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A Case Study of School District Level Leaders' Communication of Expectations and Relationships with School Level Leaders During the Implementation of New Initiatives

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**A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL DISTRICT-LEVEL LEADERS'
COMMUNICATION OF EXPECTATIONS AND RELATION-
SHIPS WITH SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERS DURING
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
NEW INITIATIVES**

by

Emma Jordan, B.S., M.A.

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared by

Emma Jordan, B.S., M.A.

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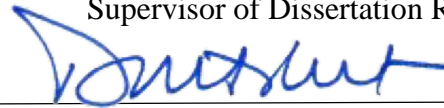
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Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership Concentration



Bryan McCoy

Supervisor of Dissertation Research



Dustin Hebert

Head of Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership

Doctoral Committee Members:

Dustin Hebert

Patsy Hughey

Approved:



Don Schillinger

Dean of Education

Approved:



Ramu Ramachandran

Dean of the Graduate School

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study of district-level and school-level leaders' roles in implementing new initiatives explored district-level leaders' support of principals' implementation of new school-wide initiatives. The theoretical framework for this study was distributed leadership. Participants included district-level leaders and school principals in secondary schools. Research methods consisted of interviews and observations. Findings of the study included (1) district-level leaders and principals play vital roles but have different perspectives on implementing new district-level initiatives, and (2) district-level leaders and principals understand the importance of communication. These understandings lead to shared leadership that provides more stakeholders with a voice and helps to develop a more inclusive decision-making process, and district-level leaders are focused on having a relationship with principals where principals are supported and valued when principals make critical decisions at their schools.

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Author Emma Jordan
Date 4-25-2022

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“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” Philippians 1:6.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

New initiatives often place demands on district-level leaders to support implementation (Honig, 2008, 2009). The practices of district-level leaders in implementing new school-wide initiatives and supporting principals in making critical decisions were the focus of the current study. In the current study, district-level leaders' roles were studied to determine how those leaders communicate expectations with principals. District-level leaders should shift their relationships with school-level leaders from enforcing policy to building relationships that successfully implement new initiatives (Honig, 2009).

Statement of Problem

The problem investigated in this study was to examine the participation of district-level leaders in the implementation of new initiatives, how district leaders communicate the expectations of the new initiatives to school principals, and how to describe the relationship between district leaders and the school principals.

Limited empirical research exists on the impact of implementing new school-wide initiatives (Honig, 2009; Stake, 1995). A study conducted by The Wallace Foundation (2010) found district-level leaders must remove their historical identities of being overseers "of buses, budgets, and buildings" (The Wallace Foundation, 2010, p. 1)

and adopt the roles of leaders who promote communication and relationship-building practices between district-level leaders and principals. District-level leaders must move beyond old educational debates about whether principals or district leaders are driving reform. Instead, they should show that improving communication is a district-wide systems problem that requires the participation of district and school leaders in joint efforts to implement new initiatives across districts using distributed approaches to leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2010). District-level leaders need to establish clear expectations for school principals and provide continuous support to implement new initiatives effectively. District-level leaders must shift from the traditional top-down, command-and-control relationships to partnering with school leaders in making decisions to increase school improvement (Honig, 2009).

New policy demands require district-level leaders to work closely with each school leader to build school-level capacity for highly effective communication and guide and support principals' decisions to ensure growth (Honig, 2008, 2009). District-level leaders must transform from districts from agencies that regulate and deal with schools into organizations that support schools and develops relationships with principals to enable the implementation and success of new initiatives (Honig, 2009). In addition, district-level leaders face demands to play key leadership roles in teaching and learning to implement new initiatives (Honig, 2008; Silverman, 2010). New initiatives are introduced yearly in schools where district and school leadership are needed to implement all initiatives effectively. District-level leaders must ensure initiatives are implemented with fidelity. Though school principals follow implementation

policies, district-level leaders too frequently fail to support or partner with school leaders to make the initiative successful (Honig, 2009).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to examine the roles of district-level leaders in the implementation of new initiatives and to determine how those leaders communicate expectations with principals.

Research Questions

The three research questions that guided this study were:

RQ 1. What roles do the district-level leaders and principals play in the implementation of new district-level initiatives?

RQ 2. How do district-level leaders communicate expectations of principals in implementing new initiatives?

RQ3. What is the relationship between district-level leaders and principals when defining expectations?

Methodology

A single bounded case with multiple embedded cases was studied using a qualitative methodology. Sources of data included interviews and direct observations of interactions between principals and teachers. The case study focused on district-level leaders' and principals' knowledge, skills, dispositions, and beliefs. Using multiple embedded cases increased the generalizability and provided opportunities for thick descriptions and more explanations than would have been possible using a single case (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Limitations

One limitation was that cause and effect could not be claimed because the study was not experimental and did not have an intervention group. Additionally, the lack of generalizability of the qualitative case study is considered a second limitation.

Delimitations

A delimitation was only looking at a subset of four schools in one large public school district for the current study. The alternative school and one 9-12 technology school were omitted from the selection process for the current study. The next chapter describes the instrument used and their findings to help with the literature's deficits.

Definition of Terms

Bridging: A policy and practice in development, capacity building, and the communication of requirements (Honig, 2009).

Buffering: Providing school-level assistance and absorbing potential and actual scrutiny for schools (Honig, 2009).

District-level leader Individual employed by the district to serve as a district-level administrator or an equivalent role.

Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS): Organization was established in 1996 to assist schools, districts, and states in developing partnership programs that acknowledge the importance of and facilitate family and community engagement in the learning process (Sanders, 2014).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this case study was to examine the of district-level leaders in the implementation of new initiatives and determine how they communicate expectations to principals. The literature review focused on research concerning district leadership and how distributed leadership characteristics developed relationships that promote school principals' collaborations.

The databases used to search the literature were Journal Storage (JSTOR), Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and EBSCO*host*. Initial search terms included “district leader,” “principals’ relationships with district leaders,” “implementing new initiatives,” and “district reforms.” The search was limited to articles published in peer-reviewed articles between 2005 and 2022.

The theoretical framework of distributed leadership is discussed first. The organization of the literature focused on the topics: roles of district-level leaders, school principals, and the interactions between district-level leaders and school principals.

Theoretical Framework

Distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005) is the theoretical framework of the current study. This theoretical framework addresses the distribution of leadership responsibilities within an organization among multiple people and situations. Distributed leadership

requires more than a division of roles in an organization. It requires shared leadership that promotes a network of participating agents in the leadership process (The Wallace Foundation, 2010).

Distributed leadership is about leadership practices rather than the roles or characteristics of leaders. From a distributed leadership perspective, leadership practices are products of the interaction of people and situations rather than being the products of leaders' knowledge and skills. Distributed leadership refers to leaders' and followers' leadership practices during interactive situations (Spillane, 2005).

Spillane (2005) describes distributed leadership as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situations. Distributed leadership is not a product of a leader's knowledge or skill but a relationship between people and their situation. The term distributed leadership has been widely used to describe leadership shared within and across organizations. Leadership is centered on the knowledge and expertise of a group or the collective efforts of individual leaders. Distributed leadership has shifted the focus from leadership practice to interactions between these individuals to investigate the situation in which leadership is enacted (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Spillane, 2005). Distributed leadership involves multiple individuals taking responsibility for leadership in school interactions. Leadership scholars have long recognized the importance of interactions and conceded that leadership involves more people than those at the top of the organizational hierarchy making decisions. Responsibility for leadership functions can be distributed not only to principals or co-principals but can involve multiple leaders who coordinate the work in parallel with others.

Leadership within any complex organization involves numerous leaders. Interdependence is the primary characteristic in the interactions between leaders and followers, rather than a function of one or more leaders' actions (Spillane, 2005). Leaders interact with others with aspects of the situation, including various tools, routines, and structures. These structures are created and remade through leadership practice as one aspect of the organizational patterns. Distributed leadership is a situation that does not merely affect what school leaders do as an independent, external variable but defines leadership practice as interaction with leaders and followers. A two-way relationship between situation and practice can either enable or constrain practice, while training can transform the situation (Spillane, 2005).

A distributed perspective allows for leadership to be democratic or shared. Distributed leadership is a system composed of three interacting components: leaders, followers, and status. The interaction of the components is necessary because the system is more than the sum of practices (Spillane, 2005). Educational organizations are so complex that a decision should not be made in isolation. One leader's perception has been put aside in schools for distributed leadership in which duties and responsibilities are shared between several leaders. Distributed leadership in a school requires cooperation with emphasis on the skills of principals, teachers, and other personnel in making decisions. Distributed leadership is described as a system created by several organizational components (Ataş et al., 2017; Spillane et al., 2004). In an organization, when tasks and responsibilities are shared, the decision-making becomes collaborative, and all members do not have to be leaders (Gron, 2002; Ataş et al., 2017).

Stakeholders within schools have accountability that is shared by members of the organization. Distributed leadership behaviors affect teachers' perceptions of organizational commitment and lead teachers to want to stay in an organization because they identify with the organization's objectives and values. When school principals exhibit leadership behaviors, teachers' commitment increases. Teamwork in schools positively impacts collaboration among stakeholders, creating a positive school climate, and producing positive organizational outputs (Ataş et al., 2017).

Distributed leadership is described as a system created by several components coming together in an organization, where tasks and responsibilities in an organization are shared, and decision-making becomes collaborative. The distributed leadership perspective suggests school management requires multiple leaders where the responsibility should be divided and shared among the leaders, which coincides with school structure and brings accountability (Ataş et al., 2017). Distributed leadership is little more than delegation by another name and has been used to justify specific leadership approaches. Distributed leadership can potentially be bullying when placed in the wrong hands (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016).

One of the core elements of distributed leadership is interactions rather than action. Leadership is not restricted to formal leadership roles but the influence of agency that all stakeholders share. Distributed leadership is a frame of analysis. Leadership is centered on the knowledge and expertise of a group or the collective efforts of individual leaders. Distributed leadership has shifted the focus from leadership practice to interactions between these individuals to examine the situation in which leadership is enacted (Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2004).

Roles of District-Level Leaders

Sanders' (2014) findings demonstrate that district-level leaders and principals play significant roles in reforming the traditional educational system. Professional development, infrastructure development, and policy reforms are the key ways to challenge school norms, traditions, and practices. Sanders (2014) found that a systems approach promotes lasting school change to ensure district and state support and meet the educational community's demands.

Honig (2009) used a comparative, qualitative case study to learn about urban school district-level leaders working to implement new small schools' initiatives in Oakland, California, and Chicago schools. In this study, district-level leaders enable implementation by transforming district-level functions from treating schools relatively uniformly to dynamic organizations that seek and support smaller and differentiated systems in all schools. District leaders' actions contributed to improving student learning districtwide when they helped schools make vital decisions about supporting their students rather than mainly directing schools' decisions (Honig, 2009).

Honig's (2009) findings reinforced the argument that treatment of "districts" in studies of new small schools has been far too unidimensional and incomplete. Such treatments cast district leaders as relatively monolithic, impersonal curbs on implementation based mainly on school reports of district-level leader activities. The findings confirmed the study's conceptual framework, which suggested district-level leader participation in implementation involved activities consistent with "bridging" and "buffering." The study confirmed the conceptual framework, which suggests central office participation in implementing activities consistent with "bridging" and "buffering."

Both activities support the premise that enables implementation by changing policy and helping schools work within existing policy and practices.

In summary, district-level leaders in small schools participate in an implementation consistent with the new policy and are associated with positive results. These district-level leaders help bridge participating schools to the rest of the district-level leaders and assist with implementation initiatives. Moreover, district-level leaders support implementation by working to change policies and enable the implementation to be successful (Honig, 2008, 2009; Lawson et al., 2017).

Sanders' (2014) case study discussed how district-level leaders and principals play a significant role in facilitating needed changes in school organizations and perform a critical role in successfully implementing external reform in schools. District-level leaders' expectations, policies, and practices affect how principals respond to external reform in schools. A systematic approach aligns across three levels, involving a three-way interaction, communication, and mutual influence (Sanders, 2014).

Sanders (2014) completed a five-year qualitative case study to investigate both district leadership practices that were conducted to support the implementation of a distributed leadership framework and principals' responses to those practices. The study explored how and why district leadership activities influence principals' actions at the school level (Sanders, 2014). The study revealed that a systematic approach is needed to support district-level leaders, principals, parents, and the community.

Honig and Venkateswaran (2012) studied federal and state policies that call on schools to engage in evidence-based decision-making to fuel educational improvement. They found that district-level leaders' lack of involvement was frustrating to school

principals and that district-level meetings were unproductive when looking at data because leaders and school staff do not identify essential participants in sense-making processes fundamental to evidence use at either level. District-level leaders mediate evidence to use in schools directly and indirectly when they set and communicate formal expectations that school staff should engage in evidence-based decision-making.

District-level leaders and school principals must cooperate within each system to implement new initiatives to have a lasting change in reforming policies (Honig, 2009; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Sanders, 2014). District-level leaders need to support implementing new initiatives and establishing relationships with principals to make quality school growth decisions. District-level leaders need to build trust and offer training on how district-level leaders can work with principals. School-focus research shows that district-level leaders can stifle performance because they do not know how to shift how they engage in their work and their relationship with schools. For the institutional policy to move, district-level leaders should expand their role to help make critical decisions about the school's growth (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Honig, 2009; Sanders, 2014).

In summary, district-level leaders and principals can sustain successful initiatives by establishing cooperation between the school offices. A collaborative approach to implementing the new initiatives and working with district-level leaders and school principals is essential (Honig, 2006, 2008). Honig (2008) found that a new non-traditional partnership between the district-level leaders and school principals needs to be built. Collaborative education policies encourage a joint effort of community and family

involvement where a solid foundation of communication is crucial when district-level leaders ensure initiatives are implemented with fidelity.

Communication Patterns

The way in which district-level leaders communicate matters. Communications need to be transparent, consistent, and meaningful. The way in which district-level leaders communicate and express information to principals has an impact on the school district. Kodish (2014) found when information is consistent and meaningful; school leaders trust the process of implementing new initiatives in school districts.

Lawson et al. (2017) provide an overview of how communication and trust between district-level leaders and school principals affect the implementation of policies. Lawson et al. (2017) found that trust and communication are mutually constitutive and foster a relationship between two involved parties - district-level leaders and school principals. Communication between the two parties supports a factor of trust, which builds an organizational resource for innovative implementation of policies and initiatives.

Lawson et al. (2017) found that trust is represented in two components. The first is a relational trust which refers to the interpersonal social exchanges in a group setting. Lawson et al. (2017) found it to have a powerful impact on student achievement in districts and school communities where trust depends on interpersonal relationships and task-oriented goals. Relational trust depends on communication between district-level leaders and principals, which can be facilitated or constrained depending on the degree of trust between the two parties.

The second component is reciprocal trust, in which the attributes of honesty, openness, reliability, and competence form a framework of trustworthiness. Lawson et al. (2017) found reciprocal trust complements relational trust with a significant interest in relationships between two leadership dynamics. High-quality relationships involving reciprocal trust exist when leaders respect each other for their deep educational knowledge, actions, values, shared experiences, and the way they engage respectfully in conversations and task-oriented activities that lead to innovative policies. Without these trust components, communication can become stifled and detrimental to implementation effectiveness.

District-level leaders support implementation by working to change policies and enable the implementation to be successful (Honig, 2009). District-level leaders play a vital role in the implementation of new initiatives, especially when communicating with principals. A collaborative approach to implementing the new initiatives and working with district-level leaders and school principals is essential (Honig, 2006, 2008). A solid foundation of communication is crucial when district-level leaders ensure initiatives are implemented with fidelity.

In summary, the implementation of policies depends on communication and establishing relationships of mutual trust between district-level leaders and school principals (Lawson et al., 2017). For the frequency of high-quality communication to remain ongoing, respectful relational and reciprocal trust must be practiced and maintained between the district-level leaders and school principals for the implementation to be successful. Honig's (2009) findings supported the idea that successful implementation of new initiatives is dependent on principals working with

district-level leaders to change their work practices through effective communication of the initiatives. Finally, it remains crucial that district-level leaders effectively communicate with principals and build trust by developing and maintaining significant and mutual relationships. This collaboration will further the district and school leaders' goal to support the success of students (Honig, 2009; Kodish, 2014).

District-level leaders engage in bridging and buffering communication activities to support the implementation of new initiatives. Bridging supports the implementation of school-wide initiatives and individual school policies to facilitate change in district office policy and practices. To support bridging, district-level leaders communicate with principals through formal memos and share information on school-wide initiatives using evidence from the schools' plans and experiences to encourage revisions or changes in district-level leaders develop relationships with school leaders through accountability meetings that establish school goals, inform them of the progress of new initiatives, and disseminate information between the central office and the schools. District-level leaders work collaboratively with the principals, communicate changes in educational policies, help solve conflicts, and provide interventions that allow schools to make school-based decisions with limited central office involvement.

Summary

School districts have placed demands on district-level leaders to support and participate in implementing new initiatives while building relationships with principals to help them make critical decisions about student achievement (Honig, 2008, 2009; Sanders, 2014; The Wallace Foundation, 2010).

District-level leaders must shift their work practices to support principals and build relationships with schools to enable them to implement new initiatives. District-level leaders should work with existing policies or change the policies and practices to become visible during implementation (Honig, 2008, 2009, Honig & Venkateswaran; Sanders, 2014; Honig et al., 2017). New reforms call for district-level leaders to make changes in their support of improving teaching and learning for all students and use evidence to guide the process. (Goldring et al., 2009; Honig, 2008, 2009; Honig et al., 2017; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Sanders, 2014).

The method used for the theoretical framework connections to the current study was distributed leadership. This theoretical framework addresses the distribution of leadership responsibilities among the district-level leaders and other people. A characteristic of distributed leadership is having people participate in the leadership process (Atas et al., 2017; Gronn, 2002; Harris & DeFaminis, 2016; Spillane, 2005; The Wallace Foundations, 2010).

District-level leaders support implementation by working to change policies and enable the implementation to be successful (Honig, 2009). District-level leaders play a vital role in the implementation of new initiatives, especially when communicating with principals. A collaborative approach to implementing the new initiatives and working with district-level leaders and school principals is essential (Honig, 2006, 2008). A solid foundation of communication is crucial when district-level leaders ensure initiatives are implemented with fidelity.

The implementation of policies and new initiatives depends on communication and establishing relationships of mutual trust between district leaders and school

principals (Lawson et al., 2017). For the frequency of high-quality communication to remain ongoing, respectful relational and reciprocal trust must be practiced and maintained between the district and school leaders for the implementation to be successful. Practices used to support communication efforts are bridging and buffering to ensure principals are provided with the necessary training in professional development, modeling teaching strategies, and using student data to promote student growth (Lawson et al., 2017).

District-level leaders need to effectively communicate with principals on policies and new initiatives in order for successful implementation. Practices used to support communication efforts are bridging and buffering to ensure principals are provided with the necessary training in professional development, modeling teaching strategies, and using student data to promote student growth. The efforts of district-level leaders to build relationships with principals will support collaboration and trust and further the district-level leaders' and school principals' goals to support the success of students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the current study was to examine the participation of district-level leaders in the implementation of new initiatives and determine how they communicate expectations to principals.

The three research questions that guided this study were:

RQ 1. What roles do the district-level leaders and principals play in the implementation of new district-level initiatives?

RQ 2. How do district-level leaders communicate expectations of principals in implementing new initiatives?

RQ3. What is the relationship between district-level leaders and principals when defining expectations?

Research Design

The current study was a qualitative instrumental case study with multiple embedded cases in a single school district implementing a new initiative successfully. There were four embedded cases: two middle schools and two high schools. Since the case study examined a specific organizational learning initiative, the qualitative case study approach was most advantageous because the research questions explained the link in a complex phenomenon. As suggested by Yin (2003), the researcher in the current

study had no control over the events and did not manipulate behaviors or actions. In a multiple-site case study, it is vital to trace the links of factors of discussion, interaction, or frequency of occurrences to increase generalizability and provide opportunities for thick descriptions and more meaningful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The strength of the case study design, in this case, is the ability to triangulate data from multiple types of sources as suggested by Yin (2003). Following Yin's (2003) model, the current study used interviews with district-level leaders and principals from selected schools to recognize factors and themes and confirm their meanings through the convergence of multiple perspectives. The current study also used teacher observation data to verify information discovered in interviews.

Sampling

Selection and Description of Sites

For this qualitative study, purposeful sampling was used. The two middle schools and two high schools were chosen because they were identified as schools in which the new initiative studied was implemented.

The schools chosen were located in the southern region of the United States. The urban school district served a blue-collar community, which predominantly was a mixture of all ethnicities. The school district selected had a history of implementing numerous initiatives across the district. This school district had a recorded higher rating compared to other similar school districts. The district was known for implementing innovative initiatives that have increased the performance levels of the schools. The superintendent was contacted regarding this qualitative case study and the process of selecting the participating schools. For the most part, the residents earned an average income,

according to a Google Scholar hometown locator search, of a median income of \$53,292 and an average income of \$73,174 (Hometown Locator, 2021).

The case study centered on a large urban school district. It was considered one of the state's largest districts with over 36 public schools servicing more than 24,000 students and employing approximately 5,000 employees. The school district received a satisfactory rating of achievement as recorded by the state department of education. The criteria for site selection of schools included the percentages of students identified with a high disability population, limited English proficiency, socioeconomic status, and average academic performance. Moreover, the selection of school sites reflected both urban and rural populations of students and the surrounding communities.

The superintendent facilitated the selection of the schools that included the following criteria: (1) the school received consistent school performance scores within the last three years, (2) the principal's mission was to increase learning opportunities for all students as aligned with the Every Child Succeed Act (ESSA) to promote student success, and (3) the principal had a record of providing quality professional development that aligned with the needs of the teachers so that they were effective in their lesson designs and instruction in the classroom.

Selection of Participants

The current study interviewed the following participants: the superintendent, assistant superintendent, director, three supervisors, two middle school principals, and two high school principals. Participants for interviews were chosen by purposeful sampling (Stake, 1995) to gather information and experiences that were important to understanding the focus of the research and the success of the district's effectiveness in

implementing new initiatives. These interview participants represented different levels of the district administration and school principals, and their experiences and opinions added to the information gathered on factors that impact the success of implementing a new initiative.

Table 1 provides details of the district-level leader participants.

Table 1

Interviewee Data Documentation Identification Numbers (P=Participant)

<u>ID#</u>	<u>District Leader</u>	<u>Years as a District Leader</u>	<u>Description</u>
P01	SL/School District Superintendent	14	Interview
P02	ASL/Assistant School District Superintendent	13	Interview
P03	DL1/District Special Education Supervisor	10	Interview
P04	DL2/District Special Education Director	10	Interview
P05	DL3/District Curriculum Supervisor	15	Interview

Table 2 provides details of the principal participants.

Table 2

Principal Interviewee Data Documentation Identification Numbers (P=Participant)

<u>ID#</u>	<u>School Principal</u>	<u>Years as a School Principal</u>	<u>Description</u>
P06	SP1	23	Interview
P07	SP2	8	Interview
P08	SP3	18	Interview
P09	SP4	17	Interview

Participant Description and Pseudonyms

The researcher created pseudonyms for each participant and excluded information that would jeopardize the anonymity of the participants. Table 3 discloses the participant pseudonyms along with details of observations from interviews.

Table 3

Information of Educational Experiences of Participants

<u>Participant ID</u>	<u>Educational Experience</u>
SL	SL is a school district superintendent for a public-school system. The researcher interviewed SL face to face with audio recorded. SL had been a teacher, assistant principal, high school principal, and assistant superintendent before being appointed superintendent.
ASL	ASL is a district assistant superintendent. The researcher interviewed SL face to face with audio recorded. ASL had been a teacher, assistant principal, high school principal, and assistant superintendent. ASL is a specialist in curriculum design and assessment
DL1	DL1 is a district Special Education Supervisor. The researcher interviewed DL1 face to face with audio recorded. Before becoming a district supervisor, DL had been a teacher, middle school assistant principal, and middle school principal.
DL2	DL2 is a district Special Education Director of Special Education. The researcher interviewed DL2 face to face with audio recorded. DL2 had been a teacher, Special Education Coordinator, and Special Education Supervisor before becoming a district director.
DL3	DL3 is a district curriculum supervisor. The researcher interviewed DL3 face to face with audio recorded. DL3 had been a teacher, assistant principal, and principal before being appointed a curriculum supervisor
DL4	DL4 is a district curriculum supervisor. The researcher interviewed DL4 face to face with audio recorded. DL4 had been a teacher, assistant principal, and principal before being appointed a curriculum supervisor

<u>Participant ID</u>	<u>Educational Experience</u>
SP1	SP1 is a school site principal. The researcher interviewed SP1 face to face with audio recorded. SP1 had been a teacher and an assistant before being appointed a principal.
SP2	SP 2 is a school site principal. The researcher interviewed SP2 face to face with audio recorded. SP2 had been a teacher and an assistant before being appointed a principal.
SP3	SP3 is a school site principal. The researcher interviewed SP3 face to face with audio recorded. SP3 had been a teacher and an assistant before being appointed a principal.
SP4	SP4 is a school site principal. The researcher interviewed SP4 face to face with audio recorded. SP4 had been a teacher and an assistant before being appointed a principal.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted interviews, completed observations, and administered follow-up questions for clarification. The researcher collected data and organized the results of the information collected. Merriam (2009) identified data collection as asking questions, observing, and reviewing information.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This researcher used semi-structured interview questions in which participants answered a predetermined set of questions (Stake, 1995). Flexibility was used to adjust the questions and follow unexpected answers or questions that the researcher was not prepared for ahead of time. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews on the school sites and in the district-level leaders' offices. The researcher took notes and recorded the interviews on Sonix, following a set of open-ended questions to allow for follow-up questions as needed to clarify interviewees' statements and the researcher's

recorded notes. Interviewees have their own unique stories and experiences to reflect on during questioning in interviews; therefore, interviews are not the same as responses (Stake, 1995). Interviews allowed the researcher to interpret their environments and discuss with participants the importance of implementing new initiatives. This also allowed the researcher to observe the behaviors of the interviewees (Merriam, 2009). This method was highly effective, given the explorative and interpretive nature of the study.

Each interview began with an iteration of the study's purpose. Each participant was given a reminder that the session was being recorded but that all identities would be kept confidential. The participants were assured that they could choose not to submit an answer to any question on the protocol (See Appendix C) and/or withdraw from the study without repercussions or consequences.

The interviews were structured to yield information directly relevant to the research questions. Acknowledging open-ended questions and recording participants allowed the researcher to listen while trying to understand the problem better.

The researcher was engaged in follow-up questions on the participants' behaviors and ideas discussed like collaboration, reflective inquiry, and student achievement. The follow-ups allowed participants to share their perceptions of the new initiatives that might not have been entirely ascertained through the interview process. Moreover, follow-ups provided the researcher with additional information and a better understanding of the collected data.

Direct Observations

Four school principals participated in the observation of new initiatives implemented in their schools. Teacher observations in the classroom environments were conducted in the middle of the implementation process. The researcher observed the teachers, along with the principals, to compare notes and reflect on the implementation process. The notes and data from the teacher observations were submitted into a generated checklist (See Appendix B) to determine the needs of teachers to measure the implementation of the initiative at the classroom level. According to the principals' knowledge, the observation provided evidence of how effective the new initiatives were being implemented in the classroom, which aligned with previous research (Yin, 2003). In addition, generated observation documentation was recorded and reviewed to help triangulate the data from the interviews. The researcher completed a generated observation checklist (See Appendix B) aligned with the implementation of new initiatives.

Data Analysis

A review of the interviews and the follow-up questions, along with the teacher observations and the generated observation checklist, allowed for data triangulation on how the principals implemented new initiatives in the learning environment. Data interpretations can only be as valid as reliable when using multiple sources. Yin (2003) advised researchers to provide an accurate account of information and data interpretation that can be easily verified among participants and multiple data sources. He also suggested a well-organized design promoted precise analysis because it enabled the researcher to remain focused on learning about the participants and their problems.

Data for the current study included information from interviews with district-level leaders and principals and observations of principals. The researcher interviewed the district-level leaders and school principals individually using a predetermined set of questions. The researcher kept information in word processing and spreadsheet applications and used sorting and filtering functions to organize and analyze results.

The constant comparative method was used to analyze data. The method involves comparing one segment of data to determine similarities and differences, and this is documented using coding (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Coding allows the researcher to observe themes and find meaning from them in the context in which they appear by discovering the conditions under which those themes are present. The researcher used the data to determine if the district-level leaders helped with the implementation process or hindered the implementation process. Data collected from the interviews helped guide the development of themes within the data. As a result, the researcher compared one segment of data with the next to help establish developing patterns (Merriam, 2009).

A combination of descriptive and interpretive coding was used to analyze the data across three phases. Data analysis occurred in three phases: pattern development, category development, and theme development.

Initially, for pattern development, descriptive coding was used to organize raw data from interviews of the two participant groups: district-level leaders and principals. From there, data were analyzed through keywords and phrases and “chunked” into clusters of related ideas, and these data chunks were analyzed across the two groups to identify common patterns. To be classified as a pattern, a single idea had to emerge at

least once in each group's data. No idea (chunk) that was exclusive to one group was identified as a pattern. From this phase, 14 patterns emerged.

Through the constant comparative analysis procedure (Merriam, 2009), patterns from the first stage were analyzed. Interpretive coding during category development of the 14 patterns resulted in the 14 patterns being narrowed to six categories. The repetitive analysis process to narrow patterns to categories was repeated during theme development to narrow categories into themes. This resulted in two themes.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher's practices must ensure the study's results are trustworthy and dependable (Merriam, 2009). The three components used to establish the research's trustworthiness and dependability included internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Merriam, 2009).

Internal Validity

The internal validity of research focused on the idea that the research must align with what happens in the real world (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). In this study, the researcher accomplished this by triangulating data and overlapping the results from interviews and observations. Additionally, the internal validity was reinforced through participants' checks, where a researcher reveals potential findings of the study to the participants to gather more feedback on those findings (Merriam, 2009). This case study mirrored this concept by staying in frequent contact with participants and sharing their findings and interpretations.

Triangulation refers to using multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Merriam, 2009). It

was also viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity by applying information from different sources. In this study, the researcher used three data sources together by triangulating multiple data sources (interviews, generated observations document, and the follow-up questions) to reinforce and verify one data source with another.

External Validity

The external validity refers to how well the study can be generalized and how it applies to the real world (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Qualitative studies cannot utilize a random population sample to predict the outcome for a second population sample without verification (Merriam, 2009). The critical method for ensuring external validity in this study was the precise use of context descriptors. The study used purposeful sampling, the chosen district and school sites represented a range of socioeconomic classes and diverse experience levels of participants. Since random sampling was not used, generalizability to other contexts cannot be claimed; however, the potential exists for readers to find some generalizability of this study's findings to school districts other than the one included in this study.

Reliability

Merriam (2009) refers to reliability as replicating and repeating a study but points out this is nearly impossible in the social sciences. Therefore, qualitative studies strive to match the data collected (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation was the main insurability of the current study's reliability, using multiple overlapping data sources to help with verification by comparison. Additionally, the researcher kept a journal of notes from the data collection process as suggested by Merriam (2009), and this journal provided an audit trail.

Researcher Role and Positionality

The current professional position held by the researcher is the curriculum supervisor of grades 6 through 8, who currently oversees the implementation of new initiatives in the district. As a previous elementary principal, the researcher had much knowledge and experience on the professional connection between school principals and curriculum implementation. The researcher approached this study as an educator and leader who implemented a program that would support principals' and teachers' collaborative efforts to effectively implement new initiatives with dignity and fidelity.

The researcher entered the study with some preconceived ideas regarding the studied issue that could potentially guide how the findings are interpreted. The qualitative researcher's role was to discover, understand, and gain insight from the study participants; therefore, what was learned from the sample was optimized (Merriam, 2009). The researcher also believed that district-level leaders could facilitate such initiatives by getting feedback from stakeholders when implementing new initiatives. In order to avoid bias, the researcher was open to contradictory evidence and reported preliminary findings to peers to get input on the perceptions or inferences made at an early stage in the research as recommended by Yin (2003). The researcher was honest about possible biases that may affect the study and eliminated any preconceived problems. In addition, the detailed coding should eliminate or provide some insight and remove the bias (Yin, 2003).

In studying the implementation of new initiatives, the researcher hoped to explore more effective ways to impact principals' learning and support their overall well-being in leadership positions. The researcher enhanced the role of a district supervisor, and the

researcher hoped this extension of one's learning would support efforts to assist school principals and district-level leaders in a positive way of building trust and confidence that would eventually impact principals' learning and performance. Ultimately, this research aimed to create a methodology by which district-level leaders could effectively implement new initiatives across the district.

The researcher's current beliefs about school leadership's role in implementing new initiatives were multifaceted and varied. The researcher believes that school leaders who are actively involved in implementing new initiatives would be more motivated and confident in their abilities to teach using strategies and practices that will promote learning at all levels. In the researcher's professional opinion, schools with healthy, influential leaders will have strong district leaders and teams who will successfully implement new initiatives. The researcher has researched case studies where weak or little leadership support revealed the opposite results. New initiatives were implemented with little or no success, and district staff neither supported nor hindered the implementation.

Entering the current study, the researcher had assumptions of what the study would reveal about district-level leaders' and school principals' implementations of new initiatives. Her current position is a middle school curriculum supervisor for grades 6-8. She is responsible for selecting new initiatives, obtaining funding, and monitoring the implementation process. She works with secondary principals in implementing new initiatives in 14 schools, has experience in curriculum design and assessments, and views her position as helping to facilitate the implementation of new initiatives with principals through working relationships.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study was to examine (1) the participation of district leaders in the implementation of new initiatives, (2) how district leaders communicate the expectations of the new initiatives to school principals, and (3) the relationship between district leaders and the school principals. Chapter 4 presents findings of the current study organized by themes that emerged.

Presentation of Themes

During the initial phase of data analysis, seven categories were developed: responsibilities, roles, decision-making, obstacles, communication, relationships, and professional development. Three themes emerged:

- Theme 1: District-level leaders and principals play a vital role in implementing new district-level initiatives but have different perspectives on implementing new district-level initiatives.
- Theme 2 District-level leaders and principals understand the importance of communication and building relationships and trust.

District-Level Leaders' and Principals' Roles in Implementing New Initiatives

District-level and school leaders have different beliefs about the responsibilities and roles in implementing new initiatives. Most district-level leaders agreed that using

the committee process with school leaders is effective. Moreover, district-level leaders think it is essential to establish open relationships with principals in order for the principals to feel supported and valued when making some critical decisions at their schools. As SL noted,

I think 99% of the decisions we make about new initiatives or curriculum adoption or whatever it may be, need to be through the committee process so that there's input from all sides. So, I think there's a tremendous amount of power and wisdom in committees.

SL and ASL provided each principal a voice when implementing new initiatives. ASL stated, "Everyone has a voice. Inclusiveness provides for those to talk and share using the democratic practice." ASL is also "sold on power *with* the principals rather than power over the principals."

District leaders believe that committees should be used in the decision-making process because they bring people together from different backgrounds, and "[each] person has something special to bring to the committee" [DL3]. Additionally, SL believes in creating committees with the "right combination of people to avoid any unintended consequences." He believes they will be sincere with the information they share with him. He further elaborates that "you know who's a sky's falling type person versus somebody that's going to give you the accurate picture." District leaders also believe that it is essential for school leaders to have some autonomy. DL1 shared, "I believe that because each school is different, they are entitled to have some autonomy. For example, I think school principals need to feel like they can make some decisions on their school campuses without being micromanaged."

However, even though the district-level leaders are transparent about implementation and include principals, the leaders are still responsible for selecting the initiatives because they must be tightly aligned to the district's goals. Consequently, some decisions are made without input from school leaders. For example, DL1 states, "Ideally, the relationship is supportive, open, collaborative, but sometimes district leadership has to make decisions that [principals] may not necessarily agree with. But because we respect their positions and authority, we inform them."

Furthermore, ASL agreed that principals need to feel supported with an open, collaborative leadership because of the respect for principals' positions. ASL also believes that "principals think differently, but I encourage them to challenge my thinking." Finally, ASL strives for "collaboration, where principals make one idea stronger." To elaborate, she states:

If I believe I want one thing, but the principals and supervisors think a different way, I don't use the power of my position to influence people. I encourage everybody that I work with to speak their mind. If I cannot substantiate my way of thinking, as a committee, we go back to the drawing board and rethink what my theory and my practice are in selecting an initiative. [ASL]

One district leader believes his responsibility is to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the new initiatives and special education teachers are well-equipped to provide the initiatives to students [DL2]. He believes educators and leaders can reach students differently. Still, he wants his staff to have knowledge and training on the initiative so that they will be able to evaluate where students should be or how to get

them where they need to be, especially if the students are going into inclusion classrooms.

In contrast to district leaders, school leaders see themselves as responsible for encouraging others in the new initiative implementation process. One described the process:

Very democratic, I would say. I really asked teachers for input. It's a rare thing for me to say no. When teachers come to me about an idea or a resource they need or something that could help them, I'm always trying to seek ways to make that happen. [SP1]

Similarly, SP2 believes in implementing new initiatives using coaching techniques. SP2 states,

I considered myself a player's coach, and what I mean by that is I would take the time to understand this one particular player who may be one of the ball carriers. I could challenge them in front of everybody and get in his head with Jedi's mind trick to the point where he would say, 'Oh, I'm fixing to show him, put me back out there.' I could get him from point A to B and across the finish line. Whereas this other boy, I couldn't say those same things because he would crawl down into a hole, and he wouldn't be it. So, I would have to reach him differently. But the result is both of them get across the finish line at the maximum performance.

More specifically, SP2 believes encouragement is the primary characteristic of his role in implementing new initiatives with teachers. He uses a "coach and player" scenario as a metaphor for how he encourages teachers because he tries to develop the same relationship with his teaching team as a coach would with a sports team. Like a coach

who takes the time to learn the differences between his players, SP2 takes the time to learn the different ways he has to individually approach his teachers when encouraging them to implement new initiatives. Using this approach, he feels he has a greater chance of successfully promoting new initiatives and coaching his teaching team to implement the new initiatives with fidelity.

SP2 states:

I had a teacher the other day that came in; she cried in front of me. I'm just going through a lot on this, and it had nothing to do with school. Right? And then two days later, I go back in and "Hey, how's it going?" Tell me." She emailed me back. She said, "It just meant the world to me that you remembered over the weekend, and you came back just to check on me." SP2 states, "And, you know, I just built that relationship because there's going to come a time, I'm going to need that teacher to go above and beyond."

SP3 has an open-door policy with his staff when the district leaders want him to implement new initiatives; he promotes it and maintains that he "has to be the champion of the initiative." He thinks it is his responsibility to have the teachers discuss the initiatives and have input. He states

It is my responsibility to collaborate with teachers about initiatives and determine how they can be implemented within the parameters of district policy. They can be part of the decision-making process as far as implementing the initiative, even though I make the final call. Once it's discussed, we agree on the direction of the initiative, and everybody sees that they have a voice in its implementation. [SP3]

He believes when the leadership team sees that the initiative would be suitable for students, team members all agree with the implementation process.

During principal walkthroughs, the researcher observed principals giving feedback to a teacher. One principal said, “I like the way you used the resources from the curriculum and grouped your students for small group discussions as you monitored their progress using terms from the text.” Another principal stated, “Your implementation of using your teacher notes allowed for smooth transitions between student tasks and the conclusion when students completed their exit tickets.” The reflective notes from the observations also revealed where students were having problems. The observation checklist confirmed areas of need to support the successful implementation of the initiative.

If you go to the English class, they are doing the Guidebooks; you could look at their lesson plans, see the annotations, and show where their kids will struggle and what they’re doing. For those kids to have equity, you should find planning in their lesson plans. I saw where they put in for equity when I did observation. So, when you go in there, you should see that annotation and that equity piece. [SP2]

Field notes on the observation of four teachers at the participating principal schools reveal that principals encouraged their teachers to invest in the initiatives with fidelity and did follow-up with walkthroughs.

Reflection is a skill that needs to happen every day in the school environment.

One principal shared,

Teachers are able to walk around the classroom, and the teacher has more tables instead of desks in the classroom because teachers like that grouping of kids. Now

they've got a shoulder partner. They've got a partner across from them. They're working and talking and discussing and trying to figure out how to solve something or how they believe or feel about a social issue or something that's going on. They're able to verbalize with each other. [SP1]

In summary, district and school leaders believe that the committee process is effective and believe all stakeholders should be involved in the decision-making process. On rare occasions, some decisions will need to be made by district leaders alone in order to align with district goals properly. School leaders believe that they should encourage their teachers to implement the initiatives with fidelity once the initiatives have been outlined according to the district guidelines.

District-level leaders believe there must be open communication about the principals' roles in implementing new initiatives. DL1 states,

We should have open conversations with school leaders about those ideas that we have to implement because buy-in is essential. We prioritize boys and girls and their needs and have a common ground about what we're trying to accomplish for our students. Those with boots on the ground must have a voice.

DL3 realizes "that principals will be held accountable for the school performance score and [she] would encourage them to implement the initiative." To this end, principals must know that accountability is important to teachers when looking at students' test scores. DL3 equated principals' roles in implementing new initiatives to teachers by stating,

Principals can't make a teacher do things. For example, a principal can't make a teacher change a grade and their grade book and give a kid a C instead of a D. A

teacher would have to make that decision. But, you know, you can encourage them to do that. If you had a situation, but ultimately with the right to teach laws, you know a teacher would have that. So, I take that same perspective in our job as supervisors with the principals.

ASL states, “School principals believe district-level leaders view data before new initiatives are implemented. Principals want initiatives to be intentional after a need assessment has been completed.” SL4 stated that district-level leaders “try to assess where we are as a school and try not to do something to say we’re doing everything. We do it intentionally. If it doesn’t have an intent, we don’t entertain it.” Principals believe in planning and developing a purposeful initiative to meet the needs of individualized students.

SP3 states, “As the principal, I’m part of a group of people discussing what is best for kids and what is best for Green Acres. Everyone has the right to voice their opinion, then we discuss it, and then we make an informed decision.” Principals believe in being part of leadership teams and empowering teachers while following district policy and guidelines. SP1 has been in the district for over 42 years, and she viewed her role as an “encourager.” At SP1’s school, she believes in treating the district as a family when implementing new initiatives because she has known most district-level leaders for over twenty years. SP1 states,

It’s kind of like a family atmosphere; people know each other. We have each other’s backs; we’re able to share and encourage each other. It’s not like anybody is out to get the other one. It’s all about how we can grow together and improve. You know, that’s something that I see. That’s beneficial.

Participants all agree that their roles are to support the initiatives because they are implemented collaboratively by district and school leaders. In addition, district-level leaders realized that school leaders are held accountable for their school performance scores, encouraging them to implement what is best for students with fidelity.

New initiatives come from federal and state mandates and grants. They are also implemented when a school is given a label because of a low performing score on their school performance index. Several initiatives are implemented during a calendar year. The most recent initiative that the district implemented was the *Language! Live* program for students with unfinished learning. District-level leaders' roles are to determine the focus of new initiatives by assessing the needs of schools and prioritizing what is good for the children. The district-level leaders realized this program was "good for boys and girls" in the district and specifically targeted their needs. They shared the program and its criteria with those school leaders whose schools were identified for their low performing scores. Another major initiative that our district is participating in is the Strong School System Pilot Initiative (Beber, 2021). The district was selected from among eight other districts by the state department of education to pilot this program. The district leaders identified four strategies to prioritize and target the needs for improvement. The strategies included equitable instruction, recruitment and development, addressing the diverse needs of all students, and maintaining an inclusive environment. The district-level leaders develop a system by providing equity for all students. SP1 states,

You can spend all your time implementing initiatives and miss the goal, and the goal is student success. What is the greatest guarantee of student success is that you have a relationship with their teachers - having professionally trained teachers

that are knowledgeable about the curriculum and making sure that we're monitoring student progress.

During observations of principal *Language! Live* walkthroughs, the researcher observed a principal (SP2) interacting with a teacher. The principal said, "Great transitions, respectful rapport with your students. You really engaged the student in the lesson."

SL realized the importance of initiatives as long as they are beneficial for students. It would not generate the same impact on success and growth just to remove something from a teacher's to-do list. To this end, DL1 shared,

You can't take away from the focus of helping students, and teachers will also lose focus. So, if it doesn't fall within those definitions, it's not useful. As a district, we always are looking for ways to make things better. How can we improve and make things better? As district-level leaders, we want other districts to emulate what we are implementing.

DL1 continued,

So, some new initiatives may help you maintain where you are. Ok, I'll make you better. So, you have to come in with new things all the time because you can get stagnant. The district wants to take the lead in initiatives and growth of students and growth of the district when it comes to education.

District leaders determine needs by assessing the data of the schools and prioritizing what is good for children. They share those ideas with school leaders who need to implement the initiatives. DL3 reports,

We're doing something right now with strong schools that require district leadership to make decisions about priorities, something that we would like to implement. We assess a need and look at data to see which schools need that professional development, and then we contact the principals to see if they would be interested in that and why we're suggesting it.

As district-level leaders, "we are looking to model what is best for students. Buy-in is gained by looking at initiatives that will move from the bottom up." DL3. District-level leaders want to provide opportunities for the growth of all students. However, the district-level leaders also realize that while not all initiatives are successful, the process is ongoing for school improvement.

According to the interviews, principals appreciate district-level leaders who think creatively. SP3 states, "Some new initiatives may help you maintain where you are or make you better. So, you have to come in with new things all the time because you can get stagnant." School principals place people in specific areas of leadership to have open lines of communication about what is working when initiatives are implemented. From SP3's perspective,

You are always trying to get better, and you want to do better. So, the new things [that are] out there, you want to bring that to your school or to your district so you can improve as a district.

Most principals share what they are doing working in their schools and networking with other schools in the district. School leaders always try to assess where they are and implement things that will make their populations academically grow. Therefore, school leaders do not entertain initiatives if initiatives are not intentional.

“Make sure they all understand that we have to take them from where they are and take them where they need to be. We can’t be a cookie-cutter and implement everything”

[SP4]. In short, the school leaders’ emphasis is to teach students as individuals.

In summary, the district-level leaders and school leaders are assessing what is good for the district and providing opportunities to become a model district.

Implementing initiatives to help with student achievement is vital for the district.

Collaborative Decision-Making Relationships

District and school leaders believe decisions should not be made in isolation from a committee. Leaders base their decisions on initiatives that have been implemented and have not been successful. ASL explains

The selection of new initiatives is not made in isolation by supervisors, coordinators, and facilitators at the central office. The supervisors have developed committees of grade level and subject-specific committees or groups to look at the curricula and decide on something. But, of course, we always go to the principals and make sure that they are on board. We often let them vote. If there are two competing curriculums, they’re equally good.

District-level leaders state that school leaders need to be involved in the planning process of new initiatives because if principals have buy-in, they will support the initiative. DL1 states,

I feel like we have gotten to a point where we’re not only getting the input from principals for the initiatives, but we’re getting the support of those that will be, you know, on the ground doing it. I feel our district does an excellent job in pulling in all the players necessary to make something successful.

Similarly, school leaders believe in asking for teacher input when implementing new initiatives. SP1 maintains, “Seek to involve them in decision-making. I don’t just decide for them.” SP4 also tries to empower his teachers. He believes buy-in comes from what they see him doing and making them part of it. “You go into something and ask them about their ideas. Ask them what they think. I try to sell it from that point and lead them in a direction that makes it their idea” [SP4]. SP3 also keeps his team informed about new initiatives:

So, it is not just arbitrarily saying we’re going to do this without them having some input and which allows me to go back to the curriculum. Now, let’s see how we can make it fit for us at Green Acres, and we can do what the curriculum department wants. But our school is unique, so let’s do it for our population and make it work here.

SP2 thinks the key is the relationship with the team. According to SP2, “When you build a foundation of trust with those people around you, know that they will not lead me in a bad situation.”

Although a collaborative relationship now exists between district and school leaders, some participants feel that past initiatives selected by the district leaders were just given to the principals without their input. DL2 recounts,

I know in the past, the initiatives came from whoever was at the top and were given to the principals and told this is what we want you to implement. You did it. Now, we’re getting the support of those principals that will be on the ground doing the work.

District leaders were adopting a more collaborative relationship that improved not only the district leaders' abilities to obtain support from the principals but also that improved the principals' abilities to obtain support from their teachers when discussing new initiatives:

I think the more teachers that are involved in the adoption committees and the creation of initiatives, if they're involved in the process upfront, then they're less suspicious. They will invest if they feel involved in a decision-making process instead of being dictated to. So, I think you also have commitment versus compliance when people feel like they were involved from the first step. [SL]

District and school leaders want to include input from all key stakeholders when implementing new initiatives. DL1 wants to "come together and hear what their ideas are first and then brainstorm some ideas on how they feel about the initiative." School leaders believe that having open conversations with district-level leaders about implementing and receiving buy-in from teachers is essential. SL shared:

I believe it is essential that teachers and principals have input and feedback on implementing new initiatives. I think there's a tremendous amount of ownership. But I also think the more teachers that are involved in the process, then they will be vested in the initiative.

District-level leaders have honest and transparent discussions on how initiatives can be implemented in the schools. "I believe in sitting down with people first, presenting what it is, and then hearing what they have to say" [SL3]. Thus, for district-level leaders, communication and gathering feedback are essential when implementing new initiatives. DL3 said the most recent initiatives were social and emotional initiatives:

We recognized what all our groups were, and they were not alike, and we identified who our different groups were. So, we had to bring those principals here to the BIC, and we had a meeting with them about a month ago, and they were invited to participate. So, we explained the initiative and asked if they would like to participate. So, we talked to those principals about implementing this initiative because we thought they were open-minded people and willing to try things and step out of their comfort zone.

Furthermore, principals agree if an initiative is implemented and it does not work, district leaders should take responsibility:

You have to be able to say that it didn't work. It was my fault. And I think people will respect that because if not, they will recognize that you didn't own the failure or that it didn't work. So, I think you have to be able to tell people, you know, we're going to try this, and if it doesn't work, it's me. [DL2]

District leaders have honest and transparent discussions on how the initiative will be received. "So, as a district leader, you at least have some feedback to guide your decisions" [DL1]. To provide feedback, progressive school leaders attempt to pilot most initiatives to help their students be successful. SP1 stated, "We want to pilot everything. We want to be on the cutting edge of things, and we want to be involved in all initiatives. We want to expose our kids to as many things as possible in middle school." SP3 concurred that school leaders are expected to follow the district's policy. He further explained, "There is a collaboration where we can speak freely and voice our opinions from a school leader to the district-level leaders and express our concerns or our likes and dislikes about the new initiative." Additionally, district-level leaders want to be

recognized as being transparent, honest, and credible. “You can only be a credible leader if you espouse values and transparency. Complete honesty and transparency are tightly aligned. It means what I say and do matches each other” [ASL].

In the four schools, observations were conducted by principals and the researcher on the implementation of new initiatives. The researcher generated observation checklist forms to document how the initiative was implemented in the learning environments. As reflected in the field notes after observing the beginning of new initiatives, one principal shared,

If you were to go in the Bridges class, you would see two separate groups of kids working, one doing language live, and then they flip. So, we have a teacher working with a group and then the contract teacher working with another group. Depending on what time of the day, you’ll see three people with different groups because one teacher would take a group of kids outside, and then two would split up in the room so they can work with those students. So that’s what you would see there in the other classes with the new initiatives. [SP3]

Collaborating Through Collegial Relationships

All district-level leaders concur that the relationships with principals are collegial. For example, several district-level leaders agreed that a principal could accept the recommendations to implement any type of initiative. ASL states,

Ultimately, it is up to the principal to follow through, and the depth of that follow-through depends on whether the principal believes in the initiative or not. If there is a strong belief that the initiative is worth it, then the principal will do his or her due diligence to learn more about the initiative and inspect what is expected for

the successful implementation of the initiative. Consequently, their formal and informal observations will be laser-focused to ensure that the initiative is being implemented with fidelity.

DL3 sees himself as the advisor in his relationships with principals. He gives them advice and encouragement based on his experience as a former principal. DL3 states,

I'm not their boss. I'm sure not their evaluator. I'm going to give you some strong encouragement. "This is what I think." "The best thing for you to do is this." "If I was in your chair" "If I was sitting in your seat."

District-level leaders do not take it personally when school leaders ignore their advice because school leaders are going to be held accountable for the school performance scores.

District-level leaders characterized their relationships with principals as being approachable because they know the complexities of the work of the principals. ASL states,

Those I supervise, most of them have been principals. Inclusiveness and everyone having a voice is very important. I provide an audience for principals to talk and share similar strategies, successes and challenges. As a district leader, I am very conscious of people's needs, especially those with whom I work closest, and I try to provide for those needs. And what I mean by that is if you're a grandmother and you and your children are far off, and your grandchildren are far off, I understand. Family is very important to me, so I understand and try to help people I work closely with, and it helps me know their situations.

District-level leaders also believe in shared decision-making to build relationships with principals, which includes collaborating on a vision and mission that moves the district forward. District-level leaders agree they cannot do this by themselves. SL said, “You got to give them a support team that they can start out with to have the impact they want to have on students in a positive way.” The district-level leaders support the development of ideal relationships by providing principals with reasons or justifications for the initiative.

One district leader believes the most crucial element in building a relationship is having constant communication with principals. “I try not to micromanage. I support my leaders. I’m going to be out front pushing the positives and the benefits of what the initiative will do for students because that is how the initiative was explained to us” [DL2].

However, school leaders view their relationships with district-level leaders as educational and collegial. When new initiatives are implemented, it is not the “same old curriculum.” School leaders want their schools to be known as progressive. Their responses confirm they want to be innovative and not simply compliant. SL1 states, “I didn’t even know what PPE was until a year ago when we were getting all that ‘personal protective equipment,’ but we didn’t know what it meant. It’s like we have to change in education.” He continues to explain,

Being an educator means being a change agent. You have really got to make sure you have that feeling that you want to create change in the world. And you know, we’re educating all of them. Every doctor came through a school teacher. Yeah. You know, every heart surgeon came through a school teacher. We set them on

the path for what's going to be the future of our country and, ultimately, our world. Now we're so global. [SL1]

Most of the school leaders are personal friends, and they have watched their peers be promoted in the district. Subsequently, they see their relationships as being very supportive and respectful of one another.

I knew Mr. D before he was the assistant superintendent as an assistant principal at Parkway. I would call him more and ask him things. It took me a while to get used to not calling him Coach D and Assistant Superintendent. Mr. R has been nothing but supportive. You know, all three of those, you know, Dr. B, Mr. R, and Mr. D, they call you back, you know. I mean, I just can't think of how thankful we have people like that that I think each one is specifically an expert in what they do. [DL2]

For this study, most of the principals interviewed have more than 30 years of experience with the exception of one. They believe that they have developed relationships where they can discuss things freely, and the end results are what is best for the students. SP4 shared, "I have been in the district so long and knowing them and them knowing me and having worked with them. That's a plus. We can agree to disagree, and it is always respectful. They're always willing to help."

In summary, the relationship with the district-level leaders is one of respect and friendship because they promote leaders from within the district. A level of mutual respect exists when principals know district-level leaders have dealt with the same situations, and they can help principals make logical and thorough decisions for students.

Communication of Expectations of Professional Growth Opportunities for Principals

Communication must be personal, open, collaborative, and directly associated with specific policies. DL1 states,

I talked to them and had a personal conversation about the need that we see. We can either meet face to face, but that's not always possible. So, we meet with the principals or send out emails to invite people who need to be there.

DL3 believes he is a liaison between the principals and the superintendent. He continues by stating,

Communication is like a liaison between Dr. B and Mr. D because they don't have time to run down to every school because they're managing the whole district. So, I am part of the intricate web to assist the high schools' principals if they need questions answered.

ASL practices open communication and want to work with principals without telling them what to do. "I characterize their communication with principals in the democratic way of doing things, so I don't use my power of position to influence people" [ASL].

To further promote the collaborative culture, district-level leaders accept proposals from school leaders when they would improve new initiatives. For example, SL stated he plans for schools that need intensive service to use a template that the principals developed. "The model emphasized finding a way to attract the best and the brightest to the neediest schools because they are going to naturally gravitate to the higher-performing schools that don't have the discipline problems" [SL]. This standard template

was developed so that principals may use practical solutions that can be easily implemented, especially in low-performing schools.

Communication is vital to all participants. For example, DL3 states that “sometimes communication can be visible and someone can stand beside you when making a decision or when dealing with a difficult situation, whether a behavior issue or filling a teaching position.” The principal appreciates the phone call, visit, or email.

Even if communication is effective with some principals, there are other principals who lack open minds about communicating new information to teachers’ complaints. SP1 repeated a statement a former district leader said:

[Former district leader] said this when we first put in Illuminate; [Former district leader] said in training, “Now wait a second.” He said, “Every day in your classroom, aren’t you trying to teach your kids something new, and you want them to be open-minded? So, we’re trying to teach you something new that can help your life here. We want you to be open-minded.

SP1 continued, “You still can communicate with principals in detail, but some are not willing to allow for growth in their school.”

Principals want to protect faculty and not put too many tasks on teachers or remove anything that has proven to be helpful. According to the participating principals, district-level leaders are beneficial when it comes to the implementation of new initiatives. For example, SP2 stated that he had never had anything but support from his supervisor, and his supervisor never made him feel embarrassed for not knowing specific details about the new initiatives. He elaborates,

Last year, during my principal's observation, my ASL asked me about the curriculum toolbox and said, "pull it up on the web." She then asked, "Do you know where it is?" And I said, "No, ma'am, I don't." So instead of making me feel uneducated, she came around and showed me, and I was very thankful for her kindness. [SP2]

SP2 realized that ASL could have written a report on his action, but instead, she gave him grace and created a communication skill that would be emphasized to others. She held him accountable but refused to embarrass or berate him.

School principals agree that there is a collaboration between the superintendent to the assistant superintendents. Even so, school principals can speak freely and voice opinions to district-level leaders. "We can voice our opinion and express our concerns or our likes/dislikes about it, and then we'll have a discussion after this information has been discussed, then this information can effectively be disseminated to our teachers" [SP3].

According to ASL,

Communication is apparent in implementing a new initiative, but principals are given guidance instead of a mandate to implement some initiatives. Still, inconsistencies exist that prevent the growth of students in schools where principals fail to implement an initiative properly.

When implementing any new initiatives, some guidelines must be followed. An essential procedure is the professional development of principals. District-level leaders provide professional training on all new initiatives implemented in the district. DL3 states,

We assess a need and look at data to see which schools need professional development. And then, we contact the principals to see if they would be interested in that and why we're suggesting it. And then, we create an opportunity for them to have that PD.

Some principals take advantage of the opportunity to be informed, but some send alternative representatives to participate in professional development training sessions.

The state department of education provides opportunities for professional growth, such as intervention content leaders. "This gives principals just a very shallow amount of knowledge to be dangerous. School principals developed a language that will fool the teachers into thinking they know a heck of a lot more than what they know" [ASL]. ASL continued,

Such professional development training provides gains in knowledge for principals to become empowered. However, some school principals dug their heels in and would not effectively implement the curriculum. While this may be true, these principals also tend to comply when district-level leaders visit the schools. As a result of observations and classroom walkthroughs, it was apparent to the district-level leaders that the principals were not committed to implementing the initiatives with fidelity. It was not until their professional development training with the intervention content leader that their eyes were opened up, and they realized the importance of these initiatives.

ASL shared that, as a result of this, "most professional development opportunities provided...are attended by lead teachers and instructional coaches. These school-site

educators have been given autonomy by school principals to act on their behalf, therefore, identifying professional growth as a significant problem for school leaders.”

District and school leaders think there are several challenges to implementing new initiatives. First, district-level leaders value principals’ opinions, and they want honest feedback. DL2 asserts that “principals need to let me know what works or what does not work. If I am not getting honest feedback, it is hard to know if what we’re doing is working.” Next, district-level leaders claim that collaboration between the principal and district leaders is vital to ensure that the initiative is good for the school and beneficial for the direction of the district. Principals hear the complaints, view the successes, and determine if the initiative is working but will not honestly inform the district leaders because they are not in schools every day.

ASL recognizes that the principal is the one person who determines the climate on the campus. Secondly, she claims,

If a principal is not familiar with the initiative and the direction that the district wants to be made public, he or she may publicly accept what is provided to the school by the district. Nevertheless, privately, when he or she is with the faculty, might say something different and become noncommittal to the initiative that the district provides. [ASL]

Finally, according to ASL:

It will ultimately be up to the principal to follow through, but if the principal believes in the initiative, the results will improve. However, when school leaders comply, the scores will reflect the school’s goals. Thus, commitment versus compliance is a significant issue when implementing new initiatives.

Another area of concern is pushback from school leaders, especially when they do not have voices in the decision. DL1 confirms that district leadership will decide to implement initiatives without receiving all the feedback from those impacted in classrooms by the initiative. “When you do not get feedback, it is a vital concern because all those making decisions should consider all those things and prioritize boys and girls” [DL1]. District-level leaders also agreed that if more people were involved in the process upfront, they would be more likely to trust the decision and have buy-in from the school leaders. SL states that creating buy-in and trust are probably the most important factors. “If people do not trust what you’re telling them, and if they don’t feel like this is going to benefit students and teachers, then they’re not going to be in favor of it” [SL]. In short, school principals agree that buy-in is crucial to implementation. Another factor that challenges implementation is the training of teachers [SP1, SP2, SL].

SL1 stated that “implementation challenges could sometimes provide training for my teachers that I know they need. You can have great programs, but if it doesn’t get in the classroom where the teacher feels good about it and feels like they are capable of doing it, it is useless.”

Further, SP4 adds, “I need to make sure they [teachers] all understand that we have to take them [students] from where they [students] are and take them where they need to be. We can’t implement a cookie-cutter initiative.” One other challenge that school leaders have is teachers not following the initiative with integrity. As an attempt to minimize the impact this challenge has on implementing new initiatives with success, SP3 believes in “allowing teachers to blend the district’s policy guidelines and their individual styles when implementing the initiatives.”

Nevertheless, one of the major obstacles is that new initiatives require teachers to be confident in using technology. SP3 is aware that some of his teachers are resisters because of the technology requirement. For example, he stated, “some of the programs are computer-based, and you have to go and search links and things of that nature. Unfortunately, many seasoned teachers are reluctant to resist doing those search links.” To combat this issue, SL3 has hired computer-savvy teachers, which has mitigated the obstacle over the last 3 years.

Summary

In summary, the themes comprise a framework for establishing how the district-level leaders and school principals work together to improve schools and play a vital role in implementing new initiatives. They describe how district-level leaders work with principals to have a collective voice in all initiatives and how professional development is inconsistent among principals. The data showed that this study’s district-level leaders and school principals have a collegial relationship; however, district-level leaders did not provide well-defined and clear expectations for implementing new initiatives. Although district-level leaders have open communication with principals, they did not require principals to attend professional development training that supported new initiatives, which led some school principals to assign other personnel to attend training. The observations also demonstrated that the environment changes when initiatives are implemented with principals and teachers who do it with fidelity.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this case study was to examine the participation of district-level leaders in the implementation of new initiatives and to determine how those leaders communicate expectations with principals.

Using the results, the researcher describes how district-level leaders support principals when making critical decisions concerning the implementation of new initiatives and how the relationships are nurtured. District-level leaders need to support implementing new initiatives and establish relationships with principals to make quality school growth decisions (Honig, 2006, 2008, 2009). Chapter 5 situates the current study's results within the context of existing research and provides recommendations for professional practice and the implications for future research.

Findings

Research Question 1

District-level leaders and principals play vital roles but have different perspectives on implementing new district-level initiatives. Honig (2009) found that district-level leaders believe that discussing ideas with principals is critical before implementing any initiative. In this study, district-level leaders maintain their roles as open collaborators

and believe that discussing ideas with principals is essential before implementing any initiative. District-level leaders believe in the committee process when implementing new initiatives in the district. District-level leaders believe that a joint committee, made up of people with different backgrounds with shared leadership roles, should be involved in selecting the initiatives, which is consistent with what Spillane (2005) found. District-level leaders realized there is power and wisdom in a committee because you can get input from all sides, and everyone has a voice. Several district-level leaders think 99% of the decisions we make about new initiatives need to be through the committee process

Similar to Sanders' (2014) findings, district-level leaders agree that principals need support when making critical decisions about implementing new initiatives in the district. District-level leaders were assigned to principals and tasked to strongly encourage principals to follow the implementation process because principals are held accountable for their school performance scores. District-level leaders realize if the principals are involved with the implementation, then their staff will implement the initiative with fidelity, and this aligns to Spillane's (2005) findings. Findings are similar in the existing literature that a collaborative perspective allows for leaders to be democratic or shared and can be stretched among leaders in a district, depending on the situation (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2005). One district-level leader wants all principals to have a voice in the implementation of new initiatives. The district-level leaders are sold on power with principles rather than power over the principals.

Principals view their roles as builders of morale who encourage their teachers to implement new initiatives with fidelity. Principals want teachers' input in the decision-making process (Spillane, 2005). Principals believe they are responsible for collaborating

with teachers, discuss initiatives, and solicit their input to maintain morale (Spillane, 2005). In this study, principals were committed to the initiatives instead of complying with directives if they were part of the decision-making process and were active and vested in implementing new initiatives.

Principals understand their roles are to assess where their schools are and implement initiatives to increase student achievement. Principals give teachers a voice if asked to implement initiatives but also follow the district's guidelines. Principals keep staff informed, so there is no arbitrary conversation. They listen but make the final decisions. Principals are vital because they shape the school climate. Literature suggests that principals have tremendous influence over the school and faculty, and how teachers feel about an initiative will determine either a positive or negative effect (Honig, 2009). Similar findings support initiatives where each person takes on leadership roles, assumes responsibility, and acts independently as an individual or group when shared leadership exists (Spillane, 2005).

This study's findings are similar where a collective perspective allows for leadership to be democratic or shared and can be stretched among leaders in a district (Gronn, 2002; Honig, 2009; Spillane, 2005). This was also found in the literature that shared decision-making can be stretched among leaders in a district, depending on the situation (Spillane, 2005). Honig (2008) found details of the district-level leaders' roles in implementing new initiatives to help principals make vital decisions to improve student learning. Sanders' (2014) findings provide research on what is expected of district-level leaders with policies and practices and how principals respond to districts.

Research Question 2

District-level leaders and principals understand the importance of communication; these understandings lead to shared leadership that provides more stakeholders with a voice and helps to develop a more inclusive decision-making process (Golding et al., 2009). In this study, district-level leaders communicated with principals in a variety of ways and encouraged principals to contact one another, especially when participating in the implementation of a new initiative. District-level leaders communicated with principals by exchanging personal conversations, face-to-face discussions, virtual meetings, and emails. These interactions support Lawson et al.'s (2017) finding that district-level leaders encourage principals to contact them and voice their ideas in the implementation process because principals' opinions are valued and respected.

Communication is apparent when implementing a new initiative, but principals are simply given guidance instead of a mandate to implement new initiatives. Principals have personal relationships with district-level leaders because principals have lived and worked in the same community for many years. District-level leaders and principals are partners in education due to the goal of increasing student achievement. District-level leaders and principals emphasize the mission is all about the students and how they can grow as a strong school district determined to prepare students for future learning opportunities.

Research Question 3

Spillane (2005) found that district-level leaders should be focused on having relationships with principals where principals are supported and valued when making decisions at their schools. In this study, district-level leaders and principals

confirmed it is imperative to empower principals during the beginning process of implementing an initiative. Principals agree that their relationships with the district-level leaders should be open, honest, and transparent. Honig (2009) agrees that district-level leaders must shift from enforcing policy to building relationships that are for successful policy implementation. Principals have worked in the district for several years, which resulted in nurtured working relationships and long-term friendships among all leaders. These relationships helped the district-level leaders and principal focus on communication and trust according to Lawson et al. (2017) findings.

The superintendent has entrusted a select group of principals to give their opinions about new initiatives and is always looking for ways to support all principals. Kodish (2014) found that at an interpersonal level, truthful, friendly, and meaningful communication helps build trusting relationships and establish a culture to improve students learning. Furthermore, the superintendent believes there is tremendous value in communicating expectations to principals when implementing new initiatives. District-level leaders have worked to build relationships with principals because they are the “boots on the ground,” and relational trust has been established to form credible relationships. Lawson et al. (2017) found it to have a powerful impact on student achievement in districts where trust depends on interpersonal relationships and task-oriented goals of schools.

District-level leaders acknowledge the relationship between the district-level leaders and principals is collegial. If the principals are familiar with new initiatives, they can decide if it is the direction their schools need. Though principals can choose to participate in the initiative publicly, privately, they may only comply with the

recommendations. Honig's (2009) findings suggest expectations are placed on principals to support new initiatives to help develop teaching and learning for all students.

Principals can influence the faculty and control how the faculty feels about implementing new initiatives because according to Spillane, (2005) leadership practices are a product of how school principals interact with their followers. District-level leaders understand when principals are committed to implementing new initiatives, they will be laser-focused on improving the school perform.

Honig (2006, 2008, 2009) found that district-level leaders and school principals can ensure successful initiatives by establishing collaborative teams. Principals established an open-door policy when implementing new initiatives and developed leadership teams to help build relationships. In the current study, principals want to provide their principals with opportunities to voice their concerns in the implementation process and believe that if principals understand why a new initiative is being implemented, they will follow the district's guidelines. Kodish's (2014) findings are similar to the literature where district-level leaders must work to build a trusting relationship with principals when implementing new initiatives.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for practice are presented and based on the themes and findings.

First, district-level leaders should ensure principals understand why new initiatives are essential to districts. District-level leaders must take principals' concerns seriously and take the time to clarify any issues the principals may have with the initiatives. One way this could be accomplished is to provide district-level leaders and

principals with professional development retreats. The retreats should focus on reviewing data and developing a needs assessment for the district. District-level leaders would facilitate discussions on the district, review current evaluation needs, develop a joint mission and vision, and provide measurable goals for the school district. The retreats should also consist of activities to strengthen principals' and district-level leaders' knowledge of new initiatives and the growth potential of the district in terms of student achievement. This team-building retreat should allow everyone to be on the same page, reflect on last year's accomplishments, think about where the district has been, and make sure the district is on the right path to increasing student achievement. This recommendation is to implement an annual end-of-the-year leadership retreat involving district leaders and school leaders to build relationships and establish collaboration among all leaders.

Second, district-level leaders should enact policy that requires leaders within the district to attend professional training in new initiatives. The current study identified that principals' attending (or lack attending) professional development to know about new initiatives implementation was a continual problem. District-level leaders would not be exempt from this requirement, which suggests the policy be school board-driven rather than district-level leader-driven.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should allow a qualitative study on how school districts could provide professional development to build the capacity of their principals within the district. This study would support the creation of a growth mindset of school principals to implement new initiatives. This study would be able to cultivate the capacity of principals

and strengthen their abilities to sustain their professional growth and be able to try innovative initiatives at their school to improve student achievement. Data may be collected through surveys among principals, teachers, and district-level leaders using collective responses to research available resources that will support student learning. These data could be analyzed to develop a needs assessment using performance data to make an informed decision on school improvement. The principals and staff would research different initiatives and visit schools where the initiatives have documented increases in student achievement. Finally, after a thorough evaluation of the initiatives, the principals and teachers would decide to implement the initiatives and provide professional development. The significant difference in this implementation would be that the initiative would be part of the principal's and teachers' evaluation processes. This requirement would ensure that principals and teachers are held accountable to increase teaching and learning. Future research should include needs assessments at individual schools, and the results should be used to determine new initiatives that meet each school's needs rather than district-wide initiatives.

Conclusion

The current study's findings indicate that district-level leaders and principals play vital roles in implementing new initiatives. The primary finding suggests that communicating expectations is the key to successfully implementing new initiatives. The study aimed to generate the needed evidence of including all stakeholders in implementing new initiatives. The research indicated that buy-in from all parties is essential for the effective implementation of new initiatives. District-level leaders believe that principals should have voices in the decision-making process, and this fosters a

collegial relationship between the two levels of leaders. Principals can influence faculty to implement new initiatives. District-level leaders agree that principals should have autonomy and be able to make initiative decisions.

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APPENDIX A

HUMAN USE APPROVAL LETTER



LOUISIANA TECH
UNIVERSITY.

Office of Sponsored Projects

EXEMPTION MEMORANDUM

TO: Ms. Emma Jordan and Dr. Bryan McCoy

FROM: Dr. Richard Kordal, Director of Intellectual Properties
rkordal@latech.edu

SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW

DATE: July 26, 2021

TITLE: "School District Central Office Bureaucracies and the Implementation
of New Small Autonomous Schools Initiatives"

NUMBER: HUC 22-003

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):
46.104 (a)(d)(1)(2)(i)(ii).

a) Unless otherwise required by law or by department or agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the categories in paragraph (d) of this section are exempt from the requirements of this policy, except that such activities must comply with the requirements of this section and as specified in each category.

(d) Except as described in paragraph (a) of this section, the following categories of human subjects research are exempt from this policy:

- (1) Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

(ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation

Thank you for submitting your Human Use Proposal to Louisiana Tech's Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B

LANGUAGE! LIVE CLASSROOM VISITATION CHECKLIST

Language! Live Classroom Visitation Checklist

Teacher _____ School _____ Room _____ Grade _____

Date _____ Unit/Lesson _____ Observation Start Time _____ End _____

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT	Visible	Not Visible
Lesson Plans/objectives “agenda” is posted. Includes title: Unit _____ Lesson _____		
Student materials are in use :Student Interactive Texts (workbooks) for Text Training and laptops/tablets and headphones for Word Training		
Text Training Vocabulary Checkpoints and Formative Assessment A/ B are available and up to date (Assessments completed match one unit prior to where they are currently teaching.)		
Visual models are used (displaying Interactive Text pages, etc.)		

TEACHING ATTRIBUTES	Observed	Not Observed
Using Teacher Edition for instruction		
Accurate and clear explanation of concepts and content		
Immediate re-teaching, reinforcement and feedback of concepts and skills		
High level of teacher-student interaction (I do; We do; You do)		
Instruction paced according to recommended time allocations in minutes—See the pacing guide that follows.		
Within 5 lessons of the pacing calendar created for the district		
Transitions from activity to activity are efficient and rapid		
Assessment data used to adjust instruction		

	STUDENT BEHAVIOR	Observed	Not Observed
Text Training with the teacher	Actively engaged and on task		
	Displays knowledge of procedures and routines		
	Variety of peer interactions		
	High level of student-teacher interaction		
Word Training completed online	Actively engaged and on task		
	Displays knowledge of procedures and routines		
	Recording their reading or listening to tutorials		
	Student stays on the website for ll.voyagersopris.com		

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for District-Level Leaders

1. What do district-level leaders see as their responsibility in implementing new initiatives?
2. What are district-level leaders' beliefs about principals' roles in implementing new initiatives?
3. How do district-level leaders believe decisions should be made?
4. Who do district leaders believe needs to be involved in making decisions about implementing new initiatives?
5. What do district leaders see as obstacles to implementing new initiatives?
6. How do district leaders characterize their communication with principals?
7. How do district leaders believe decisions should be made?
8. What do district leaders believe needs to be involved in making decisions about implementing new initiatives?
9. What do district leaders see as obstacles to implementing new initiatives?
10. How do district leaders characterize their communication with principals?
11. How do district leaders characterize their relationships with principals?
12. What do district leaders see as new initiatives, and where do they come from?

Dissertation Questions for School Principals

1. What do school principals see as their responsibility in implementing new initiatives?
2. What are school principals' beliefs about district leaders' roles in implementing new initiatives?
3. How do school principals believe decisions should be made?
4. Who do school principals believe needs to be involved in making decisions about implementing new initiatives?
5. What do school principals see as obstacles to implementing new initiatives?
6. How do school principals characterize their communication with district leaders?
7. How do school principals believe decisions should be made?
8. What do school principals believe need to be involved in making decisions about implementing new initiatives?
9. What do school principals see as obstacles to implementing new initiatives?
10. How do school principals characterize their communication with district leaders?
11. How do school principals characterize their relationships with district Leaders?
12. What do school principals see as new initiatives and where do they come from?