert that possible complex interactions were at play regarding principal self-efficacy. While the current study was not designed to examine any of
the above factors specifically, as they impact principal self-efficacy in a way that could be generalizable to a larger population, it did seek to determine the mechanisms linking principal self-efficacy to other variables that could provide insight into possible complex interactions.

One area of conflict in extant research is around the relationship between principal years of service and self-efficacy. Lyons and Murphy (1994) found a negative correlation between years of service and self-efficacy, while Lovell (2009) and Santamaria (2008) found positive correlations in their respective studies. The experiences of the longest and shortest tenured participants in the current study may offer illumination on this contradiction in past research.

The longest standing principal in the study (Sandy) noted how it took her years to get the right people in the right places so she could have difficult conversations with those staff members. Additionally, it took Sandy a number of years to create a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered success. Sandy indicated both of these factors (having the right people and a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement) were impactful to her self-efficacy to improve student achievement. The youngest participant in the study with the fewest years as principal (Paul) also indicated the importance of having the right people and establishing a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement. In contrast to Sandy, Paul was afforded the opportunity and supports to make those changes very quickly (his first year on the job) while Sandy did so over a number of years. Paul, like Sandy, credited both of those environmental influences with increased self-efficacy. These two juxtaposed participants may offer an explanation of the contrasts in previous research. The current study indicates that years of service may only be significant to principal self-efficacy in that a longer tenure offers more opportunity to build impactful environmental influences such as
having the right people and establishing a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement.

Summary

The current research study followed recommendations for future research (Azah, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2007; Szymendera, 2013) and allowed participants to identify environmental influences impactful to their self-efficacy rather than studying static characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and years of service. This qualitative exploration uncovered environmental influences that can be created, enhanced, or manipulated to elicit principal self-efficacy, as opposed to factors that are constant or unchangeable. Influences such as seeing students succeed, having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garners success, and having non-evaluative peers to turn to are within the control of principals and therefore can be manipulated by principals themselves to increase self-efficacy. The current study also reveals new paths to examine in regard to environmental influences impactful to self-efficacy as well as possible explanations to contradictory extant research. The environmental influences revealed in the current study offer four malleable and controllable environmental influences for principals to consider. The next section of this chapter discusses the findings of this study in relation to the theoretical framework of the study.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Theoretical Framework

Bandura’s social cognitive theory served as the theoretical framework of this study. Bandura (1997) proposes that self-efficacy affects and is affected by one’s actions and environment. Findings from the current study confirm and align with many of the provisions
found in Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory, specifically that self-efficacy is enacted by four types of experiences (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional/physiological state) and those experiences are processed with four types of thought processes (cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes).

**Connections to Efficacy-Activating Experiences**

The purpose and design of the current study was not to categorize experiences principals found impactful to self-efficacy, but rather to identify environmental influences impactful to self-efficacy. Some of the environmental influences described by participants confirm the tenets of Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory that there are four types of efficacy-enacting experiences: 1) mastery experiences, 2) vicarious experiences, 3) verbal persuasion, and 4) emotional/physiological state. This study also sought to memorialize how participants described the mechanisms through which environmental influences impacted their self-efficacy.

Participants in this study described the environmental influences they found impactful to their self-efficacy through four types of linking relationships (see Table 7). The environmental influences participants described using the linking relationship of seeing an exemplar model mirror the efficacy-enacting experiences Bandura (1997) described as vicarious experiences. Sandy and Paul described seeing the success of students prior to taking on the role of principal as an impactful experience because it showed them the possibility of students learning at high levels, regardless of other mitigating factors such as language proficiency or income level. These experiences mirrored Bandura’s (1997) description of vicarious experiences because they helped Sandy and Paul envision successful outcomes for students. Sandy also depicted a vicarious experience when she described seeing a colleague present a successful intervention
program she later duplicated in her school. This experience also mirrored vicarious experiences described by Bandura (1997) because Sandy viewed what she saw as an exemplar and later recreated a similar model.

Participants also mimicked what Bandura (1997) described as verbal persuasion when describing environmental influences such as having the support of their superintendent/superiors and having the buy-in of staff. In these examples participants frequently described environmental influences in the form of verbal feedback from teachers, colleagues, and superintendents/superiors as impactful to their self-efficacy because it directly informed participants’ perceptions of their own abilities. Examples included Joy receiving direct input from her superintendent on her first day: “My first day on the job he told me ‘It’s your building, run it.’ Anytime I’ve called and said I want to do this and I need your support I’ve always had it” (Interview, March 15, 2016). Sandy described a verbal interaction with her supportive superintendent that impacted her efficacy when she stated, “If I say I need this intervention or whatever or we need to find money for it, he will sometimes question it and then usually he’s like, ‘Well, you're doing something right over there, so okay’” (Interview, March 5, 2016). In both these interactions direct verbal affirmation from superintendents impacted both participants’ belief in their own abilities because they knew at the very least their superior supported them.

Participants also described seven experiences under the subtheme of overcoming personnel challenges (see Table 7) that upon analysis resembled the types of experiences defined by Bandura (1997) as mastery experiences. These experiences included addressing underperforming staff members, adopting new hiring practices, having difficult conversations with staff members, and winning over staff members. Participants described increased efficacy as a result of those experiences. John in particular described the impact of addressing an
underperforming staff member and his resultant beliefs: “But it really taught me that if you have
courage and if you stick to things, people will see and people will know and you have to be
patient and you have to have a thick skin” (Interview, April 20, 2016). Jackie similarly
expressed overcoming a personnel challenge as a mastery experience when she stated,

I was fortunate and unfortunate that there was a thing that ‘Jackie took charge of this and
we’re going to be okay’ and I think that also kind of calmed some fears and they needed
to know someone was in charge. Someone was in charge and someone had a vision. It
was good to model that right away. (Interview, March 25, 2016)

Both John and Jackie demonstrated the positive outcomes of overcoming a difficult task in the
form of addressing underperforming personnel and their resultant beliefs in the skills and lessons
they learned.

Emotional arousal is the fourth type of experience Bandura (1997) identified under social
cognitive theory as impactful to self-efficacy. Findings of this study confirm this component of
social cognitive theory, particularly when participants described the environmental influence of
seeing students succeed. Participants described this environmental influence as inspiring,
motivating, and affirming to their chosen profession and their perceived abilities to improve
student achievement. Both Joy and Charles used the term “inspire” when describing students
going on to secondary or higher educational experiences and how that motivated them to
continue their work. Paul and Sandy also depicted experiences that can be classified as
emotional arousal when describing how seeing children from low socio-economic backgrounds
or with limited English proficiency stirred their emotions. Sandy demonstrated this when she
stated, “I can't take excuses anymore because I saw it happen. That was just an amazing thing
for me” (Interview, March 5, 2016). Paul expressed a similar sentiment about his emotional
reaction during his time as a classroom teacher: “They [his old school] were actually able to
change outcomes for kids because they were well organized. That inspired me to go into educational administration” (Interview, March 28, 2016).

Findings from the current study confirm the four types of experiences defined by Bandura (1997) as impactful to participant self-efficacy. The current study also provides specific examples of these four types of experiences through participant narrative. While findings from this study do not expand on or refute the underpinnings of Social Cognitive Theory, it does provide specific examples of experiences impactful to principal self-efficacy, something in short supply from past research (Leithwood et al., 2007; Lovell, 2009).

**Thought Processes**

Bandura (1997) described four types of thought processes individuals use when processing experiences and determining their impact on self-efficacy. These four processes are 1) cognitive, 2) motivational, 3) affective, and 4) selection. Participants in the current study provided examples of cognitive, affective, and selection thought processes enacting self-efficacy.

Bandura (1997) described cognitive processes as the thoughts one has when determining courses of action toward successful outcomes. Bandura asserts that individuals with high self-efficacy cognitively envision positive outcomes and construct courses of action accordingly. The findings of the current study confirm those assertions as five of the six participants described envisioning and implementing visions that resulted in successful outcomes. Participants did so when describing the sub theme of having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered successful results.

Joy: This is a commitment, we're all doing this. Get on board and enjoy it and work with it or go find another job [describing a school improvement initiative].
Sandy: *That* is going to work in my school. That is going to be hard but it is going to work [describing an intervention program].

John: That was a personal goal of mine to make it a meaningful school improvement process [reflecting on the success of his school’s improvement process].

Charles: The vision was that we're going to really put in place a rigorous curriculum and that we're not going to take our kids from a deficit standpoint but we'll look at our kids from a strength-based approach.

Paul: The theory of action [school improvement plan] is part of who I am and what I value and so every single team works to make themselves better.

These excerpts from participants regarding their school improvement efforts provide examples of individuals envisioning successful outcomes and persevering through difficulties to make success a reality. Principals would be wise to develop courses of action with successful outcomes in mind and to communicate and persevere in those courses of action through their systems of improvement, as demonstrated by the above excerpts.

Motivational thought process is defined by Bandura (1997) as one’s cognitive foresight regarding state of attainment and setting of future goals. Individuals with high self-efficacy set more challenging goals than their less efficacious counterparts. Within the concept of motivational thought processes Bandura (1997) asserts that individuals with low self-efficacy attribute failure to a lack of their own ability or to the conditions around them. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) confirmed this when they found principals with low self-efficacy blamed other people for their own failures. The findings of the current study cannot confirm or refute this component of Social Cognitive Theory as individuals were not asked to describe failures and none offered specific examples of attributing failures to others or their own lacking abilities.
Affective thought processes are described under Bandura’s (1989) social cognitive theory as the ability individuals believe they possess to control their environment. Bandura (1989) asserts that the more individuals control their environment, the more likely they are to have high levels of self-efficacy. The efficacious participants in the current study expressed belief in some control over their environments when describing supportive superintendent/superiors. This study demonstrates that affective thought processes, as described by Bandura (1997), can be triggered by explicit or implicit control given from supportive superintendents/superiors to principals as evidenced by the following quotes:

Joy: My first day on the job he [superintendent] told me ‘It’s your building, run it.’ ...anytime I’ve called and said I want to do this and I need your support I’ve always had it.

Sandy: I am given leeway to try new programs, interventions, etc. Sometimes they develop into something we all do, sometimes I drop them.

John: I don’t ask permission [from the superintendent] for stuff like that [staffing changes].

Charles: Over the course of the last month just being able to bring on board outstanding diverse learning teachers, so that was another part of what we were really working hard on at Nearway.

Paul: I'm really fortunate that she [supervisor] has given me a lot of autonomy and doesn't really manage me too much.

Jackie: It’s rare as a high school administrator, I think, that we have the freedom to do what we are doing.

The above quotes provide tangible examples of how affective thought processes manifest in principals when afforded the environmental influence of a supportive superintendent/superior.

It should be noted that supportive superintendents/superiors are not the only way in which principals can demonstrate control over their environment. Four of the eight environmental influences identified in the current study are within the control of principals to
enhance, manipulate, or influence. Affective thought processes in principals can be enacted without the support of superintendents or superiors. By assuming a leading role in their respective school improvement processes, principals can enact self-efficacy through affective thought processes as demonstrated by the approach John described:

So the [school improvement] process has integrity. It has...people go through it knowing that in the end we're going to have something that's going to make a difference. We're really good about...I'm really good about helping other people keep the rest of their plate. (Interview, April 20, 2016)

By exercising control over his improvement process John was able to later use that process to enact a literacy initiative he later described as “our most impactful initiative” (Interview, April 20, 2016). By exercising control over any of the four environmental influences identified as controllable by principals (having a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garnered success, having the buy-in of staff members, overcoming a personnel challenge, having non-evaluative peers to turn to), school leaders can enact self-efficacy through affective thought processes.

Selection processes refer to the choices individuals make. Bandura (1989, 1997) asserts individuals with high self-efficacy select challenging environments while those with low self-efficacy select less challenging environments. The findings of this study align with Bandura’s assertion as the participants in the current study described challenging situations they took on, particularly in the subtheme of overcoming personnel challenges. Each of these five participants (Charles, John, Jackie, Paul, and Joy) described personnel challenges that when overcome resulted in increased self-efficacy. Charles described changing hiring practices at Nearway Elementary and the resulting efficacy he had from hiring dynamic staff members. John and Jackie described the difficult removals of staff members and the resulting efficacy they
experienced from having overcome those challenging situations. Joy similarly expressed efficacy after she won over a difficult staff member, a challenge she took on despite warnings from colleagues. Finally, Paul described the efficacy he felt as a result of the leadership structure he was able to implement, which required a dramatic restructuring he undertook in his first year as principal. The choices these five participants made to confront personnel challenges resulted in experiences and conditions that increased their efficacy. These examples provide specific instances of selection processes affecting self-efficacy. It should be noted that the individuals in the current study were highly self-efficacious. The current study did not determine if they took on personnel challenges because they were already highly efficacious or if taking on those challenges caused increased self-efficacy. Regardless, the current study recommends practicing principals show a willingness to confront challenges presented to them.

Limitations

This study was limited by two specific factors. The first limitation was the size of the participant sample. While the six participants for this study provided rich examples relevant to the field of principal self-efficacy, the results of this study are not meant to be generalizable to a larger population. Specifically, the disproportionate representation of high school principals in this study (four of the six participants) may make it difficult to generalize results to elementary and middle school principals as a whole. Additionally, this study was limited by subjectivity of the participants and the researcher. Charmaz (2014) underscores the probability that some events depicted in participant interviews and journal prompts are open to bias and alternative versions that create a representation favorable to the participant. Additionally, the interpretations and analysis of participant-provided data are subject to researcher interpretation, synthesis, and
ultimately bias. As described in Chapter 3, the researcher took measures to mitigate these limitations by providing thick and rich descriptions of the participants’ depictions as well as sharing transcripts with the participants prior to analysis and using educational peers for debriefing to minimize researcher bias.

Recommendations for the Field

Findings from this research study confirm the important role self-efficacy plays in whether or not principals will perform the behaviors research has identified as impactful to improved student achievement. The current study identified eight impactful environmental influences to principal self-efficacy. The current study presents recommendations principals can enact themselves to elicit increased self-efficacy, as well as recommendations for other stakeholders, particularly superintendents/superiors, to enact to increase self-efficacy in principals.

The findings of this research study identify two areas in which specific principal professional development could be impactful to self-efficacy. The first area of professional development is in addressing personnel challenges. Participants in this study indicated an ability and willingness to navigate difficult personnel situations as impactful to their self-efficacy. School districts should take note and design professional development specific to personnel management so individual principals have a skill set and knowledge base to meet and overcome these challenges. These professional development experiences should center on district level-policies and procedure as well as strategies for dealing with difficult or sensitive personnel matters. Professional development in these specific areas will increase the likelihood of principals addressing personnel challenges and therefore creating the environmental influence of overcoming a personnel challenge.
School districts and principal preparation programs should also consider professional development in data analysis as it relates to developing a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garners successful results. Participants in this study identified strong systems of continuous school improvement as impactful to their efficacy, all of which were rooted to some degree in data analysis. Specifically, school districts should provide data analysis skill development in regards to the student data on which principals and schools will be evaluated. Both Paul and Charles referred to working with outside resources (Paul’s university partnership and Charles’s supervisor) when analyzing the data used to inform their school improvement efforts. Both also referred to the sources of data that informed their school ratings (level 1 through 3) and how data regarding their rating was important and impactful to them. Both Joy and Jackie expressed concern at a lack of data clarity for Illinois high schools in the future, as both were uncertain if the ACT data their schools had been collecting would be available pending state changes to the testing systems for high schools. Districts would be wise to focus principal professional development on the gathering and analysis of the data on which they will be evaluated so their improvement efforts can be aligned to those data points.

All participants in this study expressed the importance of having the explicit support of their superintendents and superiors and having the right people on their respective staffs. The importance of these two environmental influences (having the support of the superintendent/superior and having the right people) present a two-pronged opportunity for superintendents to support principals. Superintendents may demonstrate explicit support of principals by allowing them autonomy in personnel decisions when possible, thereby simultaneously creating two of the impactful environmental influences found in this study: having the support of their superintendent/superior and having the right people. While this study
does not recommend wholesale removals or replacement of school staff as a way to improve student achievement, it does suggest that support from superintendents on matters of personnel autonomy could have a dual benefit in creating principal self-efficacy. If principals do not or cannot have the support of their superintendent/superiors, they should focus their efforts on environmental influences within their control. One example would be finding ways to gain the buy-in of staff members as well focusing on developing a schoolwide focus through a system of continuous improvement that garners success. Responses from all participants in this study indicated principal attention to detail and processes in these two areas paid dividends to principal self-efficacy to improve student achievement.

The participants in this study all described examples of seeing students succeed as confirming of their practices or inspiring them in their roles. Practicing principals would be wise to create systematic and frequent opportunities to observe, engage with, and speak with students. By visiting classrooms and observing students, principals will create more opportunities to observe student success, which in turn will impact principal self-efficacy. Participants described seeing students succeed as an opportunity to see exemplar models of learning as well as an opportunity for inspiration and affirmation of their roles. Examples included the interactions Charles described where seeing student learning inspired him or John’s observations of successful classroom experiences confirming the improvement initiatives he and his team enacted.

While many of these recommendations can be enacted by principals themselves, research indicates that non-efficacious individuals are less likely to take such steps (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, district-level leaders would be wise to create principal networks both within and outside of their districts in order to connect principals with one another and to mandate continued
follow-up among principal networks. District leaders could create the connections between principal networks by providing professional development in the recommended areas (personnel policy and data interpretation) and requiring structured debriefings with principals to ensure networks remain connected. Additionally, district leaders should consider providing a framework through which principals observe students, which affords principals ample opportunity to observe student success. This could be structured recognition of student achievements or district-designed observation protocols in which principals examine high achieving students. By providing these supports, district leaders can create opportunities for less efficacious principals to be exposed to environmental influences impactful to their self-efficacy (i.e., having non-evaluative peers to turn to and seeing students succeed).

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study followed recommendations from extant research for more qualitative approaches to the field (Lovell, 2009; Santamaria, 2008; Szymendera, 2013). A preponderance of past research was focused on identifying the presence of self-efficacy in principals and then attempting to trace the antecedents or causes of that self-efficacy. This study started with participants who self-reported high levels of self-efficacy to improve student achievement and had been recognized for their ability to do so by the Illinois Interactive Report Card. By beginning with the presence of efficacy and then qualitatively exploring the causes of efficacy and the links between those causes and principal self-efficacy, this research study is able to offer new areas for future examination.

Future researchers should look to examine a larger pool of participants. Due to the resource limitations of this study it was not possible to gather a larger pool of participants. A
qualitative exploration of more principals would allow researchers to focus on differences between diverse groups of principals and to examine the differences between principal levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school). While this study did examine principals from all three school levels it was not sufficient in size to gather any themes or explanations around the impact of school level on principal self-efficacy. A larger participant pool would also offer insight into the validity of the themes and linking relationships uncovered in this research study. Additionally, future research should examine larger cross sections of principals from varying levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school). The current study only included one elementary school principal due to a lack of respondents from the original pool of possible participants. Future research should examine the contrasts between principals of differing school levels to identify variances in sources of self-efficacy.

Participants identified supportive networks of non-evaluative peers to turn to as impactful to self-efficacy because of the problem-solving resources and alternative perspectives provided. Additionally, participants expressed the impact of seeing their colleagues succeed in a course of action on their enhanced self-efficacy. Future research focused on the ways these connections can be built and further utilized to enhance principal self-efficacy would help to further the field. Future research should explore the impact of connecting principals to supportive colleague networks and ways in which networks of principals can form and be sustained.

Future researchers should also explore the concept of principal and school match. Two participants in this research study brought up the concept of being a match for their respective schools. While this concept did not rise to the level of a theme or subtheme, it did coincide with recommendations from Azah (2014) that school districts carefully consider principal placement in schools they are appropriately suited to lead. This concept of match warrants deeper
exploration into its impact on principal self-efficacy and resulting behaviors. Future research around what school and principal characteristics constitute a match or how districts can create the sense of a match between schools and principals and the result on self-efficacy could expand the field of principal self-efficacy.

Researchers in the field of principal self-efficacy should also examine the qualitative method employed in the current study and expand upon the interview protocol utilized (Appendix B). Qualitative methods designed to confirm, refute, or expand upon the themes and subthemes identified in the current study would enhance the field of principal self-efficacy by offering additional specific examples of how environment is linked to self-efficacy, as opposed to correlational studies currently dominating extant research. Specifically, qualitative methods designed around the eight identified environmental influences would serve as validation of the findings of the current study. In addition to interview protocols designed around the findings of this study, future research should examine the value in focus-group interviewing of principals to identify if any themes emerge or are built upon when principals can dialogue with one another.

In Illinois the concept of student achievement should be examined by future researchers. As Illinois continues to refine and limit the role of PARCC assessments while simultaneously moving away from ACT to SAT for high school accountability, future researchers should examine the ways in which principals define student achievement and how the current state of ambiguity around standardized testing and school accountability impact principal self-efficacy. As the requirements and definitions of student achievement change, future researchers should examine how this impacts principal self-efficacy.

Future researchers would be wise to examine more deeply the connections between district office leaders (specifically superintendents) and principals and the impact on self-
efficacy. Past research (Azah, 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008) uncovered the significance of supportive superintendents/superiors, but the connections between supportive superintendents and principal self-efficacy were focused on conditions of leadership and organizational structures. Findings from this study point to frequent dialogue as well as principals and superintendents supporting one another in trying times as the linking mechanisms between supportive superintendents/superiors and principal self-efficacy. Future research focused on discourse analysis between principals and superintendents may uncover more generalizable examples of how superintendents can create efficacy-eliciting environmental influences around principals. Future research should also examine the role of supportive superintendents/superiors in large urban school districts. Two participants in this study (Paul and Charles) worked in a large urban school district, and while they did have superiors who functioned similarly to superintendents, the unique dynamics between large-district office leadership and principal self-efficacy warrant future investigation.

Conclusion

This research study focused on exploring the environmental influences impactful to principal self-efficacy. Past research and findings point to an increase in the responsibilities and expectations placed upon principals in the 21st century. It is the intention of the current study to find new avenues of support for principals to meet the demands placed upon them in sustainable and effective ways. The field of principal self-efficacy is a burgeoning area that may offer principals a form of much needed support. Findings from the current study will hopefully expand the dialogue around impactful environmental influences for principals and contribute to understanding the complexities around principal self-efficacy. Given the high stakes of
American public education, it is imperative that principals receive timely and effective supports to improve the achievement of all students. Hopefully this research study is but a small step in continuing that important conversation.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT EMAIL SCRIPT
Dear __________________________,

My name is Will Dwyer, and I am a doctoral candidate in the field of Curriculum and Instruction at Northern Illinois University. I am researching principal self-efficacy toward the improvement of student achievement. The purpose of this study is to explore the environmental influences school principals identify as impactful to their self-efficacy to improve student achievement. The intent of this research is to build better understanding of what type of supports and experiences can help principals navigate their positions in order to improve student achievement.

I am currently looking for six participants to interview and observe, and your school’s recognition as an Academic Improvement Award winner (as identified by the Illinois Report Card) qualifies you as a principal who has overseen the improvement of student achievement, which makes you an ideal candidate for my proposed study. If you are interested in participating in the proposed study of principal self-efficacy to improve student achievement please complete the survey found through the attached link. If interested, please complete and submit the survey no later than January 8th, 2016. If selected, I will contact you no later than January 19th, 2016 to confirm your participation and to arrange a time to meet.

Please know your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated and your privacy and anonymity will be my first priority at all times. If you have questions do not hesitate to email me or call me directly.

Yours in Education,

Will Dwyer

(773)485-1588
Participant Survey of Interest

Name

What is the name of the school where you currently work?

Which below description best describes your school?
If none of the choices accurately describe your school please select "other" and describe your school.

- Elementary School (grades pre Kindergarten-5th)
- Middle School (Grades 6-8)
- High School (Grades 9-12)
- Elementary School (Grades Kindergarten-5th Grade)
- Other:

When did you first become principal of the school named above?
If you do not know the exact date, please enter just the year.

Are you currently the principal of your school?

- Yes
- No

If you are no longer principal of the above school, when did you leave that position?
If you do not know the exact date, please enter just the year.

Are you interested in participating in a study regarding the role of the principal in improving student achievement?

- Yes
- No

Would you be willing to participate in an interview (at a location of your choosing) that would last from 60-90 minutes as part of this study?

- Yes
- No
Would you be willing to complete three to five responses to journal prompts (approximately 5 minutes for each response) as part of this study?

- Yes
- No
- Other:

**Self-Efficacy Questions**
*(As constructed by Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004)*

The following 18 questions are designed to gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create challenges for principals in their school activities. Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking one of the nine responses in the columns on the right side. The scale response range from "None at all" (1) to "A Great Deal" (9), with "Some Degree" (5) representing the mid-point between these low and high extremes. You may choose any of the nine possible responses, since each represents a degree on the continuum. Your answers are confidential. Please response to each of the questions by considering the combination of your current ability, resources, and opportunity to do each of the following in your present position.

1. **In your current role as principal, to what extent can you facilitate student learning in your school?**

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

   Not at all  A Great Deal

2. **In your current role as principal, to what extent can you generate enthusiasm for a shared vision for the school?**

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

   Not at all  A Great Deal

3. **In your current role as principal, to what extent can you hand the time demands of the job?**

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
4. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you manage change in your school? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

5. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you promote school spirit among a large majority of the student population? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

6. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you create a positive learning environment in your school? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

7. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you raise student achievement on standardized tests? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

8. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you promote a positive image of your school with the media? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
9. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you motivate teachers? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ A Great Deal

10. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you promote the prevailing values of the community in your school? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ A Great Deal

11. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you maintain control of your own daily schedule? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ A Great Deal

12. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you shape the operational policies and procedures that are necessary to manage your school? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ A Great Deal

13. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you handle effectively the discipline of students in your school? *
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14. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you promote acceptable behaviors among students? *

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15. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you handle the paperwork required of the job? *

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16. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you promote ethical behavior among school personnel? *

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17. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you cope with the stress of the job? *

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18. In your current role as principal, to what extent can you prioritize among competing demands of the job? *

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Demographic Questions

Responses to the following questions will be kept confidential.

What is your date of birth?

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other
- I choose not to answer

What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic or Latino
- White (Non-Hispanic)
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Two or More Races
- I choose not to respond
- Other: [ ]
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND GUIDE
Interviewee:

Affiliated School and District:

Date, Time and Location:

Physical Description of Setting:

Instructions to the Interviewer: (Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2011)
- Have participant sign the consent form if not already done.
- Remind participant the interview will be audio recorded. Assure participant that audio-tapes will be destroyed after defense and ask if there are any concerns with audio taping (If there are concerns, proceed in whatever manner makes the participant most comfortable. If the ideal manner for the participant is not conducive to the study then cancel the interview and eliminate the participant from the study).
- Remind participant the purpose of the study (to gain deeper understanding of the environmental influences on self-efficacy in principals).
- Congratulate participant on their school’s academic success and remind them of why their award status makes them an ideal participant for this study.
- Remind participant that participation is voluntary and if they are uncomfortable at any time they can elect to end the interview.

Warm-up Questions: (Merriam, 2009)
- Please describe your educational background beginning with your teacher preparation program. (Make sure participants include how they became principal of their school)
- What made you want to become a principal?

Key Questions in bold faced type; probing questions beneath each key question: (Yin, 2011)

- What has been an important contribution to your school’s academic achievement success that you have made within the last two years?
- Who or what helped you make that contribution?
- What was difficult about making that contribution?
- Did anything or anyone hinder you from making that contribution?
- What else have you done to improve student achievement in your school in the last two years? (This question may be used until answers are saturated)

- Who or what helped you make that contribution?

- What was difficult about making that contribution?

- Did anything or anyone hinder you from making that contribution?

- What have some of your colleagues done in the last two years to improve student achievement that seems effective to you?

- Will you do some of those same things? Why or why not?

- What might be difficult about doing what your colleague(s) have done?

- Who or what might you need to help you do what your colleague(s) have done?

- What things in your working environment (i.e. people, conditions, resources) make you feel empowered to improve student achievement?

- How exactly do you feel those aspects of your environment are present?

- How exactly do you feel when those aspects of your environment are absent?
APPENDIX C

SUBTHEMES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Formulated Meaning to Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So I picked the right people</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>Confirming the presence of the right people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>But when you have teacher leaders in a building who don't have formal</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>The right people in the right position can be effective.</td>
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<td>titles much more likely that they will have ability to move a group from</td>
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<td>point A to point B</td>
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<td>But I knew where I wanted people to get to and I knew I had the right</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 6</td>
<td>Knew he had the right people.</td>
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<td>people doing it and I gave them, found them the right time. I supported</td>
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<td>them, and you know in this job, support is the right word</td>
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<tr>
<td>We hire great people and I spend an inordinate amount of time screening</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 13-14</td>
<td>He has great people as a result of hiring.</td>
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<td>people thinking about whose best for our community. Whose best for our</td>
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<td>staff, whose best for our kids. Hiring and retaining the best teachers</td>
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<td>are my number 1 job.</td>
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<td>But it’s the hiring process and the faith that I have in others and the</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 14</td>
<td>They hire really well and don’t have dead weight.</td>
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<td>faith that they have in me that you know, when you have 20 teachers on</td>
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<td>your staff you can’t have one that dead weight. You can’t. It’s too</td>
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<td>much. Its 5%. So we hire really well and that’s my job.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 14</td>
<td>The people in the organization work hard and are good for kids.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 14</td>
<td>They have a team built around kids.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>She got the right people in the right places.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>Right people, now in the right places/teams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 12</td>
<td>Losing the right people by not having certified staff in reading positions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 12</td>
<td>Not having the right people is a hindrance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 13-14</td>
<td>Couldn’t run her building without the right people/teachers she has.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 14</td>
<td>The right people step up for her.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 16</td>
<td>It took her years to get the right people where they need to be.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Interview; p. 14</td>
<td>Enough people passionate about the school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Interview; p. 9</td>
<td>Enough people with a desire to make it a better place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have to say it’s my staff and my assistant principal.</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 12</td>
<td>In response to a question about what sustains her: The people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and I think that makes us [whole staff] feel like we can do anything that needs to get done</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 12</td>
<td>Whole staff has a sense of ability to accomplish anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our teachers here are phenomenal. They're second to none. They are hard working. They are experts in their fields and in their respective disciplines and they're constantly seeking to better themselves</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 2</td>
<td>Phenomenal staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it’s really a no brainer for me to want to be a principal of a school like that</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 2</td>
<td>Made sense to be a principal of a school with a staff as good as what he describes above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I think another critical thing is hiring two assistant principals right as we came in. And those two hires were critical</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 6</td>
<td>Two assistant principals are part of the right people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you don't have the right people in the right places and you don't know how to retain the right people in the right places and get the wrong people out, you know that’s critical and I look back often and say well, if it wasn't for this person and this person in this area we wouldn't have been successful or as successful.</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 7</td>
<td>Emphasizes the importance of having the right people in the right places.</td>
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<tr>
<td>But I think back too, I think it’s not me it’s bringing in the right people to get the work done.</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 7</td>
<td>Bringing the right people on board is critical to getting work done.</td>
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<td>Quote</td>
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<td>We had high quality staff members who were able to get the kids to understand that its relevant, you know. That algebra is you know, not something you'll never use.</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 6</td>
<td>High quality staff members were critical to improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/7 I'm recruiting and I'm looking for top notch talent always. That inspires me. so when I can.... I’m working on another staff member joining our staff. As a matter of fact, I'm going to start the transfer process tonight. And I'm excited about that. Because right now what we're working on is building our primary department and inviting this young lady in, she'll afford us with the opportunity to address students' basic skill needs in a preventive manner as opposed to an intervention manner.</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 13</td>
<td>Having top notch talent and the right people is critical to his efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So that was a testament of how impactful, how staff members could take on a leadership role themselves and utilize the limited resources that we had in extremely efficient manner.</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 5</td>
<td>The right people, staff. can take on leadership roles.</td>
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<td><strong>Sub Theme B: Having the Buy in of Staff</strong></td>
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<td>I worked side by side with the teachers and when the teachers realized that I was putting in as much work as they were, they were all about it.</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 2-3</td>
<td>Sensed she had the buy in of staff members by working with them side by side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I think the other thing is you have to get buy in from your staff.</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 5</td>
<td>Depicting her belief in the importance of staff buy-in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you don't have that kind of personality, that makes people want to work with you and have to show them you're a team player you're going to drown and be dead in the water.</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 5</td>
<td>People wanting to work with her is critical to survival.</td>
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<td>they sensed that I really did know some things, I really did understand their struggles. I think that’s really important.</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 5</td>
<td>They [the staff] sensed that she understood them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The superintendent told me at the time she said ‘well congratulations, you've done what nobody else has ever been able to do with that woman. I hope you stick around.’</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 7</td>
<td>She received feedback from her superior that she had won the buy-in of a difficult staff member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So I will say that what was huge at Faraday was #1 recruitment of staff members who bought into the vision.</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 6</td>
<td>Having staff who bought into the vision was important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers are always saying ‘I totally can't believe you made this work in our schedule.’ I know, it’s all I do in the summer. Dream schedules up.</td>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 10</td>
<td>She re-told an experience of staff expressing their disbelief at he ability to create a schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have to ensure that you do things in a way that allows for buy in. I have to have good relationships with my team members. I can't come across as being the person who know everything and this is the way it’s going to be. Otherwise it’s not a team, but it’s a top down model that’s not authentic. You've got to fight that. You don't want everything to be compliance you want it to be authentic and meaningful.</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 5</td>
<td>Describes a leadership philosophy that allows for buy in of staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>And I think also by having a broad base of support too I'm able to get things done in a much faster way than I would be able to otherwise. Because I have people who will go above and beyond for me because we have those relationships and if we didn't have those relationships then I'd be wasting my time doing a lot of stuff that I shouldn't be doing probably.</td>
<td>Paul Interview; p. 8</td>
<td>He has people who will go above and beyond for him. He implies he has buy-in from staff.</td>
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<td>I've got people in here who just simply buy into this stuff and made it their responsibility to learn about it and not only share it with their kids in their classroom but with other teachers.</td>
<td>John Interview; p. 7</td>
<td>He has staff who buy-in.</td>
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<td>But on the other side came a staff who believed that I was the right person for the job.</td>
<td>John Interview; p. 9</td>
<td>He describes the belief her staff have in her.</td>
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<td>So I think there is a huge level of trust that the community, students and the staff have in me.</td>
<td>Jackie Interview; p. 17</td>
<td>Postulates at the trust of the staff, students and community in her.</td>
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<td>I know that in the end people are going to back me, they're going to be my teammate, they're going to support me and all those things.</td>
<td>John Interview; p. 13</td>
<td>In this excerpt he describes the belief that staff support him and back him i.e. buy-in.</td>
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Sub Theme C: Overcoming a Personnel Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Witness</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Interview; p. 17-18</td>
<td>After I took office that next year, there was some concerns with our direct of athletics. And everybody knew I was very much part of that. So any naysayers or questioners I was fortunate and unfortunate that there was a thing that Jackie took charge of this and we're going to be okay and I think that also kind of calmed some fears and they needed to know someone was in charge. Someone was in charge and someone had a vision. It was good to model that right away. The way she addressed a personnel challenge gained her credibility with staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4-5</td>
<td>So what I decided to do was hire a brand new ILT...not hire but recruit from the teaching pool. So I did that. Got brand new teacher leaders in. Initiated a restructure of the instructional leadership team.</td>
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<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>He was a cynic. Let’s just call him that. He was very cynical about change. So he also liked...as far as I knew he was trying to impress me a little bit. So he agreed to go and he actually came back and became one of the biggest cheerleaders and really thought that what she said was so practical. Described the challenge of converting a cynic.</td>
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<td>The other challenge was just staff. Because we were a small school and we received funding based upon the number of students we had enrolled. And so you know, it could be one teacher out if you lose a whole day (of enrollment) and you're moving people around. the way we responded to that is that every interview I had after that it was always thinking cost and in terms of being cost effective. It was always looking at people and candidates and how versatile and flexible they were.</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview, p. 7</td>
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<td>My initial hurdle in this district was getting over the fact that I was releasing a very popular teacher for good reason. But not for reasons I could publicize. And the first year there were students out there picketing me.</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>But it really taught me that if you have courage and if you stick to things people will see and people will know and you have to be patient and you have to have a thick skin. And all that stuff. But it was a little</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>The easy answer is that getting a few wins gives you some confidence</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 17</td>
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# THEME 2: Supportive People

## Sub Theme A: Non-Evaluative People to Turn to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Formulated Meaning to Theme</th>
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<td>So it’s that once a month as well as any time stuff is coming up and sometimes people will ask a question and I’ll think I’ve never thought about that but I should and now I’ve got all the resources to answer that question. So that has been really big</td>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Interview; p. 12</td>
<td>knowing she has a colleague network is comforting.</td>
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<td>the thing that I value most about that group is its the most authentic, humble, honest group. There is never a false arrogance of &quot;I've got this figured out&quot; but everybody is capable of saying &quot;what are we gonna do guys? they just said we have to do this PARCC test and how do we go about doing this?&quot; and just really working through those logistics which as been huge</td>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Interview; p. 12</td>
<td>The dynamic of the colleague cohort makes her feel she can access its resources.</td>
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<td>And through the organization I have a leadership coach so my leadership coach is Dr. Cynthia Pharren. She's a former principal of 2 schools in Chicago and she's also a former AAIO (or what are they called? Chief of Schools, kind of like superintendents)</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 6</td>
<td>Mentor/coach as a system of support through University relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Interview; p. 6</td>
<td>Coaching dynamic causes reflection and prevents mistakes</td>
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<td>Paul</td>
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<td>She's is able to give me really good coaching and good feedback and things to consider along the way so I don't make those mistakes that I might have made without her coaching.</td>
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<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 18</td>
<td>She likes working with colleagues on same issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 18</td>
<td>She likes working with colleagues on same issues.</td>
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<td>I look forward to administrators meetings that we have. Um, we seem like we get to a certain time of year, right before January, the weeks between November and February where we don't have as many of them, we're really busy and I really miss that sitting in the same room. Everybody whose got the same sort of focus and the same issues, you know whether it be custodians or whatever it is we're talking about.</td>
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<td>Colleague cohort lessens a feeling of isolation.</td>
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<td>there’s something about being around principals that .....to me its like you're an island and we don't see each other often enough to be able to say, what are you doing? Even though we are together we're solving problems, or management issues, talking to each other about student achievement, how do we make this work and that kind of thing. I want more of that.</td>
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and we went to an RtI conference in Illinois somewhere and they, the person was talking about this having a time in your day when all of the kids at the grade level went to an RtI group and I just thought that’s what we're going to do

| sandy | interview; p. 9 | seeing a colleague describe a successful idea helped her decide. |

let’s go back to the first one, which was again, principal younger than I was, but again he was extremely successful and I had access to him and what I saw him do was just being innovative. Innovative in thinking outside the box.

| charles | interview; p. 10 | seeing a mentor be innovative |

so, yeah, that was huge and that really led to us being able to speed up the success that took place at faraday because he and I would spend hours on the phone at night kind of strategizing different approaches to deal with personnel issues, um, addressing concerns with students, parents, and so on.

| charles | interview; p. 11 | access to a mentor helped speed up success at his school |

experience I had excellent mentor superintendent, Dr. Jodi Ware

| joy | interview; p. 1 | had an excellent mentor |

who really um, helped me alot and helped me learn to do things the right way and to have high expectations in staff

<p>| joy | interview; p. 1 | mentor showed her how to do things right. |</p>
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<th>Statement</th>
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<th>Formulated Meaning to Theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>My first day on the job he told me &quot;it’s your building, run it&quot;. He...anytime I’ve called and said I want to do this and I need your support I've always had it</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview, p. 11</td>
<td>Explicitly stated support from superintendent</td>
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<tr>
<td>But he's very supportive and he's you know, he understands the community and he also knows what the short comings are and any way he can support you and help you....and he's like this with all of us. You know, he's behind you 100% and he ends every conversation with &quot;what do you need?&quot; &quot;Can I get you anything?&quot;. So i just think we have a pretty open relationship and I respect him and I feel confident that he respects me and its a very professional relationship. I mean we'll joke around but it’s ... I think it’s all about the communication. And having the same vision.</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 11-12</td>
<td>Respect and communication and support are evidenced in conversations.</td>
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<td>My boss is chief of schools. she has 40 schools she manages. I’m one of them. I'm really fortunate that she has given me a lot of autonomy and doesn't really manage me too much.</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 10</td>
<td>Fortunate for the autonomy her superior gives him.</td>
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</table>
So she's just been kind of a really good support in times of need. Like a counselor or something like that. At the same time I know that it’s political too. Like you have deal with stuff to them and you better know what type of person they are so you can give them input that matches their personality so you kind of stay off the radar so to speak. Its not all about results. Sometimes its personality

He is supportive of pretty much everything. If I say I need this intervention or whatever or we need to find money for it, he will sometimes question it and then usually he's like "well, you're doing something right over there, so okay".

I think that kind of leadership from him as much as I don't like it I can say "well, here we are all together and if its happening to you, its happening to me", you know.

It was sort of like a superintendent who was over about 30 schools and she had a system that was really deep in curriculum and we were really monitoring data we had various type of practice programs that helped to generate the data was targeted to customize instruction.

Paul Interview; p. 10 His superior gives him support in times of need.

Sandy Interview; p. 15 Superintendent supports everything she needs.

Sandy Interview; p. 18 Describing how her superintendent supported her when he led by example.

Charles Interview; p. 2 His superior supported him with a data analysis system.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>When my superintendent got back to me, he said “I trust you” whatever decision you made was a good one. I have many experiences like this and it gives me the confidence to make decisions rather than put things on hold until I get further direction. I know he would back me even if it wasn’t the right decision.</th>
<th>Sandy</th>
<th>Journal Prompt # 3</th>
<th>Superintendent explicitly demonstrated support with dialogue.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>I am given leeway to try new programs, interventions, etc. Sometimes they develop into something we all do, sometimes I drop them and sometimes I am asked to drop them for reasons our administrative staff determine together.</td>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p 14</td>
<td>Superintendent gives autonomy to try new programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’ve had a lot of support from district admin from the board on just our RtI and supporting us. And actually more than support, a lot of freedom to do things there’s....the whole three semester plan was developed by the superintendent and the high school and the district was like ‘whatever you guys feel like you need”</td>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Interview; p. 14</td>
<td>Superintendent (and other superiors) supported her with freedom and a three semester plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our change in admin at the district level has kind of given us the ability right now to create that mentality. But there’s pieces that it would be nice if there were a little more driving and pushing from them. There’s also beauty in not having to. We’ve talked about...its really, its rare as a high school administrator I think that we have the freedom to do what we are doing</td>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Interview; p. 14-15</td>
<td>Rare to have the freedom (autonomy) as a high school administrator.</td>
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<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Journal Prompt # 3</td>
<td>They (superiors) supported her by asking for input from her on staff discipline issues.</td>
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<td>I knew they supported my needs as principal, but even more importantly, they wanted my input before forming their own thoughts on the situations. This gave me the confidence to move forward with what I felt was best, knowing they were a sounding board for me and they had my back.</td>
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<td>Knowing I have his faith/trust allow me to face issues head on, rather than speculate about what he would want me to do.</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Journal Prompt # 3</td>
<td>The faith/support of his superintendent gave him confidence to know what to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essentially, my supervisor will not review/reverse the &quot;what,&quot; but will hold me accountable for the &quot;how.&quot; Knowing this, I can do my job without looking over my shoulder. Impossible to lead if you have to constantly consider anything more than the right thing to do. This job becomes impossible if, as Principal, I have to be worried about being publicly overruled.</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Journal Prompt # 3</td>
<td>He won’t be overruled in public and this allows him to operate confidently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular devoted time to their collaboration as a teacher leadership group. So I carved out that time for them. What I did is they taught one less class. And I don’t ask permission for stuff like that</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>He is so supported by his superintendent that he does not need to ask for permission on many things.</td>
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<td>One of the things that you talk about why John Brownstone believes he can be successful is I know I have the support of my superintendent</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>Believes he can succeed because he has the support of his superintendent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent complained to my Supt. He instructed me to handle it, investigate etc. and let him know what I found. I did so and communicated the findings. He said, well done. Thanks. I knew that if the parent complained further, he would support me 100%.</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Journal Prompt # 3</td>
<td>Knew she was supported by her superintendent.</td>
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<td>Now I knew what I knew about this teacher and I Knew I was doing the right thing and I knew I had the support of my superintendent</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 7</td>
<td>Knew he had the support of the superintendent when confronting a difficult personnel challenge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The courage to drive forward and take the criticism to make the mistakes and know you're going to make them and people will bail you out and all of that. But that really came a lot from the fact that the guy that hired me had faith in me. He saw something that probably I didn't even see. So I think we all need our champions and we all need our....maybe protectors is the word</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 16</td>
<td>Superintendent served as his protector.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Theme C: Support of Elected Officials</strong></td>
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<td>I always knew I had two board members I could ruffle because as long as I had five...because I'm not a 4-3 guy. I don't like 4-3. Those two always look like outliers and I had them. When its 5-2 I sleep very well.</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 17</td>
<td>Knew how much support of elected officials was the right amount to have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We built connections with the alderman, and so we were able to secure a huge funding in terms of TIF grants to turn Faraday into a STEM school</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 8</td>
<td>Having an alderman connection allowed him to get the funding to make the school a turnaround STEM school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So the alderman supporting us we pulled in board of education meetings, we pulled in the mayor in terms of accomplishments we were always able to say not only are we doing well in chess but we always correlated it back to academic achievement. We went from a level 3 to a level 1. So that was our biggest challenge.</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 8</td>
<td>Because of the alderman support they got a lot of attention and in time the whole school improved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High schools in our district (City name omitted) the local school council awards your contract. So you better be able to manage a board well and navigate board politics. That’s something I’m thankful for having the experience in doing. But it’s not something that I love.</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 9</td>
<td>He emphasizes the need to successfully navigate the politics of his school district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools that have principals that moved data across every metric at their school but the LSC now has teachers on it who weren’t working very hard and the principals pushed them out and then they got on the LSC and they voted not to renew the contract, you know? So that happens. That happens. There’s a lot of stories like that out there so you’ve gotta manage that well.</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 9-10</td>
<td>You have to manage the politics of a local school council or you could be terminated. Their support can make the difference of being retained or not.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I've been fortunate with the LSC here. I've been able to manage successfully and navigate that with a lot of success and I have a very supportive LSC.

Paul  Interview; p. 9-10  He was able to manage and be supported by his LSC.

I do have a strong base of support with the alumni with the local alderman, with people on our local school council so that helps. That helps me in the sense that I don't waste a lot of time dealing with frivolous things that I might have to deal with if I didn't have their support, right? If you're a leader whose being attacked, then you're really not being able to spend your time on the things that you really want to be spending your time on. You're just defending yourself. Um, so I'm really fortunate that I'm not attacked regularly.

Paul  Interview; p. 10  His base of support allows him to not waste time doing frivolous things.
### THEME 3: The Impact of Success

**Sub Theme A: Establishing a Schoolwide Focus Through a System of Continuous Improvement that Garners Success**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Formulated Meaning to Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So our IST is working on our whole school priority which is our TIA or targeted instructional area. And that is academic perseverance through disciplinary literacy. Both of those things were identified by teachers as things we saw needing in our students.</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>He describes his system of improvement through an instructional support team and they focused on academic perseverance through disciplinary literacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there is any one thing, you know solidifying the mentality of continuous improvement at the school. The theory of action is part of who I am and what I value and so every single team works to make themselves better every single year so I think because of that because of that culture we end up doing better every single year because that is everyone's mindset. To improve things and make things better than the year before.</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 6</td>
<td>His school adopted the mentality of continuous improvement and made themselves better every year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because before that the ILT and the department chairs were kind of one in the same and it was too many people, and it was kind of sprinkled in and it was too many people doing too much...trying to do too much and it resulted in doing almost nothing at all.</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 6</td>
<td>The previous structure around school improvement was too ambiguous and did not get much done.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackie Interview; p. 2</td>
<td>She established a schoolwide focus right away to nurture and take care of staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackie Interview; p. 2</td>
<td>Because of the focus on nurturing they saw improvement right away.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joy Interview; p. 2</td>
<td>Communicated the focus to the staff immediately</td>
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That first year as principal the whole goal was to kind of nurture and take care of the staff so we started off our first faculty meeting with pep band and we had cheerleaders coming in and we celebrated.

By October of that year we were having parents and students report just a change in the climate of the building and the teachers positiveness and the impact that it was having on the class. Just fascinating because it was almost just that nurturing, acknowledging, caring. Kind of sad that we hadn't done that for so long and realizing the damage it had had with that component being missing and how easy it was to make that change. That was kind of the beginning part.

I communicated to the staff that we absolutely had to increase our test scores because we had some very good students here but they were just not performing. They were underperforming on standardized tests. And the first thing I realized was that my staff did not know how to read data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joy</th>
<th>Interview; p. 2-3</th>
<th>After focusing on data literacy the staff identified their deficits and started to work on them with consultants.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>Charles is describing how he created an initiative/focus on differentiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
<td>Positive change was incumbent upon the staff’s vested interest in the initiatives i.e. focus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>As it relates to where do we direct our resources, how we build our teacher's capacities and what the unique part of what we did was we understood that we had to address those who were most in need who um because of the home conditions they were in. So that was something that was really set with the teachers. They used their focus on differentiation as a way to determine resource allocation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>And that was when, to me, when I could sit in a room and listen to the conversations that teachers were having about each other's students. They started to see the benefit of it within the first school year. Just the fact that that was so awesome that I could go to my next door neighbor that I had in my classroom and say &quot;what do you think else I should be doing in the classroom? You see him in RtI. What am I missing? What more can I do?&quot; And that's when it kind of started taking off and now I usually don't even attend two of the data meetings during the year. I go to the first one and the teachers run the other two just on their own. This excerpt is in reference to her schoolwide focus on interventions and staff started to see the benefits right away.</td>
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<td>John</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Our most impactful was a literacy initiative. The literacy initiative was achieved through their improvement process.</td>
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<td>We found that it really dramatically impacted kid’s ability to believe that they could do the work because they had a process</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 5</td>
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<td>Our school improvement efforts have been meaningful as opposed to what some people will say are jumping through hoops and those kinds of things. That was a personal goal of mine to make it a meaningful school improvement process.</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>So the process has integrity. It has...people go through it knowing that in the end we're going to have something that’s going to make a difference. We're really good about...I'm really good about helping other people keep the rest off their plate</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Interview; p. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>We work on our strategies and action items together that we created form our retreats that are in line with our theory of action. And it’s a continuous work in progress and you redo your cycle of inquiry or whatever you want to call it on a regular basis</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the theory of action is part of who I am and what I value and so every single team works to make themselves better every single year so I think because of that because of that culture we end up doing better every single year because that is everyone's mindset. To improve things and make things better than before</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Interview; p. 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have a very systematic approach. Um, to looking at student data and um giving students interventions um that one is fit and the other piece that we have done in my school for years and has just grown is that especially at a specific grade level we have teachers at that grade level own</td>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 4</td>
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<td>But, what you need is the data you know that’s what my intention is. To go over the data of the kids of each of those reading assistants and say &quot;look at this&quot; and maybe I'll learn a few things. Maybe that’s all I think is happening but maybe it’s not happening, you know? Maybe I would learn something, we'll see.</td>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>We had another meeting where I put together some samples and I went through and I showed them how to do it. And then I put them into their groups and they learned together with some help from me and from our guidance staff.</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can't say that it’s my favorite thing to do but it’s certainly extremely necessary and very important in making decisions. so after they saw the relationship then they were more than willing to buy in and make decisions based on that data.</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Interview; p. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Journal Prompt # 1</td>
<td>She is describing the logistics of how her improvement team implements the steps of improvement through student need identification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Journal Prompt #1</td>
<td>She is describing the data that informed their school improvement plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 2</td>
<td>Charles is describing the system of improvement his school employed that informed their focus on differentiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Interview; p. 2</td>
<td>He describes the success experienced as a result of the improvement process he earlier describes.</td>
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As a team we look to see if there are large groups of students with the same need. If so, we may find a way to add the skills to our tier 1 curriculum or we may determine teachers need professional development in specific areas.

For now, we are mostly using the data we collected in our 3 semester plan. This included a student survey, staff survey, walk-thru data, and unit plan collection.

She had a system that was really deep in curriculum and we were really monitoring data we had various type of practice programs that helped to generate the data was targeted to customize instruction.

Over the years we were able to move Nearway school from a level 3 school which is the lowest performing level to eventually to a level 1 school and it was realizing um, data to really make our decisions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub Theme B: Seeing Students Succeed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It inspires me when I see one of our students getting their Ph.D. at the university of Chicago in Stem Cell research. It inspires me when I see one of our students going off and studying at Notre Dame. Because once in a while we will have one of those. It inspires me when I see a kid graduate who I absolutely wanted to send them to the department of corrections their freshman year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
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<td>When I was at team (Name omitted) my students saw three points three and a half points growth on the science ACT in one year. And that was the highest growth in our network. I saw firsthand. I saw how changing instruction can be better suited to student outcomes and better student learning.</td>
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<td>Paul</td>
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<td>we were very successful in improving student achievement with the students and then we would sustain the changes there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
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<tr>
<td>I've got some social media now I can see my kids they're graduating from college, see my kids who are off with various companies and making an impact in society. So it’s those things that really super inspire me from a day to day perspective.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<td>Charles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
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<td>Eventually you get to the big piece when you get ACT results or PSAE results or AP results. It’s a lot of big ticket items that have gone by the way and I knew that that was going to happen because what we were doing was the right thing and we were doing it the right way.</td>
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<td>I can't take excuses anymore because I saw it happen. That was just an amazing thing for me.</td>
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<td>They were actually able to change outcomes for kids because they were well organized. That inspired me to go into educational administration</td>
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APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause and Effect</th>
<th>Confirming</th>
<th>Predictive</th>
<th>Exemplar Model</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of the things that you talk about why John Brownstone believes he can be successful is I know I have the support of my superintendent.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 5 (this is a change)</td>
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<td>But I knew where I wanted people to get to and I knew I had the right people doing it.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 6</td>
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<td>I look back now and think, wow, I survived but now I understand why I survived because I was the right guy for this place and it was right for me.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eventually you get to the big piece when you get ACT results or PSAE results or AP results. It’s a lot of big ticket items that have gone by the way and I knew that that was going to happen because what we were doing was the right thing and we were doing it the right way.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 10</td>
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<td>there are some things that I do that really make a difference and that’s because I know it’s worth my time because I know that in the end people are</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 13 (Predictive and confirmatory)</td>
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<td>going to back me, they're going to be my teammate, they're going to support me and all those things</td>
<td>I don't have some of the personal qualities and virtues and values that maybe some other guys have. But I have a lot of them and people know what they are. And that’s a match</td>
<td>Interview, p. 14</td>
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<td>I know that i have the luxury of being courageous and doing the hard stuff and having the hard conversations, all of those things.</td>
<td>I knew that if I did the right thing for the right reason, no matter how it turned out, he had my back</td>
<td>Interview, p. 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>The guy who hired me made me believe this was a right fit and he supported me to do it</td>
<td>It’s easy to say &quot;it’s my fault, or I made a mistake or its on me&quot; because I know I'll pull it out</td>
<td>Interview, p. 18</td>
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<td>Cause and Effect</td>
<td>Confirming</td>
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<td>I'll think I've never thought about that but I should and now I've got all the resources to answer that question. So that has been really big.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 12</td>
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<td>So I think there is a huge level of trust that the community students and the staff have in me.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 17</td>
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<td>So any naysayers or questioners I was fortunate and unfortunate that there was a thing that Jill took charge of this and we're going to be okay and I think that also kind of calmed some fears and they needed to know someone was in charge. Someone was in charge and someone had a vision. it was good to model that right away.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 18</td>
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<td>I knew they [superintendent and assistant superintendent] supported my needs as principal, but even more importantly, they wanted my input before forming their own thoughts</td>
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<td>Journal Prompt # 3</td>
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on the situations. This gave me the confidence to move forward with what I felt was best, knowing they were a sounding board for me and they had my back.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Cause and Effect</th>
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<th>Predictive</th>
<th>Exemplar Model</th>
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<tr>
<td>I had excellent mentor superintendent, Dr. Jodi Ware who really um, helped me a lot and helped me learn to do things the right way and to have high expectations in staff</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 1</td>
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<td>So we were very pleased with our PARCC scores in reading and writing this year. We felt that what we're doing, we're doing it right. So we had a little celebration with that</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 3</td>
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<td>And I think that’s one of the things that I can do and the other thing is I have a lot of years behind me</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 5</td>
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<td>I think for me it actually helped that I had a lot of time in the classroom and I have been on a lot of committees and I have looked at a lot of curriculum before I got, you know into administration because by sharing and getting to work...they sensed that I really did know some</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 5</td>
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<td>And that's when I figured out, shoot, If I can get this lady to cooperate I can sell snow to eskimos</td>
<td>Interview, p. 6</td>
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<td>They would say things like &quot;jeez, Marge really likes you, what did you do?&quot; I would say &quot;Oh you just have to listen to her and work with her&quot;. The superintendent told me at the time she said &quot;well congratulations, you've done what nobody else has ever been able to do with that woman. I hope you stick around&quot;.</td>
<td>Interview, p. 7</td>
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<td>My first day on the job he told me &quot;it’s your building, run it&quot;. He...anytime I’ve called and said I want to do this and I need your support I’ve always had it</td>
<td>Interview, p. 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I can tell him it’s for kids and this is how kids are going to benefit he'll try very much you</td>
<td>Interview, p. 11</td>
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<td>It inspires me when I see one of our students getting their Ph.D. at the university of Chicago in Stem Cell research. It inspires me when I see one of our students going off and studying at Notre Dame</td>
<td>Interview, p. 13</td>
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<td>I knew that if the parent complained further he [the superintendent] would support me 100%”</td>
<td>Journal Prompt # 3</td>
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<td>“I know that we always have each other’s back and we work as a team and I think that makes us feel like we can do anything that needs to get done.</td>
<td>Interview, p. 12</td>
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<td>I feel confident that he respects me and it’s a very professional relationship</td>
<td>Interview, p. 12 (put this in the middle of page. 46?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cause and Effect</td>
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<td>“THAT” is going to work in my school. That is going to be hard but it is going to work and 10 years later we're still doing it</td>
<td>Interview, p. 9</td>
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<td>I have this thirty minute block of time for every single grade level during the day and , why yes we do and by the way, we aren't just going to work with the low kids, you know what else we're going to do? We're going to work those high kids during those times too. You can't necessarily meet al.l the needs in the classroom so everyone is going to an intervention during that thirty minutes. Alright?</td>
<td>Interview, p. 10</td>
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<td>And that’s when it kind of started taking off and now I usually don't even attend two of the data meetings during the year. I go to the first one and the teachers run the other two just on their own</td>
<td>Interview, p. 10</td>
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<td>I could not make it work if I didn't have the team of</td>
<td>Interview, p. 13</td>
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<td>teachers that I have</td>
<td>If I say I need this intervention or whatever or we need to find money for it, he will sometimes question it and then usually he's like &quot;well, you're doing something right over there, so okay&quot;.</td>
<td>Interview, p. 16</td>
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<td>so that experience made me understand that every child can learn</td>
<td>Interview, p. 20</td>
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<td>Cause and Effect</td>
<td>Confirming</td>
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<td>And to be a part of the program or process that was tremendously successful was just, I mean a beautiful thing especially when it was that also had encompassed an entire community so you know I want the parents to be able to relish the joy of knowing that their children experienced academic success</td>
<td>I get to continue to relish the great feeling of the hard work, because we worked hard. Many long hours at Faraday and on weekends and so on but when you, ya know, the social media we have now, you still see these kids moving forward, experiencing success and you know you were part of giving kids these opportunities. I mean, thats why I do what I do</td>
<td>I had access to him and what I saw him do was just being innovative. Innovative in</td>
<td>Interview, p. 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
24/7 I'm recruiting and I'm looking for top notch talent always. That inspires me.

And that excites me because now I know that child is going to be going on to the high school and I'll have them come back and share what their experiences in high school are and have them come back and share that with the other kids.

So I look at that and that inspires me because it tells me the kids want to come to school.

That’s the inspiration because now you’re touching the future and then you get to validate them and say "wow, you calculated that so quickly, you have an excellent mind for computation" or "wow, I like how in depth you went with that problem". So I get a lot of my inspiration from my students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause and Effect</th>
<th>Confirming</th>
<th>Predictive</th>
<th>Exemplar Model</th>
<th>Location</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She's is able to give me really good coaching and good feedback and things to consider along the way so I don't make those mistakes that I might have made without her coaching.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>I think they are a really phenomenal teaching faculty and staff. I think that allows me to be able to do things that I wouldn't be able to do otherwise.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 7</td>
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<td>That helps me in the sense that I don't waste alot of time dealing with frivolous things that I might have to deal with if I didn't have their support.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>And I think also by having a broad base of support too I'm able to get things done in a much faster way than I would be able to otherwise.</td>
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<td>Interview, p. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I saw firsthand. I saw how changing instruction can be better suited to student outcomes and better student learning.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Interview, p. 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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