HOW DOES A PRINCIPAL IN DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS PRODUCE A PRODUCTIVE
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WITHIN THE CURRENT SYSTEM?

By

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ABSTRACT

HOW DOES A PRINCIPAL IN DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS PRODUCE A PRODUCTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WITHIN THE CURRENT SYSTEM?

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In this dissertation, the researcher investigates the success of productive learning environments in Detroit Public Schools. Using interviews with three productive principals from the Detroit school system, the researcher explores three related issues in public schooling. The first issue is the definition of a productive learning environment. By collecting answers from the principals about their definitions of productive learning environments, the researcher was able to find common themes. Among these common themes are: the safety of students, efficient hiring practices, team-centered efforts, and functioning school buildings. The second issue is about the obstacles that these principals face in creating a productive learning environment. The three principals presented many of their challenges in operating their schools, such as a lack funds, an unsafe environment, and a lack of qualified teaching staff. The third issue is the qualities that define productive principals in Detroit Public Schools. After comparing common traits and experiences between all three interviewed principals, the researcher identified several of these qualities, including open communication, acting as an instructional leader, being authoritative and energetic, and ability to build partnerships. The results of this dissertation will prove useful to urban school districts in Detroit and elsewhere in selecting future leaders and building productive learning environments.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Detroit Public Schools is a unique school system where highly devoted and incredibly innovative educators must overcome the longstanding economic and social issues that have impacted the city since the racially charged riots of 1943 and 1967. The riots exacerbated the exodus of many Caucasians, major businesses, and middle class families from the city and further worked to increase racial and economic segregation between the city and surrounding suburban areas. In 2009, Arne Duncan, the former U.S. Secretary of Education, referred to the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) system as "ground zero" for public education, (Kang, 2015). In accordance with past trends, the academic and physical conditions of DPS schools have further deteriorated over the last seven years. The situation worsened in July 2013, when Detroit, composed of over 80 percent underprovided black residents (Khalifa et al., 2015), became the largest city in the U.S. to have filed for bankruptcy. The city, under the leadership of governor-appointed Emergency Financial Manager Kevin Orr, encountered dire consequences for the city's public schools due to the financial crisis. The resulting significant loss in enrollment of students and the associated yearly loss in per pupil dollars engulfed the DPS deeper into widespread catastrophe (Kang, 2015; Mirel, 1999).

Reports claim the schools to have lost nearly 10,000 students every year for over a decade (Kang, 2015), which has resulted in half of the schools (149 schools) shutting down since 2001 (Arsen & Ni, 2011). The number of students enrolled in Detroit Public Schools decreased from 156,000 students in 2001 to less than 50,000 students presently. The loss in these schools' enrollment has been attributed to two interrelated factors. The first is the relocation of families who have the means to flee the city's numerous problems to other cities. The second is the

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selection of alternative academies such as charter schools, parochial schools, private schools, etc. by the families that chose to stay in the city and educate their child through other modes (Pierce & Stapleton, 2003; Dickson, 2011). Additionally, some parents have elected to allow their children to remain in one of the schools of the newly-formed Education Achievement Authority (EAA) district in Detroit (Chambers, 2014; Kang, 2015), which is scheduled to close after the 2016-2017 school year.

Since 2012, 15 schools in the district have been removed from Detroit Public Schools and placed in the state run Educational Achievement Authority (EAA) because of low performance (Kang, 2015). However, the EAA has faced severe criticism for destroying school communities, forming an incredibly unproductive educational authority, and closing schools under questionable circumstances (Khalifa et al., 2015). The formation of the EAA has also been ridiculed for intensifying the loss of students and employees within the Detroit Public Schools (Mason & Arsen, 2014; Chambers, 2014; Kang, 2015).

The shift of students from DPS (Dawsey, Walsh-Sarnecki, & Higgins, 2005) to available schooling alternatives has resulted in a constant struggle amongst current principals to attract, retain, and recruit students from competing schools as well as neighboring districts willing to accept Detroit students. The situation of DPS is considered unique given the dramatic decline in population and school enrollment which has never been witnessed by any other city in the U.S., except in the case of natural disaster. Detroit Public Schools thus appear to be the sole exemplary case that can be used as a positive example of the overcoming of such odds.

In addition to the financial pressures, DPS has also faced a leadership crisis in the wake of the temporary leaders titled Emergency Managers (Kang, 2015). The Emergency Manager is an individual appointed by the governor to control the various aspects of the school system. He

or she has the authority to void previous employment contracts, impose new agreements, make curriculum decisions, as well as promote and terminate employees. Furthermore, the role of the Emergency Manager is similar to a superintendent in a traditional district who functions without the supervision of a school board. The implementation of the Emergency Manager laws essentially implied the elimination of the power of the school board and elected officials to provide meaningful resistance to the unprecedented changes occurring in the district (Oosting, 2012). Such eradication of the control of powers of the Detroit Public Schools school board members has reduced their status to powerless elected officials (Khalifa et al., 2015).

Five Emergency Managers have managed DPS since 2009 with Steven Rhodes becoming the latest Emergency/Transitional Manager to lead Detroit Public Schools until December 31, 2016 after the resignation of Darnell Early (the fourth Emergency Manager) on February 29, 2016. The rotation of Emergency Managers has created a wave of new school reforms in DPS (Sands, 2012) with each Manager bringing in a new visionary plan to reduce cost, increase student achievement, and improve school quality. However, despite the intention to improve the situation in DPS, the experimental reforms undertaken by each Emergency Manager has added to the district's dismal economic and academic state (Lewis, 2015).

The DPS principals, who bear the primary responsibility for preserving the confidence of the parents and local community members, have been particularly impacted by this frequent change in district leadership. Although such personnel changes are common in urban schools, principals in urban districts often must deal with temporary superiors who act as permanent leaders. The high turnover (two to three years) of superintendents in large urban districts (Haberman, 1999) has forced principals to withstand unstable district leadership and wavering directions for nearly a decade in their mission to produce productive learning environments.

During the 2015–2016 school year, Governor Rick Snyder signed a $617 million-dollar bill for splitting the Detroit Public Schools into two districts in order to eliminate the district's operating debt. The old district was to remain intact for roughly ten years to pay off the outstanding debt, while the new district would exist to educate students with a startup cost of $150 million dollars (Eggert, 2016). Further, a new district named the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) was formed to begin the 2016-2017 school year without the previous debt of the old DPS.

The financial and leadership challenges encountered by DPS had several repercussions for the students, teachers, and staff in the district. All employees in the district were required to suffer a 10% reduction in their salary to contribute towards the elimination of the district's outstanding debt that had ballooned under state control. Further, DPS employees during the 2016-2017 school year maintained their former 10% reduced concession salary as the normal salary under the new DPSCD. Additionally, 23 out of 97 school buildings under DPS tested positive for elevated levels of lead and copper in the water making it unfit for consumption by students and staff. This necessitated the daily provisioning of bottled water by the school district due to medical concerns associated with lead consumption (Zhang et al., 2013). Other city inspections indicated that numerous buildings in the district failed due to the presence of black mold, rodents, leaking roofs, and malfunctioning heating systems. The salary reductions, years of pay step freezes, frequent leadership changes, and deplorable working conditions have all contributed to the further erosion of employee morale (Fantz, 2016).

The district is also characterized by a massive shortage of teachers owing to the various issues that plague the urban systems. Such issues tend to dissuade some of the best teachers from applying to urban districts (Yisreal, 2012). The result is several schools within the district

functioning without sufficient teachers in core subject areas. Some classrooms are vacant and/or being led by substitute teachers who have been granted temporary clearance owing to the district shortage of over 200 teachers. The use of substitute teachers for full-time teaching positions has created a void of substitute teachers needed to replace absent educators resulting in vacant classrooms. Some schools are forced to hold classes in gymnasiums, cafeterias, and auditoriums for multiple class periods due to a lack of core subject instructors to regularly educate the students.

Given the numerous problems of the DPS, several sections of society in the district have begun to protest the conditions under which teaching and learning has been allowed to occur in such schools. Thousands of teachers have participated in "sickouts" to oppose the current conditions of the education provided in the district (Andrews, Bartell & Richmond, 2016; Fantz, 2016). A sickout is a term used for the collective decision of teachers to call off work as a form of protest. The sickouts of 2015-2016, along with a lack of substitute teachers, led to the official shutdown of schools monthly. The sickout protests have been widely supported by parents, students, and other stakeholders in the community. Other protests in Detroit have used various forms based on the differences among the inhabitants pertaining to resistance, cognizance, accessibility, and upbringing (Khalifa et al., 2015).

Curbing the varied challenges of financial constraints, loss of enrollment, leadership changes, teacher shortages, working conditions, and rising protests is the responsibility of principals, who are simultaneously faced with the task of meeting both the academic needs and any other needs of the students (Mirel, 1999). Effective leaders who envision the schools' culture are essential ingredients for successful schools (Stafford & Hill-Jackson, 2016). Thus,

principals need to be the positive catalysts for steering all efforts towards improvement in the district regardless of current conditions.

The question which remains unanswered concerns how the urban principal can reasonably be expected to meet these multiple and competing demands. Urban school principals have the challenge of juggling the needs of the school, staff, students, and the community while constantly being scrutinized (Yisreal, 2012). The responsibilities are a challenge: ensuring the fulfillment of student learning needs in the absence of vital resources or basic amenities, and adapting to the current employee shortage and devising creative methods to educate students in overcrowded classes without certified teachers. Some principals have taken the role to act as educators in classes for certain periods of the day due to a lack of adequate teacher coverage. Sickouts, especially, place the principal in a demanding position to retain a positive working relationship between the teachers, district administration, and parents (Gast & Shortell, 2016). Such factors add to the workload and pose relentless demands on the part of the current principals in Detroit Public Schools.

Veteran as well as incumbent principals have often claimed that it is difficult to understand the roles and burdens of a principal until one has been in the same position (Pristash, 2002). This claim is particularly true for the present scenario facing the principals in Detroit Public Schools. The success stories of principals devising effective strategies for curbing the challenges posed by urban districts in the nation can serve as valuable examples for other building leaders in Detroit and throughout the country. The present project aims at analyzing some of the scholarly, as well as unorthodox methods, employed by principals within Detroit Public Schools to produce a productive learning environment for students and staff.

Problem Statement

From the research perspective, few studies have focused on the Detroit Public Schools. To the best knowledge of the researcher, no study has been completed regarding the current conditions of such schools or the relationship that exists between DPS and school leadership. The scholarly works of Jeffrey Mirel and Leanne Kang have served as primary resources for the current study. The research also made use of a collection of news articles relating to the current conditions of Detroit Public Schools. Several researchers including Carlin (1992), Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004), and Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010), have demonstrated that the principal is the single most influential individual in a productive school environment. Howsoever, sufficient research has still not been completed focused on the school principals in Detroit Public Schools.

The present research is thus, expected to be first study which will extensively analyze the current conditions of the district from the principals' perspective. Further, given the unique conditions of the Detroit region, the research conducted in other urban locales will only prove to be partially useful for studying Detroit Public Schools. Additional research that addresses the role of the principal in producing a productive learning environment given the contextual realities facing the district at present is critical. Likewise, the research will examine the principals' ability to foster productive learning environments in the wake of the multiple obstacles that plague the current educational system.

Purpose of the Study

The present research aims at filling the existing research gap concerning the role of school principals in producing productive learning environments in the midst of Detroit's multitude of challenges. The existing challenges impacting Detroit Public Schools have received

national as well as international attention over the past year (Fantz, 2016). These challenges include teacher sickouts (Oosting, 2016), limited substitute teachers and qualified educators (Zaniewski, 2014), insufficient textbooks and supplies, reductions in employee salaries and benefits, fiscal inadequacies within the district, unsafe building conditions for staff and students, and low employee morale. The present qualitative case study can thus be used for gaining a greater understanding of the actions of a productive principal experiencing unparalleled turmoil and future uncertainty. Similar actions can then be used as a tool to educate the current leaders within urban schools facing similar challenges.

Research Questions

Given the purpose of the present study, the research questions that will guide this examination are as follows:

1. How does a Detroit Public Schools' principal within the study currently define a "productive learning environment" based on the current state of the district?

2. What are the obstacles that prevent principals within the study from achieving productive learning environments?

3. What are the characteristics of a Detroit Public School principal within the study who produces a productive learning environment in the current system?

Conceptual Framework

Only limited research exists pertaining to Detroit Public Schools and the complexities within the district. However, two significant resources, namely Appreciative Intelligence and Appreciative Inquiry, guided the conceptual framework throughout the research. In addition, two supporting resources also supplemented the conceptual framework: Positive Organizational Scholarship and the Warrior Principal Mentality. Although these resources do not address the

exact problems of Detroit Public Schools, they proved useful in providing a prospective for producing extraordinary results in organizations experiencing systematic disorder.

Appreciative Inquiry is a theory that evaluates how systems function at the optimal level for productivity (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Principals within DPS are faced with the task of ensuring the operation of their school buildings at high levels despite the numerous challenges that exist. Systems and leaders who maximize the Appreciative Inquiry theory display a substantial capacity to exhibit Appreciative Intelligence. In simple terms, Appreciative Intelligence is the ability to recognize the positive attributes in a situation to generate longstanding productive change. Leaders with Appreciative Intelligence have the aptitude to see the possibilities for success despite the obstacles that exist in their path (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006; Lehtimaki, Kujala & Thatchenkery, 2013).

Appreciative Intelligence empowers leaders to identify the positive attributes of individuals and organizations to produce productive results (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006; Thatchenkery, 2009). In most situations, productive principals in DPS are forced to extract positive factors for productivity by overcoming the lack of basic resources, which can attribute to negative outcomes. Appreciative Intelligence thus encourages framing reality in a new and positive manner (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006; Lehtimaki, Kujala & Thatchenkery, 2013). Leaders with Appreciative Intelligence typically separate the future from the present to alter the outlook for success in a positive manner (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006). In this manner, such leaders can focus on organizational goals rather than on any current failures that may facilitate a culture of underperformance. Using Appreciative Intelligence triggers sequential steps for achieving momentum shifts to productive outcomes (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006; Thatchenkery, 2009), which further provide opportunities for celebration and measurable gains.

Appreciative Inquiry transforms the functions of a system from command and control to exploration and teamwork (Whitney &Trosten-Bloom, 2010; Jordan & Thatchenkery, 2011). The current system of leadership in DPS has been based on command and control, owing to the frequently changing Emergency Managers. Appreciate Inquiry provides an opportunity to replace fear with fearless cooperation, and punishment with productive praise. Productive principals must incorporate the appropriate components of Appreciative Inquiry Theory in organizational practices to achieve success.

Appreciative Inquiry Theory consists of four major cycles that are necessary for productivity: discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Hart, Conklin & Allen, 2008; Whitney &Trosten-Bloom, 2010; Bushe, 2011). The discovery cycle engages organizations in a search for their strengths and greatest attributes for success. The dream cycle involves the search for organizations' greatest potential: what they could become with a concerted team effort. The design cycle forces organizations to move out of their comfort zones to create a blueprint for an ideal organization. Finally, in the destiny cycle organizations complete the ongoing actions that cement the new direction and sustained culture. Each of the four cycles assist the inculcation of trust within the leadership in successful organizations (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Thatchenkery, Cooperrider & Avital, 2010).

Continuously questioning and re-evaluating the progress of an organization is at the heart of Appreciative Inquiry (Whitney &Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The questioning allows the organization to refocus and make adjustments for overall productivity. Questioning will always concentrate on positive changes rather than focusing on deficit-based thinking about past failures

(Whitney &Trosten-Bloom, 2010; Bushe, 2011). The elimination of deficit-based thinking favors the overall mindset change required of the organization.

The process of questioning also encourages one-to-one dialogues within the members of the organization which promotes positive change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). From the principals' perspective, one-to-one conversations are a key instrument in the development of individuals within a school (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran 2010). These one-to-one dialogues between organization members are called Appreciative Interviews, and are a crucial element for creating systemic culture shift (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Such conversations allow the organizational members to learn from each other and exchange candid viewpoints (Hart, Conklin & Allen, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran 2010).

Dr. Kim Cameron highlighted the importance of practicing positive leadership for leading organizations to bring about productive change through the Positive Organizational Scholarship concept. He worked in close collaboration with Detroit Public School administrators to create a cultural shift within the district through a series of professional development meetings held at the University of Michigan campus during the 2015–2016 academic year. A major goal of this series of professional development sessions was to devise organizational strategies to deal with crisis situations (Cameron & Dutton, 2003). According to Kim Cameron, "it is almost impossible to be a positive leader without being a source of positive energy" (Cameron, 2013, p. 15). Positive energy may thus be regarded as a monumental asset for a district which frequently encounters negative conditions in all facets of the system.

Dr. Sean B. Yisrael researched school leadership from the perspective of urban schools. His major contribution has been the introduction of the concept of urban principals as warriors in

the current volatile scenario of the urban school districts and the communities they service (Dickinson & Williams, 2016). According to Dr. Yisrael, "warrior principals have the heart to confront tough issues because they are confident in themselves and their abilities" (Yisrael, 2013, p. 13). For example, the principals in Detroit Public Schools have no other choice but to confront tough issues for the survival of their school buildings (Steckroth, 2016). The roles and responsibilities of the urban school principal similarly align with that of a traditional warrior in several ways (Yisrael, 2013). Principals in Detroit Public Schools must prepare for the unpredictable and maintain a warrior-like focus to overcome the substantial barriers that could inhibit their school from producing productive learning environments.

The DPS principal is in a constant battle with the district's limitations for academic supplies, teacher staffing, physical plant support, school security, busing assistance, maintenance, and releasing of school funds for improvement purchases. Warrior principals must manage the responsibility of spending a majority of their time on addressing urgencies aimed at an overall improvement of the school (Yisrael, 2013). The voluntary willingness of a principal to fight for students' needs is the most influential factor for determining whether the school will be productive or unproductive. As claimed by Yisrael (2013), being a warrior principal implies that the principal is willing to go beyond the prescribed duties of an organizational leader to ensure the productiveness of the school. The focus is on taking up complete responsibility and ownership of the school's affairs to make it a productive place for both students and staff.

Principals in Detroit Public Schools must portray themselves as a positive force for the entire school community while withstanding the various negative forces that are detrimental to producing a productive learning environment. An essential tool for the principals in such challenging environments is the ability to find positive meaning in all work-related activities

(Cameron & Dutton, 2003). A crucial step towards inculcating positive organizational

scholarship in DPS is incorporating systems of displaying appreciation and gratitude for effort,

especially in view of the feeling common among employees of being undercompensated

(Cameron & Dutton, 2003). Positivity is attractive and inspiring; therefore, practicing positive

leadership is important (Cameron, 2013). People tend to gravitate to positive individuals who

have the aptitude to inspire others at time of struggle. At the epicenter of leadership lies the idea

of positive energy (Cameron, 2013). Productive principals in DPS must have a similar ability to

positively influence the entire school community and motivate them to contribute towards the

betterment of the students beyond their job descriptions as presented in the Symbiotic

Relationships in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1 SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS
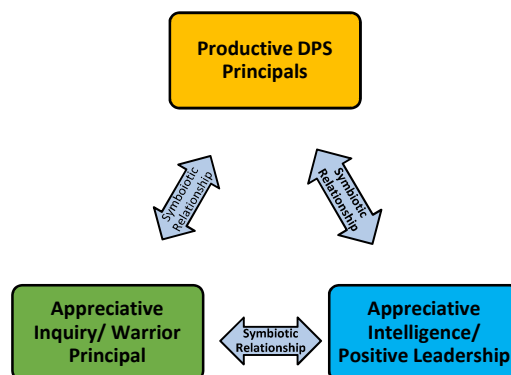
Irrespective of the turmoil that currently exists in the district, productive principals in

Detroit Public Schools are expected to possess the characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry,

Appreciative Intelligence, positive leadership, and a warrior-like state of mind to maintain

productive learning environments. Productive principals in Detroit Public Schools infuse

Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Intelligence, the warrior mentality and positive leadership

with the aim of motivating employees to sacrifice their personal desires for the overall well-

being of the school. A successful cultural transformation is evident when associates of the

organization start altering their habits, reason differently, modify how they make sense of their

settings, alter the denotation associated with their actions, and focus on possibilities instead of

probabilities (Cameron, 2013). In certain cases, all employees are required to volunteer for

uncompensated services to create a productive learning environment for students. Warrior

principals must aim at advancing their schools in favor of all students, teachers, and staff in the

building (Yisrael, 2013).

Principals in DPS can effectively utilize their positive relations with prominent

individuals in the district to present increased opportunities for the students. Positive leaders are

usually expected to possess the ability to channel the arrangements and collaborations necessary

to an organization to manufacturer modifications (Cameron, 2013). Such additional

opportunities are owed solely to the DPS principals' ability to maintain positive leadership and

lines of communication under stressful times. Positive leadership relates to the implementation

of numerous constructive systems that support individuals and organizations in attaining their

highest potential, effectiveness, and a sense of uplifted energy (Cameron, 2013). Figure 1.2

illustrates the conflicting positive and negative forces in the construction of productive learning

environments.

FIGURE 1.2 POSTIVE FORCES VS. NEGATIVE FORCES
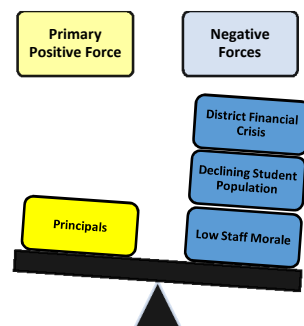
Significance to the Field

Despite the research of numerous scholars on the importance of school principals for bringing about effective change in schools, the challenges faced and processes to be undertaken by the principal remain undocumented. Especially for DPS, such factors have not been analyzed as a tool used to ensure their survival in urban districts by undertaking the necessary future changes. DPS presents a distinctive case study due to the extreme challenges that exist within its present structure and the variety of principals who have proven to be productive despite the documented obstacles in the system. Understanding how principals can successfully retain productive learning environments is significant for the current and future students of Detroit Public Schools Community District, as well as for other building leaders and policymakers in urban schools who may face similar circumstances.

Summary

Principals in Detroit Public Schools must daily overcome several obstacles on their uphill battle to improve academic achievements regardless of internal and external barriers. The present research is designed to serve as a revolutionizing tool for the Detroit Public School System. The collected data, scholarly foundation, and inputs from productive principals will prove fundamental in understanding the necessary actions to be undertaken by Detroit Public School principals to create productive learning environments. Creating district leaders who hold the belief that they have the necessary resources and personnel to educate and protect students, attract and retain talented employees, and prepare students for success in the real world, is paramount to the survival of the district.

Definition of Key Terminology

1. **Academic Achievement** – The overall measurable growth and development of students on standardized tests, quarterly grades, and classroom assessments.

2. **Administrative Employee Agreement** – The Administrative Employee Agreement is the contract that is signed by all Detroit Public School principals. This document lists all of the expectations and responsibilities of principals within the district.

3. **AFT/DFT** – The AFT is the American Federation of Teachers Union which has momentarily taken control of the DFT (Detroit Federation of Teachers Union) due to infighting and leadership division within the union.

4. **Assistant Superintendent/ Network Leader** – Detroit Public Schools currently has several Assistant Superintendents/ Network Leaders who divide the 97 district schools.

5. **Bankruptcy** – The City of Detroit has filed bankruptcy under the leadership of Emergency Financial Manager Mr. Kevin Ore.

6. **Chief Communications Officer** – The Chief Communications Officer is responsible for communicating with the media and issuing district statements in the times of crisis and positive events.

7. **Chief of Staff** – The Chief of Staff is second-in-command. The Emergency Manager has his Chief of Staff/ Special Assistant. All district Assistant Superintendents/Network Leaders report directly to Emergency Manager and/or Chief Staff/ Special Assistant.

8. **Crime** – Illegal activities. Detroit has been ranked by the FBI as one of the nation's most dangerous cities based on the crime rate (murder, rape, physical assault, and robbery). Several schools in the district are in the heart of what have been documented as some of the

most dangerous neighborhoods in the nation. DPS is a unique district in the state because it has a police department solely dedicated to assisting the school system.

9. **Concessions** – All DPS Employees are required to return 10% of their salary in concessions to assist with the overall district debt. Therefore, no DPS employees are eligible for step raises and/or any financial increases until further notice.

10. **DFT** – Detroit Federation of Teachers Union

11. **DPS** – Detroit Public Schools

12. **DPSCD** – Detroit Public Schools Community District (Established July 1, 2016)

13. **EAA** – The Education Achievement Authority. The EAA is the state controlled school system that currently holds the lowest performing schools from Detroit Public Schools.

14. **Emergency Manager/ Transitional Manager** - The Emergency Manager/ Transitional Manager is appointed by the Governor. Detroit Public Schools has experienced four Emergency Managers. Robert Bobb was the first and was strongly considered to be the most controversial. Roy Roberts replaced Robert Bobb and was the second Emergency Manager. Jack Martin was the third Emergency Manager. Darnell Early was the fourth Emergency Manager. Retired bankruptcy Judge Steven Rhodes was the fifth Emergency Manager/ Transitional Manager. These individuals have the authority to break contracts and mandate financial concessions, they have additional sweeping powers that impact every single dimension of the school system. This is a term limited appointed position.

15. **Employee Work Rules** – A set of rules and regulations that govern all employees within Detroit Public Schools.

16. **Pay Steps** – Pay steps are incremental increases in salary based on years of service and level of education.

17. **PACSA** – PACSA is the parent involvement board that represents the interests of the parents, students, and school stakeholders. PACSA is Detroit Public School's version of the PTA or PTSA.

18. **Poverty** – Extremely poor conditions caused by lack of income.

19. **Priority Schools** – Priority Schools are the lowest performing schools in the State of Michigan and represent all schools in the bottom 5 percent. Detroit Public Schools have a considerable amount of Priority Schools and schools that have worked off the Priority List due to incredible reorganization and improvement strategies. In September of 2016, the State School Reform/Redesign Office (SRO) added additional schools from DPS/DPSCD to the Priority Schools list. Currently, 47 out of 97 DPSCD schools are on the lowest performing (Priority Schools) list.

20. **Productive Learning Environments** – A term defined by principals in the study.

21. **Productive Principals** – Building leaders who are able to withstand the current obstacles of the district while maintaining productive centers for teaching and learning.

22. **School Community** – The entire neighborhood surrounding a school.

23. **Sickout** - Collective decision of teachers to call in sick as a form of protest.

24. **Superintendent of Academics** – Superintendents in most districts have the responsibility of controlling academic, budget, transportation, and all other aspects of district functions. However, DPS has an Emergency Manager who has been appointed by the Governor. The Superintendent position is currently held by Interim Superintendent Alycia Meriweather. Her official contract terminates on Friday, June 30, 2017.

25. **SRO** – State School Reform/Redesign Office

26. **Urban Schools** – Schools that exist within high-poverty inner-city environments.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature has shown that the complex nature of urban school leadership can be attributed to several factors (Crow and Scribner, 2014). Some urban school systems have been tarnished by employee corruption, local and state fiscal irresponsibility, political agendas, and student enrollment declines (Zaniewski, 2014). Such factors have further augmented the obstacles faced by principals to improve the learning environments in the schools. There has been a systemic disinvestment in the academic achievement of several urban school systems throughout the country. Institutional disinvestment can take the form of deliberate discrimination and its associated consequences, however it is more likely to be demonstrated in poor expectations, poor demands, lack of adequate teaching, and unethical distribution of human as well as social resources (Payne, 2008).

The review of literature indicated that there has not been extensive research on principals within school systems facing extreme economic disasters such as bankruptcy and possible total elimination of the district. In addition, there has been no research on how principals create learning environments for students, teachers, and parents in the wake of such a financial and political crisis. As asserted by Damiani (2014), the principal-teacher and principal-student have changed in the same way as the change in the relationships between principals and schools. Principals within cities and school districts facing economic and political turmoil often face unique challenges that most scholars regard as abnormal and undiscovered phenomena. Modern principals must work among a multitude of impediments imposed by constantly changing fiscal supports, school laws and procedures, community principles as well as youth philosophy (Rousmaniere, 2013).

Principals theoretically have the most challenging job in education (Bellamy, Murphy, Fulmer & Muth, 2007). A broad research base has dealt with multiple aspects of the principal position from both urban and universal perspectives. Principals are the "difference agents" in productive schools (Carlin, 1992) and their actions have the power to transform organizational cultures (Hart, Conklin & Allen, 2008; Lehtimaki, Kujala & Thatchenkery, 2013; Bushe, 2011). The author researched existing literature that discusses the principal's role in leading urban schools. Research topics also included environmental factors, instructional leadership, school safety, and financial responsibility. This research further addressed the limitations pertaining to the distinctive circumstances of the school system and the principals being observed.

The Principal's Role

Milli Pierce and Deborah Stapleton investigated the changing roles of the 21st century principal. Their study explored the growing demands on active principals coupled with the limited physical and economic resources at their disposal. They analyzed the increased accountability and expectations for academic gains that all principals must embrace (Barber & Dann, 1996; Cooke, 2006; Fulmer, Murphy & Muth, 2007). Also, they took a realistic view of the increased level of stress among principals and the present trend of attaching compensation incentives to academic achievement. Pierce and Stapleton stated that taking up the responsibility of being a 21st century principal is more challenging and less favorable due to the rising demands of the role (2003).

Theodore Kowalski researched the visionary leadership and management traits of effective principals in view of the progressing demands of the profession. Visionary leaders have the ability to reframe the current situation and inspire positive change (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Hart, Conklin & Allen, 2008; Thatchenkery, 2009; Whitney, 2010).

Educators striving to become building leaders need to understand how to balance the developing expectations for school leadership and the continuous social demands for excellence (Kowalski, 2010).

The increased accountability and probability of a reduction in compensation based on building performance is a constant barrier endured by all principals. Some of a principal's responsibilities are not understood by teachers, parents, students, and staff (Kowalski, 2010; Haberman, 1999). Sharon Pristash researched the routine responsibilities of the principal and highlighted the necessity of the school principal to be in total control of all factors of the school. The principal is the key decision maker in the school, provides a safety net and direction, and holds each person accountable for their actions (Pristash, 2002). Some urban principals must accept these unlimited duties while balancing the possible financial limitations faced by their district (Lipman, 2013; Kang, 2015).

Gwendolyn Cooke researched the success factors of the different roles taken by urban principals. Principals must realize the need to lead as a leader with compassion, and have high levels of expectation, support, and content (Cooke, 2006). Urban principals must set high standards for all other stakeholders in their buildings to face the circumstances in the district without limiting the success of their students. Fiscal obstacles and a lack of human capital are constant challenges for principals within poor districts who are fighting to enhance their students' academic achievement (Carlin, 1992; Cooke, 2006; Payne, 2008). Prince and Stapleton also pinpointed the moral and ethical obligations of principals to enhance academic achievement regardless of the obstacles within the system. An important part of a principal's job is to guarantee that each child is regarded as having a promising and bright future (Pierce & Stapleton, 2003).

Effective principals are considered "resolution creators" due to their willingness to challenge difficult topics and their understanding of how to help staff, students, and parents discover complications. Along with this, they also focus on pondering probable solutions (McEwan, 2003). Principals within some urban environments are constantly encountering new challenges that prohibit the attainment of higher academic achievement (Burns, 2014; Lewis, 2015; Yisrael, 2012). Elaine McEwan researched the ten traits of highly effective principals and highlighted the importance an ability to analyze the current situation and make frequent adaptations to increase opportunities for success. Highly effective principals continually monitor and adjust their leadership styles to accommodate the various challenges related to schools, faculties, and communities (McEwan, 2003).

Principals must adjust to the changing dynamics of a new generation of teachers, students, and parents. These dynamics may include dissimilarities based on race, economics, culture, stereotypes, and political views (McEwan, 2003; Pierce & Stapleton, 2003; Ricken, 2006; Seyfarth, 1999). Principals with inclusive leadership personalities contest stereotypes and conservative understanding with their teachers and staff (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Leaders in urban districts may have to successfully manage schools that are composed of individuals from diverse backgrounds. However, communicating effectively and understanding individual differences while also connecting across social, racial, cultural, as well as political lines is a difficult and complex task (Delpit, 2006).

Lisa Delpit explored the concept of communication across diversities from a classroom instructional standpoint and found it to be relevant to an urban principal's perspective as well. The priority area of a principal's job description is to be a productive communicator to students, teachers, parents, and staff while also ensuring that the communication is relevant, supportive,

and productive (McEwan, 2003). These elements work together to pose a new challenge to fostering academic achievement in some urban schools (Haberman, 1999; Jackson, Turner, & Battle, 2015; Yisrael, 2012). A majority of principals hold the notion that relationships, especially with educators and parents, are more crucial in the present scenario than ever before (Kowalski, 2010).

School staff may be successful because productive principals create an environment that fuels success through multiple avenues including positive communication (Haberman, 1999; Bushe, 2011). Research has shown that successful principals are perceived to be visible and highly involved in all the dimensions of the school (Cooke, 2006; McEwan, 2003; Seyfarth, 1999; Stafford & Hill-Jackson, 2016). This perception manifests itself in the daily interactions of a school leader with parents, staff members, community partners, and the local media. This indicates that the urban school principal's obligation goes much beyond the immediate students and teachers (Cooke, 2006).

The expectation for principals is to "lead by example" and consistently act as a positive spokesperson for the school and district (Oplatka, 2007; Ricken, 2006). Parents appreciate visible and active principals (Pristash, 2002). In addition, some urban principals must develop meaningful relationships with local business stakeholders to create a beneficial learning opportunity for students within a potentially explosive system. Principals also must work to leverage external business partnerships that benefit their school (Haberman, 1999). Due to the economic limitations of some districts, it has become essential for principals to successfully solicit financial assistance from outside agencies to enhance academic achievements in their schools.

Limitations in the Literature: The Principal's Role

The job of the principal requires a range of skillsets necessary to handle diverse circumstances (Seyfarth, 1999). John Seyfarth researched the new challenges faced by principals in the new millennium. Seyfarth rightly argued that the principal's job demanded more than what was simply written in his or her job description. A substantial proportion of research conducted on the role of principals stresses the complexity and unpredictability associated with the job (Pristash, 2002). Effectively playing the role of a principal in schools is a difficult and exhausting task. However, the overwhelming majority of the literature does not cover the additional challenges faced by districts under decades of state control. Also, the literature does not cover the role of a principal under state appointed Emergency Managers. Within some urban school districts, longstanding dysfunction, money mismanagement, corruption, departure of students, and political gymnastics have created a unique situation for principals aiming at productive learning environments. Political and economic interests have also made audacious statements that only the market can salvage underperforming public schools (Lipman, 2013). Seyfarth regards the principal's role as fluctuating because of associated political, societal, and monetary conditions (1999). The role of an urban principal is unique based on the added responsibilities that these leaders must accept to create productive learning environments. Fluctuating social conditions are a challenging task in themselves, even without considering student learning goals (Bellamy et al., 2007). Leaders are required to be pillars of stability in many unstable districts. The literature did not provide an opportunity to research the current role of Detroit Public School principals, nor did it provide insights into how principals in Detroit Public Schools are overcoming the current conditions of the district to create productive learning environments.

Environmental Factors

      Martin Haberman researched the actions of successful principals serving in schools composed of students in poverty. His research highlighted the impact that violence and environmental factors of poverty have on principal's routine responsibilities in producing academic achievement. He noted that potentially urban principals must deal with student violence on a regular basis (Christensen, 2007; Haberman, 1999; Dickinson & Williams, 2016; Burns, 2014). Principals must be proactive to combat the potential for violence within their school buildings. When students enter the threshold of the school building, they bring with them the burdens from their home life and the code of the community where they reside (Yisrael, 2013). Successful urban principals have a strong understanding of the environmental factors that influence their schools.

      Prince and Stapleton have also provided a realistic description of the environmental factors that impact students' ability to function and grow positively within a school setting. If children come from abusive home environments or have broken homes (such as divorced parents or other home life issues), their approach to education may not be as desired (Pierce & Stapleton, 2003). Drug abuse, sexual abuse, poverty, and homelessness are all obstacles that principals must overcome to create adequate learning environments for their students (Haberman, 1999; Lipman, 2013; Noguera, 2003). Gwendolyn Cooke explored the additional resources that urban principals must use to maintain higher levels of academic achievement for students who lack assets owing to their poverty. Urban principals face the challenge of performing outside the norm to provide support to such students by way of cultivating partnerships to bring additional programs to the school, such as nourishment programs, afterschool tutoring, health programs, and other support services (Cooke, 2006).

Limitations in the Literature: Environmental Factors

In the practice of everyday life, negative representations of the inner city are challenged (Lipman, 2013). The author selected literature so as to cover the universal environmental factors that affect schools, especially from an urban standpoint. Children from middle-class homes tend to perform better in school because the school environment culturally represents the philosophy of those in power (Delpit, 2006). Nevertheless, the literature failed to conceptualize some of the unique environmental factors that impact those urban areas of the country where these issues are most severely pronounced. Communities that contain large groups of poorly educated individuals living in elevated levels of poverty may have a devastating influence on productive learning environments.

Several urban cities have been ranked as the most dangerous cities in the nation owing to their high levels of violent crime, homicide, and murder rates. The violence in the community often travels to the school. Discipline issues with students is one of the most discussed issues in urban education (Yisrael, 2013). Some parents enter the school building with disdain and attempt to have confrontations with educators (Jackson et al., 2015). Principals in violent communities must possess a calm personality to ameliorate such hostile environments.

The standardized test scores for several predominately poor and minority urban districts rank among the bottom percentile for large cities throughout the nation (Lewis, 2015). Principals in these areas must be equipped to adapt to increasing responsibilities. Principals are expected to have diverse experiences in many areas: law, personnel relations, curriculum, finance, and special education (Stevens, 2001). A substantial proportion of the students rely on school for their basic health, nutritional, and clothing needs, which their impoverished families are unable to fulfill. The health of a child and his or her academic performance are related (Jackson et al.,

2015). All these unique factors add to the environmental challenges which must be curbed by DPS principals to increase academic achievement. Principals in DPS must first create avenues for meeting students' basic needs before addressing their academic achievements. Principals in DPS must successfully compete with longstanding city issues of disenfranchisement and a lack of basic resources for some residents that expand well beyond the reach of the school system. These factors deserve additional research dedicated to the impact of the extreme environmental, political, racial, and economic aspects exclusive to Detroit Public Schools.

Instructional Leadership

As the principalship began shifting from the classroom to the main office, despite having less connection with the routine actions of the classroom, the primary responsibility of student learning became assigned to the building leader (Rousmaniere, 2013). Standardized test scores are commonly used by the media as a measuring tool for determining the academic success and effectiveness of principals, schools, and school systems. Gaffney, Hesbol, and Corso (2005) assessed the impact of standardized test scores on the principal's ability to be an instructional leader and claimed that the compiled data provides a host of details that potentially impact classroom instruction. Principals must balance the non-instructional expectations of the position with the highly publicized low standardized test scores (Bellamy et al., 2007; Lewis, 2015; Nelson & Sassi, 2005). These leaders must also make daily instructional decisions for students and staff that may not be quantifiable in standardized tests scores and semester grades. In order to work efficiently with teachers, astute principals often use a mix of both formal and informal observations as well as formative and summative evaluation practices (Zepeda, 2012).

Successful principals must have the ability to disaggregate data and then use that data to drive academic instruction (Barber & Dann, 1996; Carlin, 1992; Cooke, 2006; Gaffney, Hesbol

& Corso, 2005). Principals are faced with the challenge to simultaneously overcome barriers to productivity and improve student achievement in the wake of resource limitations and political agendas (Bellamy et al., 2007). The barriers to learning for students in impoverished school environments are heightened due to the documented poor facilities that students and staff inhabit from preschool to high school. Some urban principals must firstly overcome these non-academic elements that challenge their capacity to improve student achievement.

Instructional leadership is often understood as the tasks associated with administrators' roles (Nelson and Sassi, 2005). Larry Stevens researched the difficulty faced by principals in balancing the non-academic responsibilities of the position with the expectations for academic success. Ensuring the effective and efficient functioning of a public school building is a daunting and time-consuming task which frustrates the principals' efforts towards effective leadership in instruction and curriculum (Stevens, 2001). Thus, principals within many urban schools must juggle the tremendous non-academic obstacles that derail academic success (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Mayer & LeChasseur, 2013; Zepeda, 2012).

Mustafa Yavuz and Gokhan Bas researched teachers' perception of the role of the principal as an instructional leader. Their research highlights several aspects of the principal's role in improving academic achievement. Instructional leadership behavior is a key operational component that aids school principals in managing schools effectively (Yavuz & Bas, 2010). As previously noted, a great deal of principals' time is spent dealing with issues that are non-academic (Jackson et al., 2015; Rousmaniere, 2013; Stevens, 2001). This trend has resulted in a majority of the teachers viewing the principal as a manager of the building rather than an instructional leader. Steering the efforts of the teachers towards curriculum development and providing adequate opportunities is a dynamic obligation expected of the principal (Yavuz &

Bas, 2010). However, the instructional leader role of the principal is severely challenged in the absence of adequate instructional personnel to provide student instruction.

The significance of a principal's position presents a direct route to enforcing school reforms and justifies the distinct consideration assigned to school principals for such matters (Carlin, 1992). Philip Carlin researched the role of urban principals in school reforms which have been identified as an urgent need for several urban schools. Federal accountability mandates such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to The Top (RTT) have escalated the need for principals to locate tools to aid in student learning and teacher directed instruction (Damiani, 2014). The federal accountability mandates may have changed by name over the past decade, but the need for all principals to continue to adhere to similar regulations for funding remains (Cooke, 2006; Huang et al., 2012; Kowalski, 2010; Zepeda, 2012). Urban principals are in a constant fight to balance the responsibilities of federal mandates with the growing challenges on academic instruction.

Limitations in the Literature: Instructional Leadership

Sally Zepeda also researched the principal's role as instructional leader and claimed that the principal must prioritize time in the classroom (Zepeda, 2012). Several researchers including Sally Zepeda have highlighted the common responsibilities that need to be fulfilled by the principal to succeed in the role of an instructional leader of the building. Highly effective principals often challenge teachers' beliefs about educating students by fostering relationships and discussions about policies affecting schools (McEwan, 2003). However, the literature failed to consider some of the insurmountable complications that urban principals face in acting as instructional leaders.

There is increasing concern regarding the need for administrators to focus their attention on improving instruction and learning (Nelson and Sassi, 2005). Some urban and non-urban districts are experiencing a teacher shortage which results in unattended classrooms and the daily absence of basic necessities (Preston, Jakubiec & Kooymans, 2013; Walters & Pickands, 2000). Long-term substitutes have filled a large number of vacancies in classrooms in comparison to full-time teachers (Jackson et al., 2015). Some classrooms are filled to capacity with 30 to 60 students in each class. A well-acknowledged solution to such issues that can enhance student academic achievement is to decrease the student-to-teacher ratio in classrooms (Barber and Dann, 1996).

In addition, there is a severe shortage of substitute teachers to fill the vacancies for educators when teachers are absent. Some substitutes refuse to work in extreme urban environments. In some of the worst urban schools, students may attend school without a teacher for core subjects like math, reading, science, and/or social studies for an entire academic year (Lewis, 2015). Teachers in inner city schools frequently transfer between these schools (Jackson et al., 2015). Unfortunately, principals are forced to spend a significant portion of their day devising plans to divide these academically deprived students into another classroom regardless of the grade level.

Having a severe shortage of instructional staff maximizes the difficulties of the principals in Detroit Public Schools to truly act as the productive instructional leader described in the literature (Zaniewski, 2014). It seems rather peculiar that the schools that require the most help with special needs children as well as academically and behaviorally challenged students get the least equipped teachers (Jackson et al., 2015). These obstacles may result in principals constantly reevaluating their goals and redefining productivity within the current system. Most

enterprising principals do not settle for average standards for their school (Seyfarth, 1999).
Problems with the staffing and attendance of instructional staff are compounded with the
possibility of lacking adequate textbooks and materials (Foster, 2016). The unique and abundant
academic obstacles of Detroit Public School principals are largely unaddressed in the current
literature. Further studies on this topic can be used as a learning tool for principals who are
struggling to create productive learning environments within the present unproductive systems.

School Safety

Schools have two core responsibilities: helping students learn and keeping them safe
(Kowalski, 2010). Unfortunately, it is safe to assume that no school in the United States is clear
of concerns for safety and discipline (Christensen, 2007). Jon Christensen researched school
safety within public schools and charter schools wherein the Principals are held accountable for
school safety both in the presence and absence of security officers. The provision of a safe
learning environment for students is of utmost importance to parents, teachers, and staff
(Christensen, 2007). Unfortunately, a great deal of schools within urban districts encounter
elevated numbers of fights, discipline referrals, suspensions and undesirable incidents
(Haberman, 1999; Yisreal, 2012; Yisreal, 2013). Therefore, effective principals should cultivate
relationships with local law enforcement (Ricken, 2006), which can prevent minor disturbances
from becoming major incidents and affecting student learning in urban schools.
Some urban principals must deal with the possibility of having limited staff members within a
building along with a possible reduction in security staffing. A staffing concern can increase the
responsibilities of the principal to maintain building safety in some urban districts. Robert
Ricken researched mastering the balance required of principals. Creating a safe learning
environment for students and staff is a goal of all principals (Ricken, 2006; Christensen, 2007;

Cooke, 2006; Yisreal, 2012). Within the study, he focused on the fact that all principals want to have safe schools; however, all principals are not skilled in creating safe schools.

Limitations in the Literature: School Safety

The literature did not thoroughly examine the magnitude of school safety from the perspective of principals in school systems where violence has emerged as a way of life within the school community. The literature also did not explore the differing ideologies held by the school and the neighborhoods that surround the school; the value systems between the two are often diametrically opposite. Schools located in the most poverty-stricken and crime-infested neighborhoods often have a large number of poor children enrolled (Jackson et al., 2015), and an absence of school safety in such areas can severely disrupt their academic achievement. In order for a school to be considered productive it must first educate (Barber and Dann, 1996). However, it is extremely difficult to educate when the students and staff have safety concerns.

Issues of conflict can lead to potential breaches in safety and security. Parents can also be caught in the middle between inadequate teachers, negative press in the media, and parent-staff relationships within the school. Principals should understand that parents have preconceived notions about their role because of good and bad past experiences (Pristash, 2002). The current climate in some urban districts of low staff morale, alleged corruption, inhumane working conditions, job uncertainty, and working in violent neighborhoods with high unemployment rates create a perfect recipe for safety concerns.

The instability of classroom teachers often results in increased classroom disturbances and fights due to a lack of consistent leadership for the students. Such instability can also lead to severe verbal and physical confrontations between co-workers, parents and staff, parents and other parents, and instructional staff and students. In such a scenario, the role of the school

becomes paramount. The lack of highly qualified and experienced instructional staff continues to have a dramatic impact on student achievement. In order to be successful, principals must be creative leaders who aid their school communities in accomplishing results for student learning (Bellamy et al., 2007).

Principals in urban districts must constantly be on high alert for potential problems from the neighborhood to spill into the school. These leaders must be able to communicate with diverse people including parents, the media, and other educators to defuse potentially deadly situations that can cripple a productive learning environment. Higher academic achievement is directly correlated to parental participation (Jackson et al., 2015). DPS principals, therefore, must be able to understand and communicate with the residents of the neighborhood in a more common language while also having the professionalism to successfully communicate with the media and corporate sponsors. This innate ability to galvanize distinctively diverse individuals to enhance student achievement deserves further research and literature to focus on this currently undiscovered area.

Financial Responsibilities/Legal Responsibilities

The primary ethical and legal representative of the school is the principal (Stevens, 2001). Corruption scandals have shaken several large urban districts and eroded trust in district leaders. Financial and legal responsibilities are paramount roles of principals; principals in many districts work to solicit aid from the public in supporting public schools (Pierce & Stapleton, 2003). Larry Stevens researched the topic of principals following legal protocol from the perspective of an elementary school principal. The school principal, district, or school board can potentially face legal implications because of a lack of attention to legal details (Stevens, 2001). These legal and financial responsibilities are increased in middle school and high school settings.

Principals are given the jurisdiction to produce regulations to comply with policies in the public school sector (Kowalski, 2010). Principals are responsible for enforcing the district rules and regulations. These leaders must attempt to create positive and longstanding change in districts that have become notorious for negative circumstances. To grasp the political economy of urban education, a principal must understand how education, ideologies, and political and economic structures are intermixed in actual cities (Lipman, 2013). The financial responsibilities of urban principals are another unique situation. Holding the position of a principal in schools necessarily implies continual navigation of the decision-making process of how to overcome obstacles (Pierce & Stapleton, 2003).

Limitations in the Literature: Financial Responsibilities/Legal Responsibilities

The literature does not address the financial and legal dynamic from the current perspective of urban principals who are working to build productive learning environments while under heightened scrutiny. Many urban principals seek additional resources and support from outside sources to meet the basic needs of their students. This creates another dimension to the role of the principal. These leaders must seek additional services to fulfill needs that cannot be adequately met by their district and the parents of the students. The disparities among the fiscal challenges of big cities and local property tax valuation are fundamental restrictions of funding available to some city schools (Barber and Dann, 1996).

Financial shortages have resulted in an increase in the number of outsourced employees in some school districts. The DPS principal is responsible for managing the legal and ethical actions of outsourced employees such as maintenance, food service, security, landscaping, building engineers, and bus drivers. However, none of these individuals are directly employed by the school district. This complexity of moral contexts and political structures in urban

schools means that the school leader role is very important (Crow and Scribner, 2014).

Furthermore, the principal is responsible for balancing the school's general funds, Title budgets,

donations and grants. Lastly, the literature fails to analyze this dynamic from the perspective of

principals who have witnessed colleagues and/or superiors being sentenced to Federal prison

terms due to corruption scandals (Baldas, Stafford, Gary, and Zaniewski, 2016). All of these

responsibilities are highly scrutinized while the principal is also expected to increase student

achievement and create productive learning environments. This condition deserves additional

research and literature related to the financial and legal responsibilities of urban principals.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology and design of the study. It includes a review of the research questions guiding the project, the rationale for a qualitative approach to the research design, and a brief discussion of the use of case study design in this research. This chapter includes a discussion of the setting and context for the project in Detroit Public Schools in Detroit, Michigan, along with a description of the selection and recruitment of the research participants. Data collection methods will be discussed, followed by the methods of data analysis. Chapter 3 closes with a discussion of the researcher's trustworthiness and positionality.

To review, the research questions that guide this project are the following:

1. How does a Detroit Public Schools principal within the study currently define productive learning environments based on the current state of the district?

2. What are the obstacles that prevent principals within the study from achieving productive learning environments?

3. **What** are the characteristics of a Detroit Public School principal within the study who maintains a productive learning environment in the current system?

Rationale for a Qualitative Research Approach

The researcher found a qualitative approach to be appropriate for this research project because the conditions that exist in DPS have not yet been viewed through a scholarly lens. Using qualitative research such as interviews, data collection, and observations allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the current state of DPS (Creswell, 2012). The researcher spent a great deal of time with each principal; through these interactions, the researcher was able to investigate perceived problems and confront longstanding issues of using

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the qualitative research approach (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). The qualitative data provided insights into the characteristics of productive principals and the unique functions of their respective schools (Schram, 2006). A qualitative approach to this research project allowed the researcher to deeply discuss the nuances that school principals conquest daily to produce productive learning environments.

Case Study Design

While the overall approach adopted for the project was qualitative, the specific study design followed the case study methodology. A case study approach allowed the researcher to interview and observe three principals within their normal school environments for an extended period, enabling a better comprehension of the complexities of their learning environments (Maxwell, 2012; Schram, 2006). The researcher used interviews, observations, and artifacts as the primary data collection tools for the case study (Creswell, 2012). The case study method also provided an in-depth analysis of current situation from the perspective of a DPS principal while granting the researcher exclusive access to the foundations of their productive learning environments.

Research Setting and Context

Chapter one of this dissertation presented a synopsis of the existing conditions of the city of Detroit and the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) to achieve a chronological perspective of the current situation. The chapter provided a brief summary of the major points by way of a historical timeline to present additional context to the methodological choices made in this project. The city of Detroit became the largest U.S. city to ever file for bankruptcy in 2013. Detroit Public Schools have been under state control since 1999 and under an Emergency

Manager since 2009. In turn, this has placed Detroit Public Schools in a downward spiral in finances, politics, and public perception.

There has also been tremendous inconsistency in DPS leadership for over a decade. The district has had five Emergency Managers since 2009. A new Transitional Manager was appointed in February 2016. This leader was responsible for leading the school district until December 31, 2016. In addition, the district recently appointed an Interim Superintendent after a gap of nearly a year. The Interim Superintendent, Alycia Meriweather, is only responsible for handling the academic aspects of the district with no additional authority beyond academics.

The final 2015-2016 DPS website demographic data estimated the district ended the year with 49,628 students, with 24,583 females and 25,045 males. Further, 40,872 of the students are African American, 6,689 are Hispanic, 850 are Caucasian, 744 are Asian, 355 are Arab American, 100 are Native American, and 38 students are Pacific Islander. There are 8,479 disabled students in the district. Also, the district has 5,883 English Language Learners. Lastly, 34,644 of the total 49,628 are considered economically disadvantaged, i.e., nearly 70% of the students in the district live in poverty.

DPS has a total of 104 principals in the district, of which 73 are female and 31 are male; over 70% of the principals in the district are female. Currently, there are 104 schools placed in 97 buildings in the district. The schools range from traditional K-5 elementary settings, early learner schools for pre-kindergarten students, traditional middle schools, K-8 buildings, alternative schools, vocational technical schools, traditional high schools, special education schools, and adult education schools.

70 schools have a pre-kindergarten program and 70 schools have an elementary program, however most of these schools are in the kindergarten – 8th grade configuration. 55 schools have

a middle school program. 25 schools have a high school program. 6 schools exist in the district as full-service schools for special needs students. 4 schools are specialty schools for early learners and provide Head Start programs. The district includes 5 career and technical schools, 3 adult education schools, and 2 alternative education schools. Lastly, DPS is also an authorizer of charter schools. The district has 13 charter schools that are not counted in the 49,628 students or the 104 schools.

Participants

The study population consisted of three principals currently heading Detroit Public Schools. The principals were all elementary principals even though a vast majority of school buildings in DPS have a K-8 structure. The selection criteria for the principals included the following:

1. Principals who had been in a particular school building for three or more years.

2. Principals who had a track record of success that could be measured by standardized tests, community partnerships, wrap around services for students, parental involvement, Student Code of Conduct violations, and student overall academic growth.

3. Principals were neither selected nor rejected due to their sex, race, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation.

The principals were individuals who have been able to produce productive learning environments in the wake of the numerous leadership changes and fiscal challenges of the district. The district provided a list of all principals, their contact information, the grade configuration of their school, and a link to the school website. The principal list was a useful tool in the recruitment process since it helped to compile a list of the principals whose data met the selection criteria. The researcher then contacted these principals via email to inform them of

the study and gauge their interest in participating. Of much help was the fact that all principals

are required to attend a district wide and/or network meeting twice a month. The researcher was

able to use these meetings as an additional opportunity to talk with principals who met the

selection criteria of the research project during designated break periods. In addition, the

researcher met with the principals before and after work related meetings. The participants

selected for the study were a random purposeful sample of the first three principals who

indicated their willingness to participate and met the selection criteria for the project.

The three participants selected were all African American women in their 50s, which is

representative of the majority of elementary, middle school, and high school principals in the

district. All three principals were native to Detroit and each had over twenty-five years of

service in the district. The principals were from schools in three diverse sections of the city that

served students with measurable similarities.

Data Collection

The researcher secured IRB approval to conduct research with human subjects. The

researcher began interviewing participants during the summer school session in DPS, with an

official start date of July 2016 while DPS was transitioning to begin the 2016 – 2017 school year

as DPSCD. The researcher interviewed each principal four times over the course of the project

to achieve data saturation. It was necessary to have this prolonged contact in order to establish a

rapport with each principal due to the political nature of the topic.

Also, the researcher needed an extended time to discuss all of the nuances of each

principals' experiences in the district. Each interview lasted for 1-2 hours and took place at a

location that was comfortable for the participants, with the interview locations ranging from the

principal's buildings, district principal meeting locations, and neighborhood cafes. Initial

interviews were audio recorded (with participant consent) and transcribed for analysis.

Observations

To supplement the interviews, the researcher chose the observational method: observing

each principal twice in their school buildings. The observations lasted 1 – 2 hours. Observations

are an essential component of case study research (Maxwell, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The observations allowed the researcher to witness how the participants operated in their school

setting, which provided additional context for the interviews conducted. Visual factors could not

be accurately measured by surveys, student achievement data, and/or interviews (Maxwell, 2012;

Creswell, 2013). The sights and sounds of the school building acted as an additional indicator of

the mechanisms of a productive learning environment.

The observations allowed the researcher to witness how each principal interacted with

students, staff, parents, and members of the local community. The researcher also used the

observations to examine each principal's demeanor, tone, and body language during these

interactions with the school community. The researcher allowed the principals to complete their

normal activities during the observation periods in order to capture the most authentic actions

and interactions. The goal was to examine measurable impact of each principal's overall

presence and influence within the school community based on their actions within the

observational period.

A majority of the extended observations took place during the summer school session of

2016. The summer school session provided a relaxed atmosphere for principals due to a massive

reduction in their workloads. The principals were willing to participate and spend a greater

amount of time in the observation sessions without the intensified demands of the regular school session.

Documents and Artifacts

The data consist of standardized test scores, handbooks, and other relevant documents that the researcher found on school websites and during observations. The standardized test data are a valuable component of the research. The standardized test data were used to examine the relationship between student achievement, safety, and productive learning environments. Furthermore, the standardized test data acted as a comparison tool that could be measured.

Data Analysis

The official data analysis began once the data collection process started. Furthermore, after the interviews were completed, the data analysis phase intensified. Total data analysis consisted of seven major components.

The first component of the data analysis consisted of organizing and preparing the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Maxwell, 2012). The researcher spent a considerable amount of time reading field notes, interview highlights, and notable occurrences during the observation. The researcher arranged the interviews, observations, and field notes during this component; also, the researcher transcribed and rigorously reviewed the recorded interviews.

The second component consisted of immersing in the data. The immersion phase was an ongoing review and analysis of the data gathered in the first stage (Maxwell, 2012). This process generated stronger questions to ask the principals during additional interviews. The questions also guided the direction of additional observations.

The third step consisted of coding the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). The researcher based the coding on parallels found in the data collection as well as outliers that posed significant

importance to the research. The researcher based the created codes on the key words, phrases, and characteristics that frequently appeared in the data. The information was useful in further investigations during the later interviews and enhanced the overall understanding of the principals' perspectives.

The fourth step consisted of generating descriptions for the categories and themes for analysis (Maxwell, 2012) based on similarities between the three principals. The interviews and observations provided a baseline for analyzing the distinctive features of any data containing reoccurring themes and/or categories.

In the fifth step, the researcher advanced the representation of the descriptions and/or themes in the qualitative case study. This step allowed the researcher to gather deeper insights into the data and have a stronger understanding of the findings. The repeated questioning and observations of the principals helped to develop this stronger understanding (Maxwell, 2012).

The sixth component consisted of searching for alternate understandings. The researcher was able to achieve an alternate interpretation of some aspects of the data through prolonged data collection, analysis, and conversations. This process helped the researcher to clarify, conceptualize, and eliminate preconceived ideas (Creswell, 2012).

The seventh and final step involved presenting interpretations of the findings and results of the case study. The saturation of the data was useful in accomplishing this process. Extended periods of contact with the principals and consistent review and analysis of the data both guided the interpretations of the findings. The conceptual framework was included in the interpretations of the data (Maxwell, 2012).

Trustworthiness

Given the political nature of this project and the continuing challenges facing the district, issues of trustworthiness became particularly important. The project required the researcher to repeatedly analyze the data and reconsider previous interpretations. The research used several techniques, such as member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation, to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015).

Member Checking

Member checking was the first trustworthiness technique used by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). As the researcher conducted the interviews and reviewed the transcripts, the researcher also shared the data with the participants. The researcher discussed some of the preliminary findings to grant the participants an opportunity to ensure that their perspectives were being represented accurately. Due to the negative and sometimes inaccurate portrayal of DPS principals, the participants appreciated an opportunity to share their perspectives in their own words. The documentation of their perspectives enhanced the research project and attended to the trustworthiness of the data.

Peer Debriefing

The researcher also had a series of conversations with individuals who were not immediately part of the research project. The researcher discussed emergent analysis and findings to ensure that the researcher was drawing appropriate interpretations from the data. The peer debriefing granted the researcher an additional opportunity to analyze the findings from an outside and neutral perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015) and also provided added resources to detect some overemphasized as well as underemphasized points. In addition, it potentially

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helped to detect inherent researcher bias errors in the data. The use of peer debriefing assisted the overall trustworthiness of the research findings.

Triangulation

Finally, employing multiple data collection methods (interviews, observations, and document/artifacts) allowed the researcher to learn about the issues that emerged from the study from multiple perspectives. Studying the issue from multiple perspectives added to the overall authenticity of the research. This use of triangulation also aided the overall precision of research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015).

Positionality

The researcher began his career as a DPS classroom teacher in 2000 and is currently a 4th year principal who has developed respectful relationships with other principals in the district. The district has 104 schools in 97 school buildings. The researcher had an opportunity to select three principals from the current roster of principals. The cordial relationships maintained by the researcher with other principals benefited the ability to secure principals for the study.

The researcher's current role as a DPS principal gave the positionality of an insider in the district and not an outsider with limited understanding of the obstacles that exist within the system. This insider positionality allowed the researcher to have a greater likelihood to obtain unfiltered and accurate interviews from principals in the district. This positionality also increased the level of trust among the selected principals. In addition, this potentially allowed the researcher to document a perspective from the principals that has not been covered in any previous research.

As a principal in the district, the researcher has engaged in similar experiences that have altered the overall understanding of urban education as well as the environmental obstacles that

impact academic achievement for the students, staff, and parents. The researcher has spent between $2,000.00 and $5,000.00 yearly out of their $86,000.00 pre-taxed salary to supply basic needs for students, purchase emergency building supplies, and pay for academic-based celebrations for the students and staff to increase morale. Low staff morale has taken a toll on staff attendance and academic instruction. Previously, the researcher led a staff that accumulated over 100 total days of absences during the 2015-2016 school year. There were only 37 days in that school year that the entire teaching staff was present for instruction in the building. 143 days out the total 180-day school year involved dividing students for instruction without substitutes in other classes or assisting the limited number of substitutes in the absence of the contractual teacher.

In March of 2016, the school building tested positive for elevated levels of lead in the water. As a result of contaminated water, the researcher now facilitates the daily distribution of bottled water to students and staff. In addition, the building is over 90 years old and the researcher is constantly working with the facilities team to repair recurring leaks, structural damage, and plumbing issues. Numerous complaints have been received from parents and staff regarding the deteriorating conditions in the building. Buckets in the middle of classes, buckled floors from water damage, frequent power outages, malfunctioning heating systems, and falling ceiling tiles all create a challenging atmosphere for teaching and learning.

The researcher has proactively worked in close liaison with law enforcement to apprehend potential pedophiles in the school neighborhood who were exposing themselves to the students. The researcher stepped directly in front of a gun brandishing individual to protect an elementary bus load of students from possible harm during his first official month as a principal. The researcher has also taken up the role of the security force, maintenance supervisor,

classroom teacher, social worker, nurse, therapist, secretary, conflict resolution specialist, and athletic coach in the building to provide the best environment possible for the students. These experiences indicate that the researcher has a thorough understanding of the obstacles facing principals in the district and the multiple roles productive principals must accept to create productive learning environments.

Understandably, the researcher's position as a current DPS principal created some potential biases in the research and data interpretation. Due to being a veteran DPS principal, there was potential to have partisanship to the challenges that building leaders face within the current system. This partisanship could have potentially impacted the objectivity and subjectivity of the research. However, to counteract the probability for biases, the researcher utilized the peer review team to maintain an adequate balance in the findings and negate any potential predisposed representation of the data.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The schools in the study have each been given a code name to disguise the actual identities of the school community. The codes names are School A, School B, and School C. The A, B, and C format simply denotes the order in which the schools were observed. In addition, the researcher also gave the principals in the study a code to protect their actual identities. The principals are referred to as Principal Angelou, Principal Bethune, and Principal Chisholm, and are respectively the principals of School A, School B, and School C. Concealing the identities of the schools and principals increased the willingness of the participants to be candid during the interviews and observations.

Principal Angelou is a business-minded leader who acts as a mentor to other principals in the district. Multiple Emergency Managers have appointed her to take part in various improvement and evaluation teams in the district. Principal Angelou is highly respected for her organizational skills, growth mindset, and ability to transform failing schools into some of the highest performing schools in the city. She is a fashionable African American woman in her 50s.

Principal Bethune is an African American female in her 50s possessing great passion and expertise for curriculum development in her building. She continues to serve on DPSCD district leadership approved committees for improving curriculum. Principal Bethune also leads professional development opportunities for other principals in the district. She is known as a no-nonsense leader who has successfully changed the environments of several schools during her tenure.

Principal Chisholm is a building leader known for her ability to foster partnerships with community organizations and business leaders. She has successfully led multiple buildings in

her tenure devoting her time throughout the weekdays and weekends. She is an energetic African American female in her 50s. Routinely attending community events as well as inviting increased community engagement within her building are testimonies to her caring and incredibly supportive character.
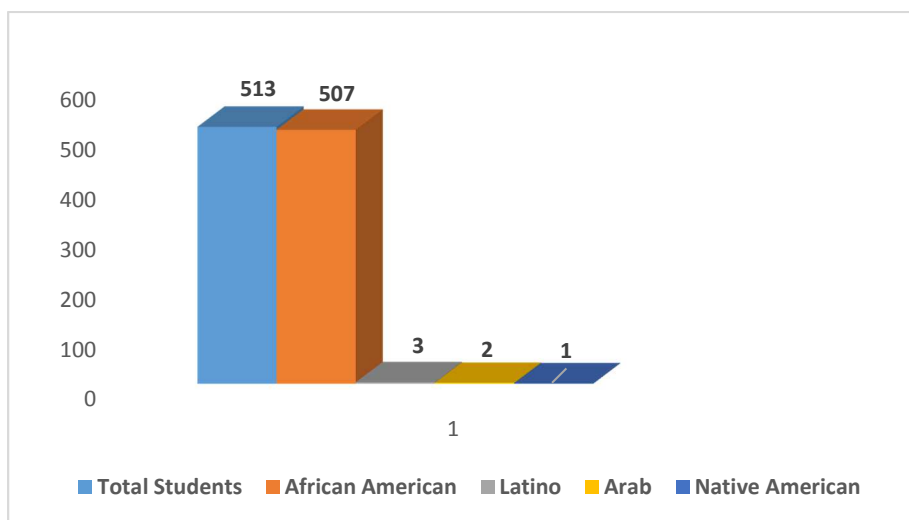
Principal Angelou and School A

School A is a Title I elementary school located in Northwest Detroit. School A received an A grade from the Mackinaw Center of Public Policy in 2015 and has been consistently ranked as a top school by Excellent Schools Detroit. School A is a traditional neighborhood school which does not require an application for enrollment. School A has 462 elementary students and a total of 513 students including special needs and pre-kindergarten programs with an 85% schoolwide attendance rate. Both district and state targets for attendance are 95%.

School A serves grades pre-kindergarten through 4th. School A has multiple classes for each grade level. According to the Detroit Public Schools website, 507 of the students are African American, 3 are Latino, 2 are Arab, 1 is Native American, while none of the students are Asian or Caucasian. Further, 287 students are male while 226 students are female. Other student categories are: 82 students receive special education services, 1 student is a limited English speaking student, and 441 students are considered economically disadvantaged. School A is housed in an extremely clean and new facility. The building has clear signage to inform students, parents, and staff members about the expectations, rules, regulations, and daily procedures of the school. All staff members receive written expectations regarding their performance to begin the school year. During the observations, the building was extremely quiet and the hallways were covered in bright artwork and selections of student academic work. The staff displayed a willingness to work as a collaborative team and the parents acted as partners in

the learning process for the students embodying the four cycles of the Appreciative Inquiry

Theory. Figure 4.1 provides a visual aid to the racial mixture of students attending School A.

FIGURE 4.1 SCHOOL A STUDENT MIX

School A has a veteran African American female principal who usually spends 9 to 12

hours a day in her building and nearly 60 to 72 hours a week completing school-related work.

Principal Angelou is a native of Detroit and a product of the Detroit Public Schools system. She

stated, "I was born and raised in Detroit Public Schools." She has been a principal in the district

for 10 years and at School A for 6 years. Principal Angelou is responsible for turning a former

priority school, which was one of the lowest 5% percent performing schools in the state of

Michigan, into one of the top schools in the entire city according to Excellent Schools Detroit

and the Mackinaw Center for Public Policy 2015 reports.

Principal Angelou stated that her biggest challenge is not being able to be the

instructional leader in the building because of all the additional tasks that are placed on DPS

principals. She stated, "I can't be the instructional leader that I would like to be, because of all

the things that we have to do as far as, sending out emails, making time to talk with the parents,

dealing with issues with the parents, dealing with issues with the kids." The responsibilities of

responding to urgent e-mails from district superiors, parents, and school partners consume a great deal of the school hours. Another time-consuming task is addressing parent complaints and concerns. She explained how she must devote a considerable amount of time to communicating with parents to resolve issues of conflict between students, staff members, and neighborhood influences.

Issues of student violence, conflicts, and student discipline are another major component of her typical school day. Principal Angelou said, "We are everything to our kids." School A had 195 suspensions for Student Code of Conduct violations. Figure 4.2 provides a visual example of the percentage of the student population suspended at School A during the year. According to principal Angelou, these added responsibilities require her to take on the daily role of a counselor, social worker, parent, nutritionist, and mentor to the students of school A. The principal stated that only an estimated 10% of her day is devoted to being the instructional leader or issues related to student achievement. She wished she had additional time to focus on being the designated instructional leader in the building. As asserted by the principal, "my important role as a principal is making sure that the students achieve."

Principal Angelou stated that her primary concerns each day are student achievement and student safety. She expressed an obligation to protect her staff and their personal belongings and stated, "when I say protect my staff, I'm just making sure that they are comfortable coming to work every day." She explained how a staff member who feels unsafe or who is worrying about their cars in the parking lot will not be able to focus their absolute attention on student instruction. She has created a monetary plan for all staff members to pool their financial resources bi-weekly. The funds are used to pay for a local security officer to protect the cars in the parking lot during the school day.

FIGURE 4.2 SCHOOL A PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT POPULATION SUSPENDED
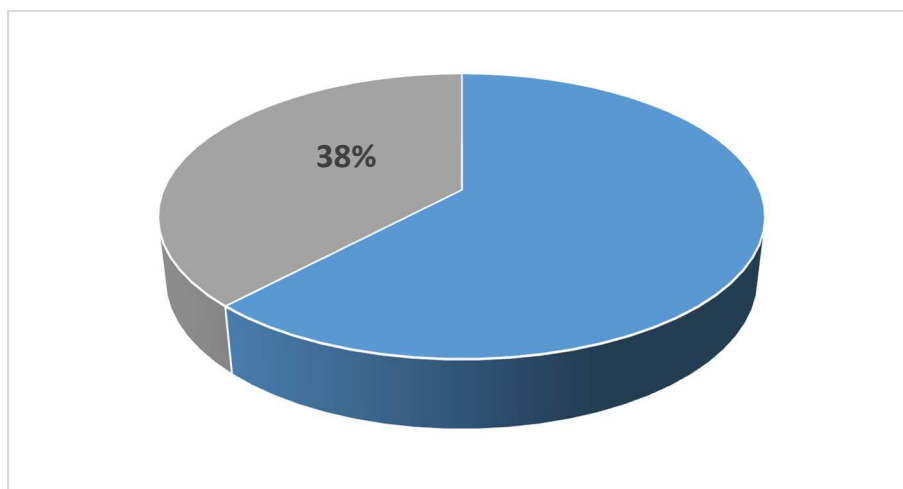
Principal Angelou must also act as a part-time security officer and bus attendant to monitor the 13 buses that arrive and depart from the school to service the students. Principal Angelou is known as an active and visible principal throughout her school community. She must constantly be out of the office and moving throughout the school campus to ensure the safety and security of students, parents, and staff. The Principal stated, "you want to be visible for your parents, your staff, and your students." She is active and involved in the supervision of all three lunch periods for her students. She expressed a desire to be less of a school disciplinarian and more of a hands-on instructional leader in the building to steer additional academic success; she wishes that she could spend time helping the students' complete projects, solve academic problems, and answer questions geared toward academic development.

A major concern expressed by principal Angelou is the lack of substitutes available under the existing system. According to principal Angelou, the shortage of teachers in the district has caused a greater depletion of substitutes for all DPS schools. She revealed that when her teachers are absent there has been a high possibility that the absent teacher's classrooms will go unattended. The unfilled classrooms must be covered by teachers who forfeit their preparation

periods to provide academic guidance for the students. Principal Angelou said, "because when the teacher is absent, not only are their kids not getting the instruction for that day that they would normally get, but the other kids are affected as well, and the other teachers,". The students' academic instruction suffers due to a lack of consistent instructional practices. In addition, the continual loss of preparation periods weakens the morale of the staff and the willingness of some staff members to frequently sacrifice their personal time for the betterment of the students.

Principal Angelou defined a productive learning environment as an environment where the teachers are not only teaching the required district content, the teachers are also teaching with rigor. She stated, "they are teaching with rigor, not just doing what the district is telling them to do." Rigor includes promoting deeper thinking and questioning to gain an enhanced understanding of the overall application of the content. The students will experience an engagement in the lesson that will allow them to improve their understanding of the concept beyond rote memorization. An organized, clean, and structured classroom in a productive learning environment is conducive to learning for all students. Student behavior problems are minimal and all building personnel focus their primary attention on improving student achievement. The productive learning environment also entails the provisioning of all basic educational supplies, which are sometimes unavailable in Detroit Public Schools due to the financial obstacles faced by the district.

Principal Angelou expressed the importance of having an open relationship with both the teaching and non-instructional staff in the building to utilize the positive attributes of each staff member personifying Appreciative Intelligence. She said, "I think for the most part we all get along as a family, while we are here." The staff is free to approach her with new ideas and

present issues of concern. She has mini-meetings with staff members as early as 6:45am and as late as 6:00pm. Principal Angelou uses key members of every department as consultants to stay in tune with the needs of the members of the school. This universal communication is a tool to meet the needs of the employees and reinforce the feeling of full support. She prides herself on supporting her teachers and the teachers support her in return.

Principal Angelou repeatedly highlighted the importance of protecting her students and the entire school community. She said, "you got to protect them, you got to protect the kids." The issue of protection was a common theme throughout the interviews. Principal Angelou is a petite female in her 50s; however, she is regarded as the most dependable and authoritative figure in the building. Principal Angelou symbolizes the Warrior Principal Mentality by having a plan of execution for multiple unexpected occurrences. She is constantly active and visible during the arrival, lunch, and dismissal periods of the day when the students are in less structured environments. There are only two men in the building working in any capacity. Principal Angelou utilizes clear written mandates and strategic staff placement throughout the school day to maintain student and staff safety. Staff members are assigned to monitor building locations throughout key portions of the day to maximize safety.

Principal Angelou claimed that the current economic conditions of the district have a direct impact on student achievement and the ability to produce productive learning environments. She said, "so the financial situation really hurts all of us and it really hurts the kids." Staff morale is at an all-time low and several staff members have been earning the same salary over the past decade without any raises. Increases in employee insurance benefit costs and the reduction of benefit services further decreases staff morale in school A. The sickouts impacted the school and the school community throughout the previous year. However, the

principal expressed her support for the teachers and their fight to improve conditions for staff and students. She said, "I supported their sickouts because it would be worse, it really would be worse." Her visible support for the teachers has assisted in strengthening the partnership between the principal and the staff, thus epitomizing the theory of Positive Organizational Scholarship.

The financial limitations faced by the district restrict school A from purchasing goods and services using school funds because of credit holds placed on the district by vendors. School A may have to wait for nearly an entire year to receive computers, field trip buses, supplies, and updated technology due to vendors refusing to honor purchase orders from the district. The principal asserted, "when it takes you a whole year to get a laptop or a tablet for the kids to be able to have more technology, that's sad." The delay in receiving necessities earmarked from general funds and title funds increase the challenges for school A to produce a productive learning environment. The school has created innovative methods for using photocopies, electronic versions of books, and standards-based lessons without textbooks to overcome the limited supply of textbooks. School A has achieved a higher level of academic success by focusing on the academic standards and not allowing the lack of resources to be a reason for failure.

The 2015 spring MAP Language Usage data for School A indicated that 12% of 2nd graders, 27% of 3rd graders, and 60 % of 4th graders met the projected growth targets. The 2015 spring MAP Mathematics data for School A displayed that 21% of kindergartners, 18% of 1st graders, 9 % of 2nd graders, 23% of 3rd graders, and 45% of 4th graders met the projected growth targets. Moreover, the 2015 spring MAP Reading data for School A revealed that 21% of kindergartners, 14% of 1st graders, 20 % of 2nd graders, 38% of 3rd graders, and 37% of 4th

graders met the projected growth targets. Finally, the 2015 spring MAP Science data for School

A displayed that 32% of 3rd graders, and 34% of 4th graders met the projected growth targets.

There was no 2015 spring MAP Social Studies data. Figures 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 display the

MAP data for Language, Mathematics, Reading, and Science for School A.

FIGURE 4.3 MAP LANGUAGE USAGE DATA SCHOOL A
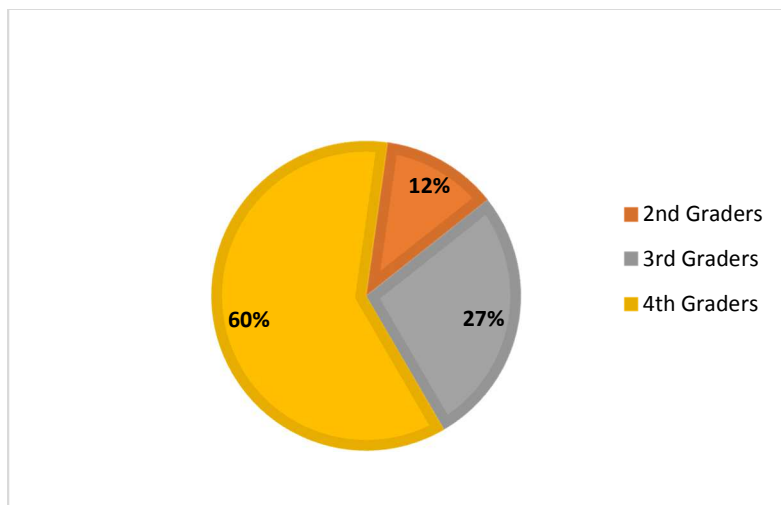
The 2015 M-STEP data for School A displayed that about 43% of the students met the

state proficiency targets for mathematics. The district averages for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade

mathematics were 10.4%, 7.2%, and 2.5% respectively. According to mischooldata.org, the state

proficiency targets for mathematics were 45.2% in 3rd grade, 44.0% in 4th grade, and 33.8% in 5th

grade.

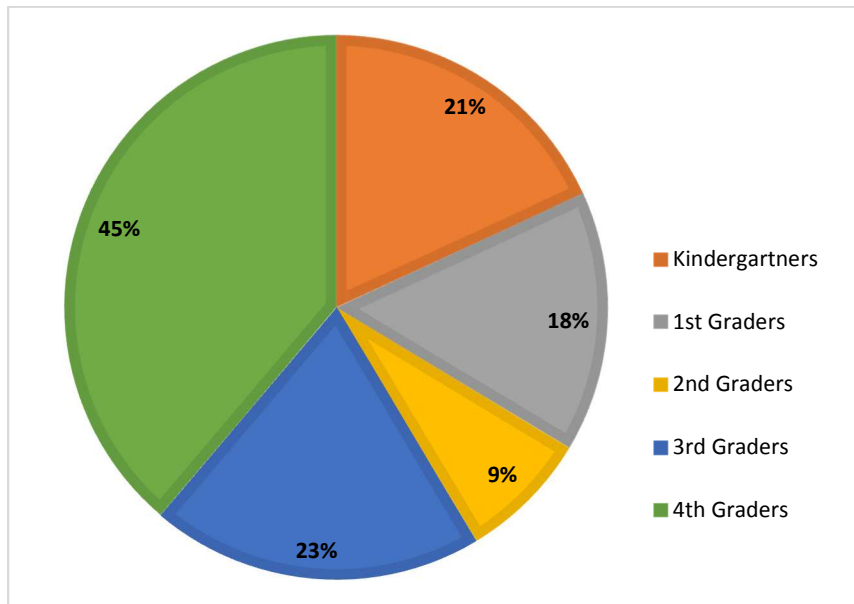FIGURE 4.4 MAP MATHEMATICS USAGE DATA SCHOOL A

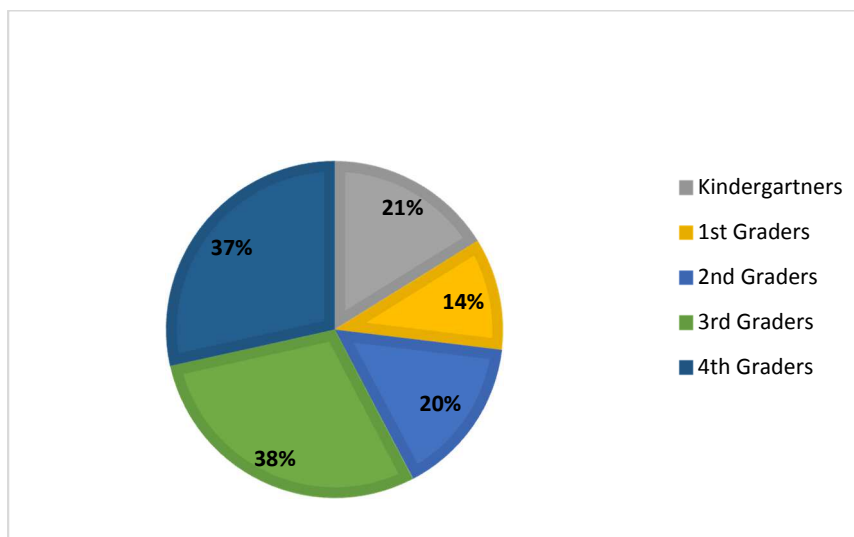FIGURE 4.5 MAP READING USAGE DATA SCHOOL A

About 33.8% of the students met the state proficiency targets for English Language Arts.

The district average for 3rd grade ELA was 9.9%, 4th grade ELA was 10.9%, and 5th grade ELA

was 12.8%; the state proficiency targets for ELA were 46.0% in 3rd grade, 46.3% in 4th grade,

and 50.6% in 5th grade according to mischooldata.org. 6.8% of the students met the state

proficiency targets for Science. According to mischooldata.org, the district and state averages for 4th grade Science were 1.8% and 14.7%, respectively. There was no M-STEP data for Social Studies based on the current grade level and student configuration for School A.

FIGURE 4.6 MAP SCIENCE USAGE DATA SCHOOL A
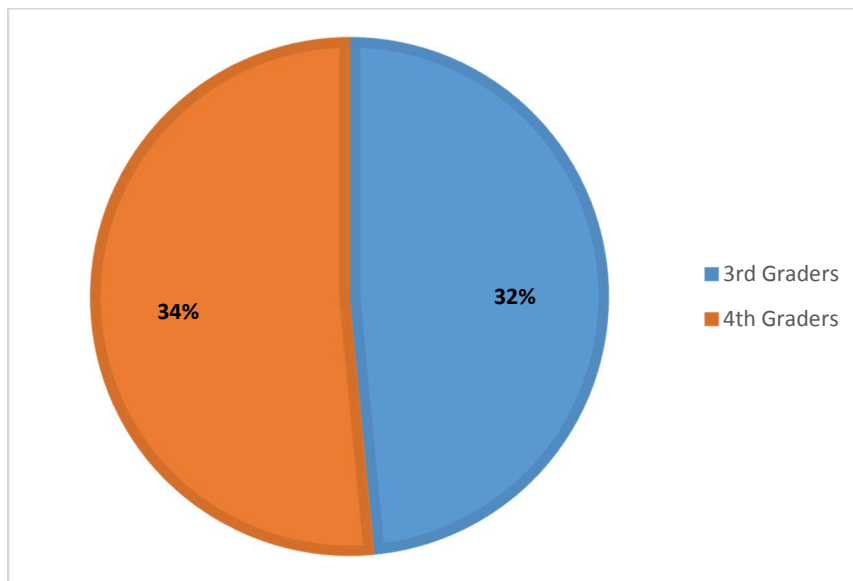
Principal Bethune and School B

School B is a Title I elementary school located in Northeast Detroit in one of the most impoverished areas of the city. There are numerous abandoned buildings and condemned houses in the school community. School B is a traditional neighborhood school which does not require an application for enrollment. School B has 327 elementary students including the special needs and pre-kindergarten programs with an 84.4% schoolwide attendance rate. Both the district as well as state targets for attendance are 95%. Figure 4.7 highlights the percentage of the student population suspended at School B during the year.

FIGURE 4.7 SCHOOL B PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT POPULATION SUSPENDED
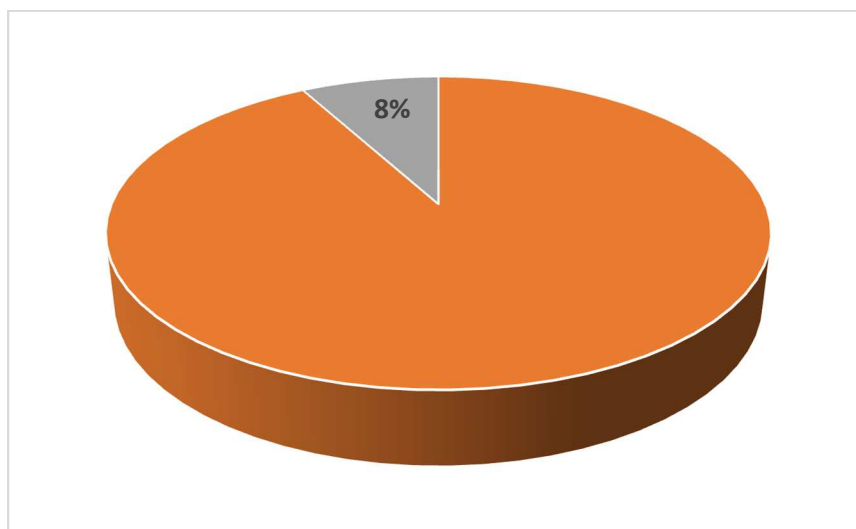
School B serves grades pre-kindergarten through 5th. School B has multiple classes for each grade level. School B had a total of 35 Student Code of Conduct violations resulting in 35 suspensions for the year. According to the Detroit Public Schools website, 326 of the students are African American, 1 is Asian, while none of the students are Latino, Arab, Native American, or Caucasian. 178 students are male and 149 students are female. 55 students receive special education services, 223 students are considered economically disadvantaged, and none of the students are limited English speakers. Figure 4.8 provides a visual aid to the racial mixture of students attending School B.

School B is housed in a clean and considerably older building. The building has clear signage informing students, parents, and staff members about the expectations, rules, regulations, and daily procedures for the school. The signage also encourages the students to follow various daily steps to prevent conflicts. During the observations, the building was extremely quiet and the hallways were covered in student data and statements of commitment from the employees of the building. The staff displayed a willingness to work as a collaborative team to take full ownership of student achievement and behavioral infractions. For example, each member of the

team wrote a personal school pledge for the school year that is displayed near the main entrance of the building. The pledge was used as an instrument to integrate the discovery, dream, design, and destiny cycles of the Appreciative Inquiry Theory for the team members of School B.

FIGURE 4.8 SCHOOL B STUDENT MIX
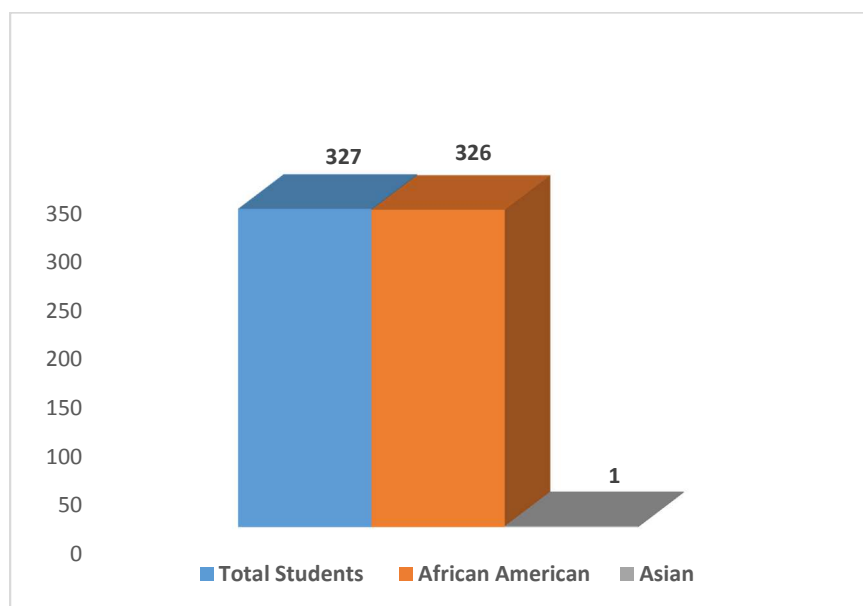
School B has a veteran African American female principal who usually spends 10 to 12 hours a day in her building and nearly 60 to 80 hours a week completing work related to her school. Principal Bethune devotes a substantial amount of time during the evenings and weekends researching best practices for curricular development and national academic achievement statistics. Principal Bethune is a native of Detroit and a product of the Detroit Public Schools system. She said, "I come from some of the very backgrounds as the students who I service, so it helps me to understand their level of anxiety when it comes to education." She is also an educator who was herself caught in the struggles of poverty while growing up in a disadvantaged area on the west side of Detroit. She stated, "I was raised in a very impoverished area in the city of Detroit."

Principal Bethune has been a principal in the district for 10 years; she has been a principal at school B for five years. Principal Bethune has been applauded for transforming a former priority school, which was one of the lowest 5% percent performing schools in the state of Michigan, into a school that is now classified as a Turnaround School in the district. She takes pride while claiming that preparation and organization have been her core focuses throughout her entire career. As she asserted, "I was always a rebel." She even revealed that each staff member in the building receives a written plan to complete the requirements for the year at the start of the school year.

Principal Bethune has also spent the past five years creating, finalizing, and implementing a customized curriculum for School B. She said, "I have always been an instructional leader, even before I heard the term, I was a teaching principal." She wrote the entire curriculum for each grade level and core subject areas to establish uniformity and alignment for all classrooms and grade levels. Principal Bethune also writes the curriculum for the electives in the school to promote differentiation of instruction and cross curricular implementation. In addition to this, she also supplies the weekly lesson plans based on the established school-wide curriculum.

Principal Bethune became a principal because of her commitment to the city of Detroit and to the public school system that helped her become a veteran educator. She said, "I am DPS." She expressed a career long desire to provide children with the best education possible. She stated that her most difficult obstacle and challenge is working with the constant misalignment of the district. She said, "it is very difficult to navigate and so in order to navigate through the chaos and the misalignment, then you have to be a visionary." Principal Bethune associated the misalignment with the challenges that are encountered without consistent and

qualified leadership. Principal Bethune expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that for numerous years Detroit Public Schools have been under the direct leadership of Emergency Managers possessing little or no academic background for making curricular decisions.

The lack of a truly academic visionary leader filters into all aspects of the school district including Human Resources, Procurement, facilities, security, and instruction. She said, "I believe that whatever you send me, I can improve that teacher better than the way they were when they walked in." According to principal Bethune, the district does not have a true curriculum which further implies that there is no universal academic alignment for schools across the district. According to principal Bethune, a student should be able to move through schools across the district and receive the same instruction at the same points of the year. In addition, multiple academic department leadership positions have gone unfilled for over a year and other departments are being headed by leaders holding multiple positions in the district. These factors lead to a misaligned academic focus and sporadic programs being introduced in the schools with immediate urgency only to be later replaced with new initiatives year to year. As stated by the principal, "there is no support, it is really non-existent."

Principal Bethune defined a productive learning environment as one with a calm atmosphere. Such an environment should be a safe place where the children feel free to ask questions and have no fear of being wrong. She said, "when you have a calm environment, then the students, it takes away the threat that students feel when they walk into a school and walk into a classroom." According to Principal Bethune, children should be able to enjoy learning in an environment that will challenge their thinking and retain their engagement in all lessons. At times, the students may even take over certain aspects of the class because the school has eliminated the fear of violence, conflict, and emotional harm. A productive learning

environment is focused on being team-centered as well as student-centered. The needs of adults take a backseat to the needs of the children.

Principal Bethune considers herself capable of cultivating a productive learning environment. According to her, feelings of comfort and contentment with the status quo lead to underperformance and excuse making. As a teacher, principal Bethune refused to teach from outdated textbooks and began her career-long mission to create a differentiation of instruction practices. She asserted, "I refused to teach out of the two textbooks and I informed the principal that I would differentiate the instructions, so that my students who were at the lower spectrum and students who were advanced would be taught from the same curriculum, the same materials, but based on their individual learning styles." Some of the differentiation of instruction practices that principal Bethune created decades ago are now standard practice within the district based on the differing needs of students.

The principal claimed that she has successfully changed the school culture from a toxic one into one with a prime focus on academics. She further revealed that the process took three full years and nearly 40% of the teaching staff were replaced over this period at two different schools. However, based on a schoolwide focus on team-centered instruction, increased attention was placed on the creation of an environment with few suspensions and limited disturbances. These schools were once institutions where the employees dreaded coming to work. The principal presented herself as the teachers' biggest supporter and cheerleader, hence exemplifying the traits of Positive Organizational Scholarship. She asserted, "we are only as strong as our weakest link." She uses extracurricular activities and post school outings to strengthen the relationships among the various stakeholders. Some of these activities included

painting, exercising, picnics, and talent shows. Positive reinforcement is thus used as a

motivational tool to ensure that employees perform at their best.

Principal Bethune also stated that maintaining high levels of staff morale requires a great

deal of emotional and professional support for the teaching staff. The current economic

conditions and challenges have created a deflating effect on the morale of some employees. In

view of this, Principal Bethune has created a supportive and nurturing relationship with her staff

that enhances their willingness to use a unique curriculum and classroom instruction rotation that

separates School B from all other elementary schools in the district. She claimed, "I still believe

that it is my responsibility to groom that teacher, improve that teacher's practices." She further

stated that a strong balance of nurturing, direction, alignment, and strategic planning was

essential for guiding her building to an academic focus.

The principal claimed that an inability to encourage employees to improve the students'

opportunities for achieving academic success can be paralyzing to individual growth. According

to principal Bethune, all staff members, including herself, must be pushed out of their comfort

zone to foster improvements in student achievement. The Principal further claimed that being in

an academic comfort zone stagnates growth for both students and staff.

During the observations, the staff at School B highlighted the open-door policy followed

by principal Bethune. They revealed that she gives to all staff members the freedom to present

ideas and feedback over the academic and social directions of the school; they are encouraged to

express their professional and personal feelings. Principal Bethune incorporates the components

of Appreciative Intelligence to promote the positive attributes of her staff members to produce

positive results. The mentality of the staff appears to be one of intense teamwork and

togetherness under the leadership provided by the principal.   Principal Bethune stated her desire

to consistently focus on the development of her teachers and retain individuals to create a stronger academic program. She said, "we look at a team-centered approach." She presented the view that School B is only as strong as the weakest educator in the building. Threat based management, bullying, and having any individual in the building operating in fear is counterproductive to boosting student academics, according to Principal Bethune.

Listening, researching, and unhindered communication are the guiding principles of a building leader. Principal Bethune stated that she supports her staff and is willing to fight against the numerous obstacles they may face. The Principal was reported as taking on the additional role of a teacher in the building for a 60-minute block to relieve a stressed-out teacher who had 47 students in a 2nd grade class. She said, "I taught science from 2:00pm – 3:00pm." The teacher had been forced to take on additional students once her grade level counterpart left the district to pursue a higher paying position in a new school system. Principal Bethune also mandated that her AEA (Academic Engagement Administrator) take on a 60-minute block of instruction to provide the necessary assistance to relieve the overwhelmed teacher with double the average class size. Principal Bethune epitomizes the Warrior Principal Mentality to confront tough issues in her building and to create solutions to the barriers that arise during the course of a school year.

Principal Bethune stated that the district does not provide the necessary support to create productive learning environments. The inability of Human Resources to fill vacant positions is a major hindrance to productive learning environments. She said, "my vacancies from last year were never filled." In addition, the failure of the district to adequately pay vendors limits the ability of the schools to spend available Title I, grant, and general funds to purchase materials for the school. As previously stated, vendors have placed Detroit Public Schools on credit holds due

to their past poor payment records. Also, as stated by the principal, the slow turnaround time for

Procurement to approve and process orders leads to difficulties in creating productive learning

environments. Lastly, the lack of security officers also presented another major challenge for

schools to create productive learning environments.

The 2015 spring MAP Language Usage data for School B displayed 28% of 2nd graders,

13% of 3rd graders, 64 % of 4th graders, and 42% of 5th graders meeting the projected growth

targets. The 2015 spring MAP Mathematics data for School B displayed 17% of kindergartners,

13% of 1st graders, 35 % of 2nd graders, 6% of 3rd graders, 21% of 4th graders, and 48% of 5th

graders meeting the projected growth targets. The 2015 spring MAP Reading data for School B

displayed 22% of kindergartners, 16% of 1st graders, 24% of 2nd graders, 17% of 3rd graders,

38% of 4th graders, and 52% of 5th graders meeting the projected growth targets. Finally, the

2015 spring MAP Science data for School B displayed 26% of 3rd graders, 28% of 4th graders,

56% of 5th graders meeting the projected growth targets. There was no 2015 spring MAP Social

Studies data available. Figures 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12 display the MAP data for Language,

Mathematics, Reading, and Science for School B.

The 2015 M-STEP data for School B indicated that about 6.5% of the students met the

state proficiency target for mathematics. The district averages for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade

mathematics were 10.4% ,7.2%, and 2.5%, respectively. Further, according to mischooldata.org,

the state proficiency targets for mathematics were 45.2% in 3rd grade, 44.0% in 4th grade, and

33.8% in 5th grade.

8.3% of the students met the state proficiency targets for English Language Arts. The

district average for 3rd grade ELA was 9.9%, 4th grade ELA was 10.9%, 5th grade ELA was

12.8%; the state proficiency targets for ELA as estimated by mischooldata.org, were 46.0% in 3rd

grade, 46.3% in 4th grade, and 50.6% in 5th grade. 0.0% of the students met the state proficiency

target for Science, estimated at 14.7% by mischooldata.org. The district average for 4th grade

Science was 1.8%. 0.0% of the students met the state proficiency target for Social Studies,

estimated at 18.9% by mischooldata.org. The district average for 5th grade Social Studies was

2.8%.
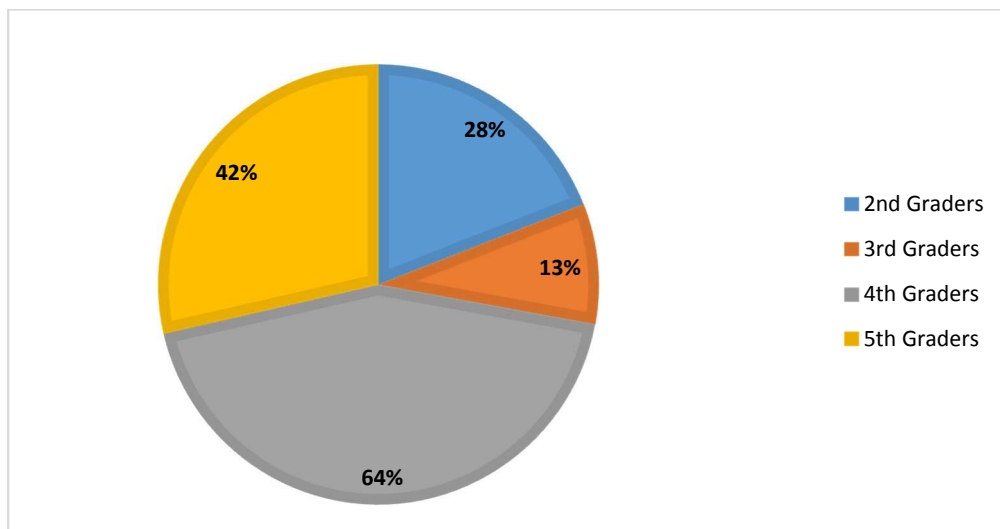
FIGURE 4.9 MAP LANGUAGE USAGE DATA SCHOOL B

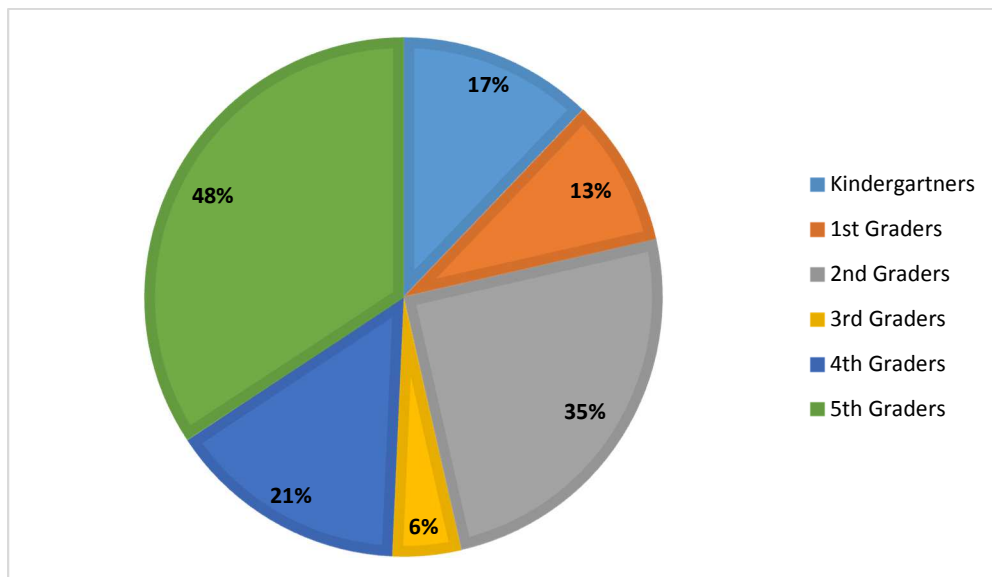FIGURE 4.10 MAP MATHEMATICS USAGE DATA SCHOOL B

FIGURE 4.11 MAP READING USAGE DATA SCHOOL B
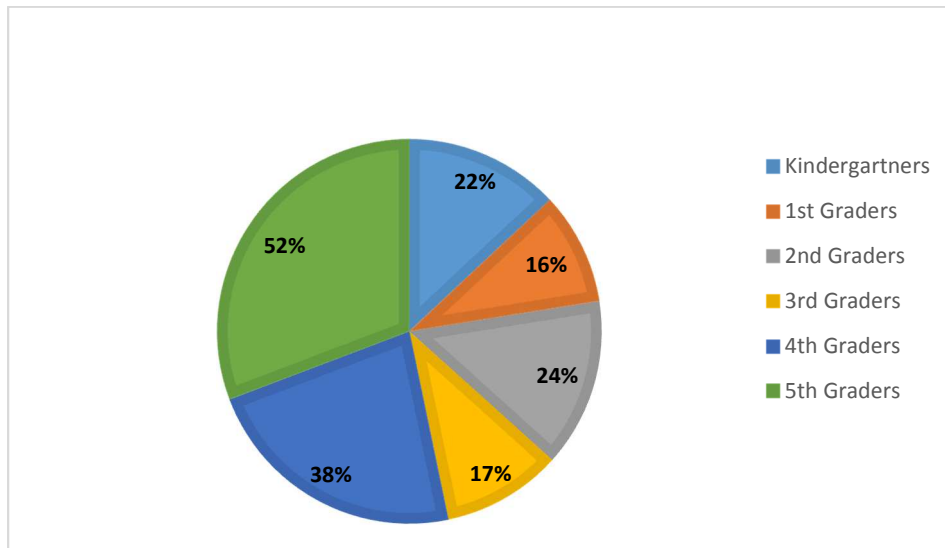
FIGURE 4.12 MAP SCIENCE USAGE DATA SCHOOL B
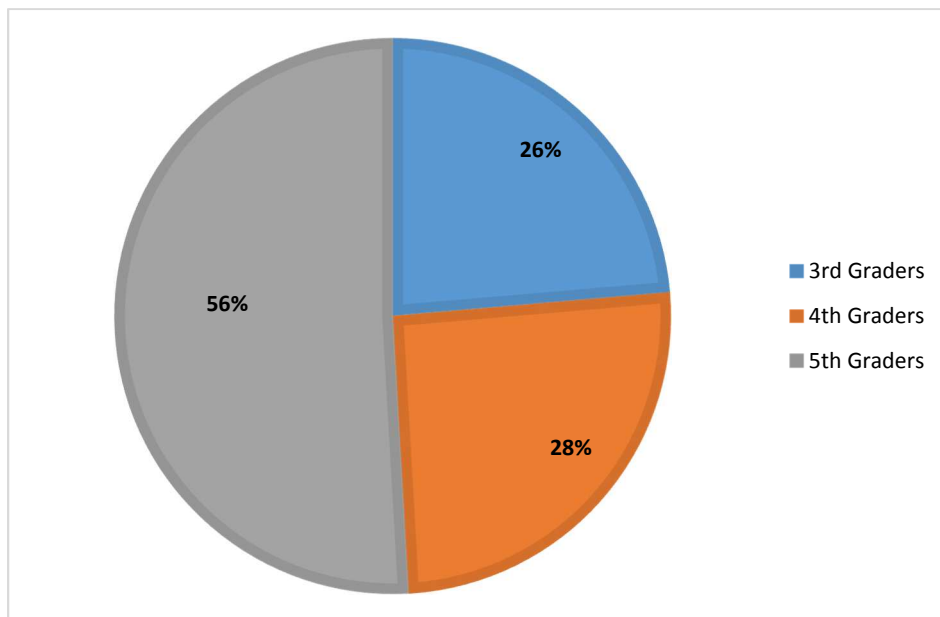
Principal Chisholm and School C

School C is a Title I elementary school located in downtown Detroit. School C had 13

suspensions for Student Code of Conduct violations. School C has 182 students, out of which

174 are African American, 7 are Caucasian, 1 is Latino, while none of the students are Asian,

Arabic, or Native American. 11 students receive special education services while 105 are

considered economically disadvantaged. 88 of the students are male; 94 of the students are female. School C has been one of the top performing schools in the entire city for a long time.

Some of the most successful and influential individuals in the city have children studying in School C; School C has also been highly praised by several authorities. The school secured an A grade from the Mackinaw Center of Public Policy in 2015, and it was ranked as a top school by Excellent Schools Detroit. School C is not a traditional neighborhood school and requires an application for enrollment. There is only one class per grade within School C. School C has a 92.8% schoolwide attendance rate, compared to the district and state targets of 95% attendance.

Although School C is housed in an extremely small and considerably older facility, its building is clean and well organized. Trophies and artifacts of accomplishments are on display throughout the building. Parents are actively involved in all aspects of the school day by way of parent groups that are assigned different duties. These groups work under the supervision of Principal Chisholm and are actively involved in curbside morning arrival, recess, curbside dismissal, and extracurricular activities. Figure 4.13 illustrates the racial mixture of students attending School C.

School C has a veteran African American female principal who usually spends 8 to 14 hours a day in her building and nearly 60 to 80 hours a week completing school-related work. Principal Chisholm is a native of Detroit. She has been a principal in the district for 14 years, and has been a principal at school C for five years. Principal Chisholm is responsible for maintaining the higher academic standards and standardized test performances that have transformed school C into one of the top-ranking schools in the city.

Principal Chisholm is a petite African American female in her 50s. There are only two men in the building including the custodian. In the absence of a security officer, she is regarded

as the authoritative figure and security force in the building. Therefore, principal Chisholm must create safety and security plans to maximize protection for all of the school community. Principal Chisholm stated that maintaining student protection and staff safety are the major tasks of her daily routine. She repeatedly navigates throughout the building to do safety and security checks. Principal Chisholm uses her AEA, custodian, and multiple parent groups as an extended security force.

FIGURE 4.13 SCHOOL C STUDENT MIX
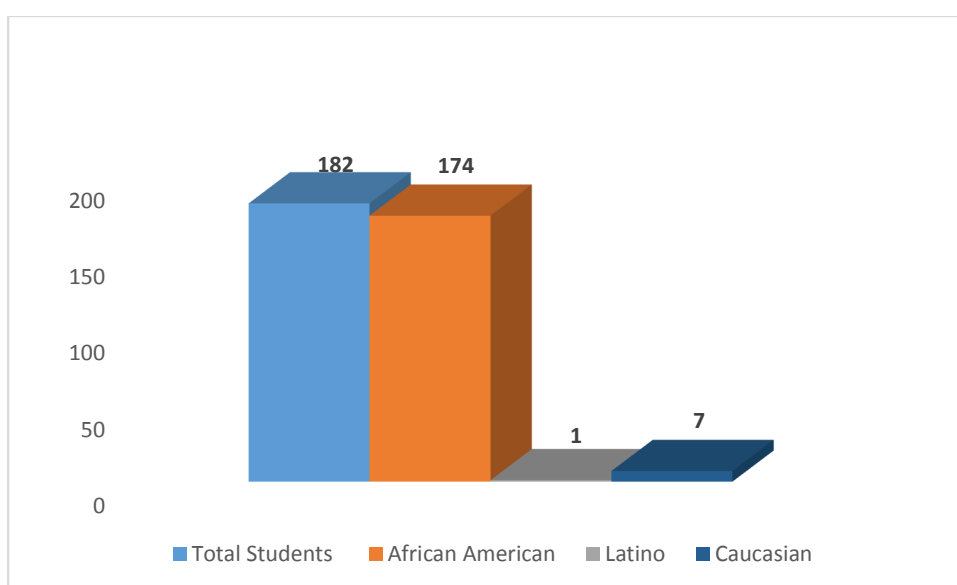
Principal Chisholm must also mobilize her administrative team to stay abreast of building repairs, as the school does not have an on-site building engineer to maintain the facility. Due to financial limitations, school C was forced to share an engineer working with neighboring schools in the district. The principal also must act as a part-time recess supervisor and part-time nurse to distribute medications to students due to a lack of staffing. She is occasionally responsible for administering epi-pen injections and breathing treatments for asthmatic students, thus embodying the Warrior Principal Mentality to provide a solution to the challenges encountered within School C.

One of Principal Chisholm's major obstacles is the lack of available teachers to fill vacant positions due to the current teacher shortage in the district. She said, "one obstacle that I face is when a teacher retires and I have to fill the position." School C has had three teachers leave the district for better compensation and opportunity in other school systems. Principal C expressed that she has struggled to find replacement teachers with the same experience, professionalism, expertise, and passion as the previous teachers in School C. She said, "I think, right now I am losing sleep about vacancies because I don't know who is out there." The compensation packages of the district and the current conditions have made it difficult for school C to attract the best available talent in the area.

Principal Chisholm stated that the district's inconsistency in maintaining academic programs were an additional obstacle for principals in creating productive learning environments. She said, "we bring in new programs and it is difficult to get teachers to buy into it." According to her, the district frequently implements new academic initiatives and programs that come and go within years. The inconsistent academic focus and short-lived programs cannot be used as effective tools for maintaining teacher buy-in and enthusiasm. She stated that she has had to implement multiple academic programs that did not receive adequate support and reinforcement from the district. According to principal Chisholm, many teachers feel as though they do not need to change within any new initiatives because those initiatives will not last long in the district. Therefore, some teachers continue teaching in the same method through much of their career without meaningful professional development to spark instructional change. Principal Chisholm stated that such factors create significant obstacles for the school principals.

Principal Chisholm stated that her most important role as a principal in the district is to support the staff through developing relationships with each staff member. She said, "I think the

most important role is knowing your staff, keeping them abreast of test data, being supportive, being an instructional leader." She considers herself the biggest supporter of the staff and takes pride in claiming that she gives her team positive reinforcement for success, which she refers to as "warm fuzzies." These attributes symbolize the elements of Positive Organizational Scholarship within the daily functions of School C.

According to principal Chisholm, positive relationships are the backbone of a productive learning environment. She greets each staff member in the morning and has a short conversation to get a feel for staff morale which demonstrates Principal Chisholm's utilization of Appreciative Intelligence. She also pays specific attention to interactions with students. The principal tries to spend at least ten minutes in each class every morning; she said, "I go into classrooms every morning." During the sickouts, many teachers returned to the building as a token of appreciation for principal Chisholm. The teachers reported the absence on the sub-finder system only to return to the building to support the principal in explaining the sickout to concerned parents. Principal Chisholm stated that nearly 70% of the staff returned to the building to support her during the sickouts of 2015–2016.

Principal Chisholm estimated that she spends 80% of her time being the instructional leader, but only when all components of her school team work perfectly. She said, "at this particular school I would say I am able to spend 80% of my time on instruction on most days." For example, she is able to spend the necessary time on instruction when every teaching vacancy is filled. It is uncommon for School C to have a need to divide students or have principal Chisholm be forced to substitute on a weekly basis. However, there have been certain occasions that required the principal to take up the role of a teacher due to lack of adequate teacher coverage. Last year, fortunately, School C did not have a longstanding classroom teacher

vacancy. Principal Chisholm has fostered great working relationships with a selection of

substitutes who prefer to only work in School C and two to three other upper echelon schools in

the district. Principal Chisholm believes that the substitutes prefer School C due to the small

school size, smaller class sizes, limited disciplinary infractions, and considerable support from

the active parental groups. Figure 4.14 displays the percentage of the student population

suspended at School C during the year.

As stated before, principal Chisholm has the ability to spend 80% of her time as an

instructional leader only when she has the adequate administrative support staff for non-

academic responsibilities. However, this was not the case for the previous school year when her

AEA was promoted to another position and the vacancy went unfilled for three months. During

this period, she was forced to take on the added responsibilities that would normally be delegated

to the AEA. These added responsibilities limited principal Chisholm's ability to devote 80% of

her time on instruction for a three-month period. She also reported that her time is also divided

up between responding to district emails, dealing with parent concerns, and meeting the

nutritional and health needs of the students.

Principal Chisholm claimed to have fostered relationships with major organizations in the

city to supply additional resources for the students. The principal expressed, "I feel relationships

are very important." The positive and productive relationships assist School C in functioning at

an optimal level and encompassing the cycles of the Appreciative Inquiry Theory. The principal

has nurtured partnerships with local banks to supply coats in the winter, professional sports

teams in the city to provide technology upgrades, and downtown businesses to supply additional

food to needy students over the weekends. The parent organizations use their political and

financial clout to increase exposure for the students. These parent groups lead extracurricular

activities such as Girl Scouts, sports teams, Academic Games, and the chess team. Parents are

active in the building from the beginning of the school day until the conclusion of afterschool

programs. All of these components assist the principal's agenda of enhancing student

enrollment, employing teachers, and filling vacant positions with substitutes.

FIGURE 4.14 SCHOOL C PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT POPULATION SUSPENDED
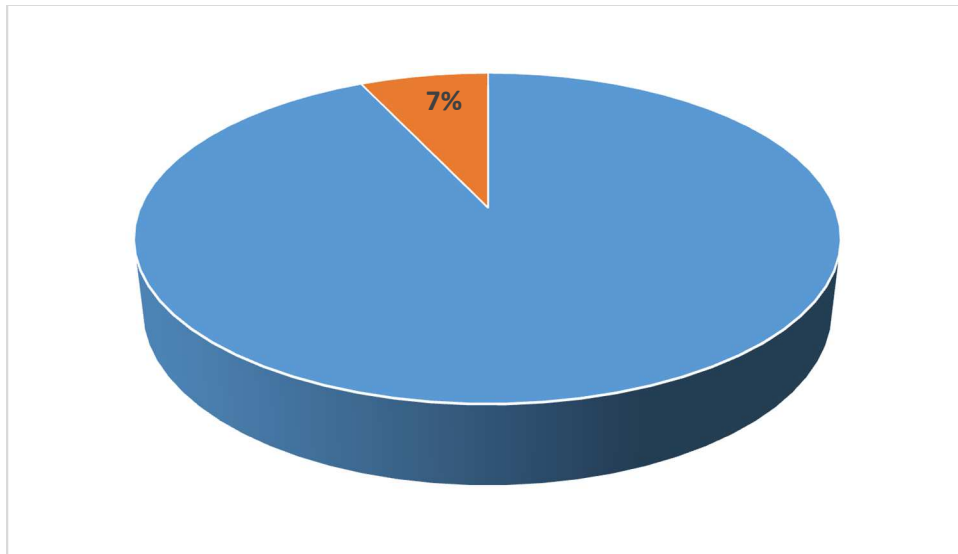
Principal Chisholm defined a productive learning environment as an environment where

all of the students are learning. As she asserted, "in a productive learning environment, teachers

are providing instruction where students can show growth and encouragement to learn."

Teachers can take responsibility for a child who is not reading and provide adequate instructions

aimed at defeating illiteracy in schools. The environment is safe and the students can have all

their basic needs met through wraparound services provided by the school. Both teachers and

students are growing yearly and classroom size remains at a manageable level. According to

principal Chisholm, having 30 to 40 students in a class restricts the creation of a productive

learning environment. A productive learning environment also has added instructional support

from teacher aides and parent participants that provide enrichment for the students.

A productive learning environment is supported by the district's ability to recruit and maintain the best talent. The principal stated, "how can I reach a child that is struggling when I have 30 to maybe 38 students in a classroom?" According to principal Chisholm, schools must not struggle to fill vacancies or rely on long-term substitutes. A productive learning environment is also supported by the district's ability to make adequate repairs and improvements to school buildings. As the principal further stated, the teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn in unfit environments. Lastly, a productive learning environment is supported by the district's ability to secure a stable academic foundation and sustain an academic plan for an extended period. She claimed that constant changes in the academic direction of the district are counterproductive to producing productive learning environments.

The district's financial crisis has placed School C in a unique situation. As the principal claimed, "we have a limited Title I budget and the allocation is $77,000.00." This indicates that School C cannot afford to pay teachers for an afterschool tutoring program due to the limited budget. Therefore, students in School C cannot attend teacher instructed afterschool tutoring during the year, according to principal Chisholm. School C has a population of students who require additional academic support but cannot receive these necessary services without afterschool tutoring. Principal Chisholm has constructed partnerships with other organizations to provide academic support for this population; however, these students are not receiving direct certified instruction from members of the school teaching staff for afterschool tutoring.

The district's financial crisis had a similar impact on School C's ability to support summer school programs. The principal stated, "I have been unable to have summer school, which is truly needed because the children experience the brain drain over the summer." In previous years, the district provided the necessary funds to run a summer school program at

School C, but the current financial crisis has prohibited School C's ability to have a summer school program and monitor summer instruction for their students. Small school populations are characterized by a small general fund budget; school C cannot afford to pay teachers for the summer school program due to the limited budget, therefore the students in School C who require additional academic support cannot attend teacher instructed summer school. Instead, the principal reported, these students from School C had to attend a neighboring school for the summer program in the previous year.

The 2015 spring MAP Language Usage data for School C displayed that 25% of 2nd graders, 31% of 3rd graders, 23 % of 4th graders, and 52% of 5th graders met the projected growth targets. The 2015 spring MAP Mathematics data for School A displayed that 14% of kindergartners, 4% of 1st graders, 0% of 2nd graders, 3% of 3rd graders, 15% of 4th graders, and 16% of 5th graders met the projected growth targets. The 2015 spring MAP Reading data for School C displayed that 23% of kindergartners, 4% of 1st graders, 14% of 2nd graders, 24% of 3rd graders, 23% of 4th graders, and 20% of 5th graders met the projected growth targets. The 2015 spring MAP Science data for School C displayed that 38% of 3rd graders, 19% of 4th graders, and 36% of 5th graders met the projected growth targets. There was no 2015 spring MAP Social Studies data available. Figures 4.15, 4.16, 4.17, and 4.18 display the MAP data for Language, Mathematics, Reading, and Science for School C.

FIGURE 4.15 MAP LANGUAGE USAGE DATA SCHOOL C

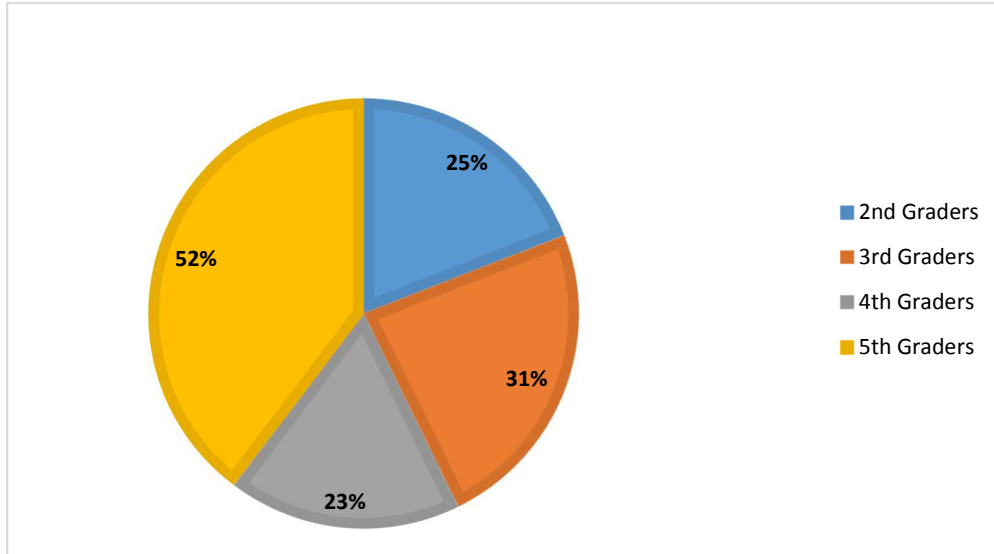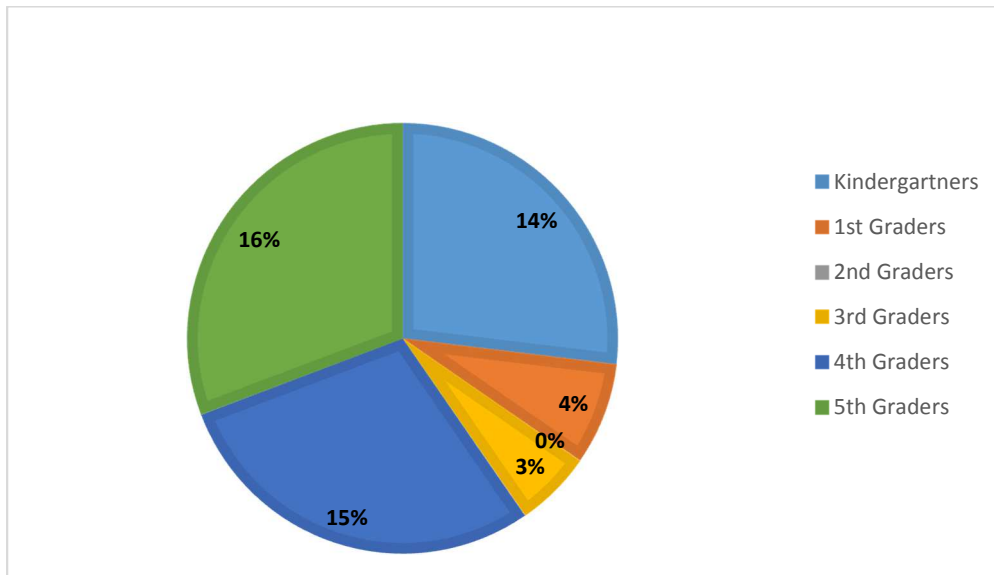FIGURE 4.16 MAP MATHEMATICS USAGE DATA SCHOOL C
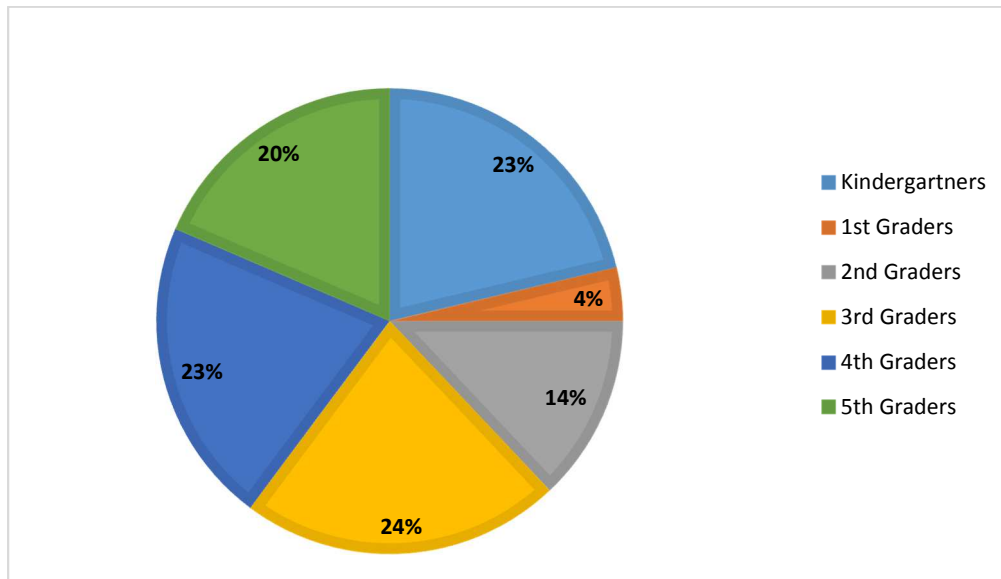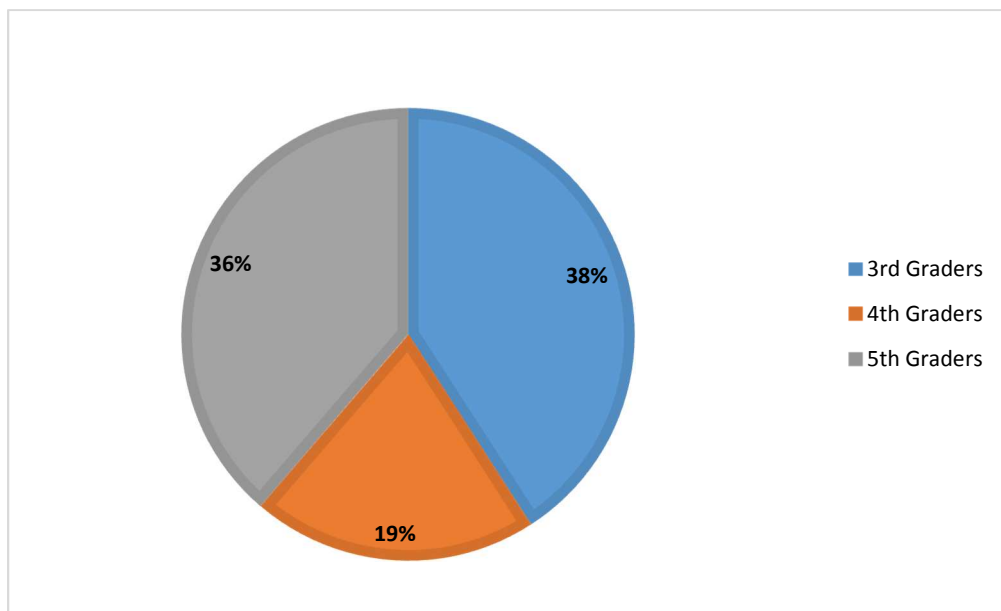
FIGURE 4.17 MAP READING USAGE DATA SCHOOL C

FIGURE 4.18 MAP SCIENCE USAGE DATA SCHOOL C

The 2015 M-STEP data for School C revealed that about 30.9% of the students were able to meet the state proficiency target for mathematics. The district averages for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade mathematics were 10.4% ,7.2%, and 2.5%, respectively. Further, according to

mischooldata.org, the state proficiency targets for mathematics were 45.2%, 44.0%, and 33.8% for the three grades, respectively.

About 40.2% of the students met the state proficiency target for English Language Arts. The district averages for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade ELA were 9.9%, 10.9%, and 12.8%, respectively. According to mischooldata.org, the state proficiency targets for ELA were 46.0% in 3rd grade, 46.3% in 4th grade, and 50.6% in 5th grade. About 7.7% of the students met the state proficiency target for Science. The district average for 4th grade Science was 1.8%. The state proficiency target for Science was 14.7% according to mischooldata.org. 18.5% of the students met the state proficiency target for Social Studies. The district average for 5th grade Social Studies was 2.8%, while the state proficiency target was 18.9%, according to mischooldata.org.

Universal Themes Within Findings

During the observations, each school displayed similar attributes regarding cleanliness, school safety, building tone, and varying degrees of teacher collaboration. The school settings for each building demonstrated a clean and orderly learning environment. The hallways and classrooms indicated a building where the entire staff took great pride in the conditions of the learning environment. Each building was free of odors, graffiti, and visible structural damage that could obstruct the learning environment.

The three schools exhibited a major emphasis on safety and security. Each building had a unique plan to ameliorate safety and security concerns in the building and within the adjacent school community. These security plans incorporated the principal and various members of the team to maximize school safety. In addition, each school displayed techniques to reassess and alter safety plans for the advancement of productive learning environments.

A prominent similarity in each building was the overall verbal and nonverbal tone of the learning environment. The principals spoke to the students, staff, and parents in a calm, respectful, and businesslike manner. The teachers spoke to the students, parents, and staff members in a very similar manner across the three schools. The verbal and nonverbal exchanges between staff, students, and parents represented a culture of cooperation and teamwork. There was no evidence of excessive yelling, screaming, and speaking to students in an aggressive tone.

The schools verified a consistent sense of teacher collaboration. The teachers within the schools displayed the freedom to discuss issues of concern with the principal and other stakeholders in the school to improve the learning environment. Furthermore, the principals promoted teamwork and idea sharing within the school community. These qualities helped the progress of productive learning environments within the three schools.

The three interviewed principals presented similar views on the basic concepts of productive learning environments. Another universal theme discussed by the principals was concern about the supply of an adequate number of teachers for academic instruction. Acting as the instructional leader was another universal theme within the research based on the additional duties associated with the position in the current system. Each principal detailed that a clean and orderly school environment was a crucial component of a productive learning environment. Lastly, all three principals expressed the desire to provide additional wraparound services based on the financial limitations of the children they service.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 5 provides detailed interpretations of the research findings presented in Chapter 4, as well as a conclusion and final recommendations for future research. This chapter also provides analysis and discussion of the research findings. The chapter explores contrasting views presented by the data and conclusions of the study in terms of the implications for principals in DPS in creating productive learning environments. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

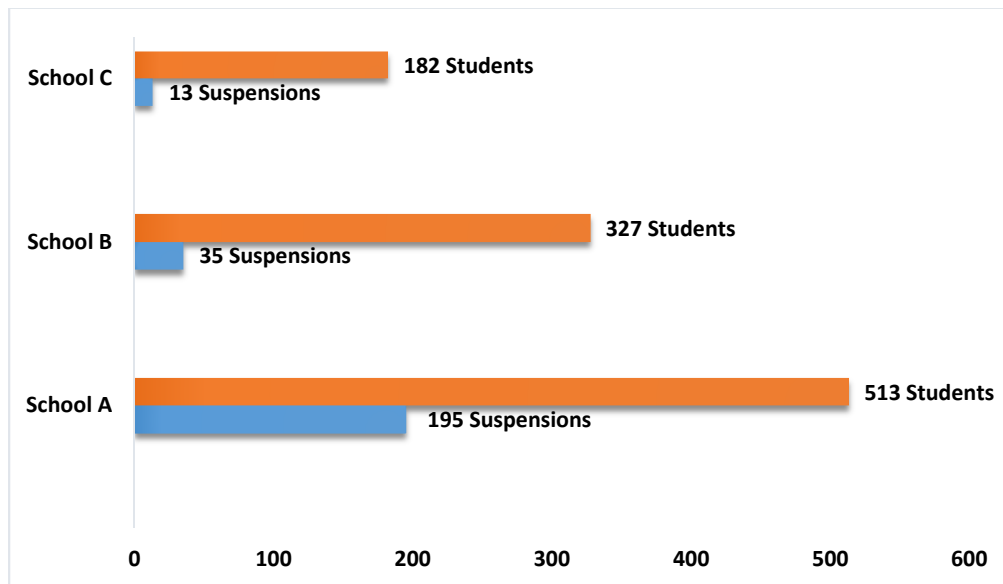**Definition of a Productive Learning Environment**

The researcher noted an increased focus on safety to be the most common theme in the definition of a productive learning environment. Each principal described safety as a major key in the development of a productive learning environment. According to the principals, students must feel safe and comfortable for effective learning to occur. In addition to the students, the teachers and staff members must also feel safe to be able to produce productive learning environments.

While a violence free school setting is clearly central to understanding the concept of safety, it was also reported that safety is a much broader concept. Safety can also be explained as the willingness of the students to give wrong answers and look at a topic from multiple perspectives without fear of judgement, failure, and ridicule. Furthermore, the concept of safety also includes a feeling of security among the teaching staff in expressing ideas, concerns, and frustrations to the administrators without retaliation from the school principal.

Safety also includes the ability of the teaching staff to collaborate with both each other and parents within the school community to improve the educational and social outcomes of the

school. This team-first approach encourages the various stakeholders to sideline their individual differences and needs for the betterment of the students. The process of parents blaming the teachers, and vice-versa, is neutralized by the effective development of the teamwork approach. These claims about safety that the principals put forward can lay a significant foundation for producing a productive learning environment. By signaling a willingness to defend the safety and security of the school and inspiring others to embody a spirit of teamwork, all three principals displayed the attributes of Appreciate Inquiry and the warrior principal mentality. Figure 5.1 provides a visual aid for a cumulative overview of school suspensions for all three schools.

FIGURE 5.1 CUMULATIVE SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS

Each principal stated a dire necessity for students to have access to excellent teachers to produce a productive learning environment. The division of students along inappropriate grade levels and ability levels is detrimental to the production of productive learning environments. As an emergency procedure to ensure that each student is assigned a teacher, students are shifted to different grade levels irrespective of their appropriate grade levels. In the worst cases, classes

are held in the lunch rooms, auditoriums, and gyms for extended periods of time without instructional guidance. The principals further revealed that the Human Resources department has struggled to meet the needs of their schools.

Allowing non-certified long-term substitutes to fill vacant positions is detrimental to the creation of productive learning environments. Therefore, the current teacher shortage in the district has severely impacted each school and further complicated the ability to create productive learning environments. However, the three principals have adopted several measures to curb these challenges, such as combining classes, creating alternative scheduling to limit the subjects taught by non-certified long-term substitute teachers, producing lesson plans, and providing personal instructional guidance for struggling teachers. The principals have also taken a step forward by acting as a teacher themselves in case of the non-availability of teachers.

All three principals stated that they do not have the time to be the instructional leader to create their desired productive learning environment. Due to the numerous responsibilities of a principal, they feel that a productive learning environment involves the building leader having adequate time to devote solely to the school's academic aspects. However, the three principals have extended roles beyond the academic arena: they must often play the additional roles of security agents, maintenance personnel, substitutes, active social workers, nurses, and nutritionists to ensure the basic health and safety needs of the students.

However, all three principals have generated methods to handle the added responsibilities of being a DPS principal and ensure productive learning environments. The principals have developed systems of delegating non-academic assignments, spending 60 to 80 weekly hours for meeting the needs of the school, researching best practices, and fostering partnerships both inside and outside of the school. Another effective method the principals have adopted is using positive

forms of communication and actions of appreciation to encourage the employees in building

productive learning environments. Such actions are a testimony to the principal's use of

Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Intelligence, and positive organizational leadership in their

buildings.

All three principals highlighted the sanitation and structural conditions of the school as a

detrimental factor for the production of a productive learning environment. The issue of

cleanliness is extremely relevant in the wake of the 2015-2016 teacher-led sickouts that protested

against inhumane conditions for staff and students in such buildings. Teachers and students must

have the ability to focus on academics without any distractions from other factors such as leaking

roofs, cold buildings, rodents, black mold and mildew. The principals in the study have

personified the warrior principal mentality to the point where they sometimes perform janitorial

duties within the building to ensure a productive learning environment for their school

community.

The three principals have established a system of checks and balances to maintain

acceptable conditions in their buildings. An important factor for ensuring such acceptable

conditions is the collaborative effort of all other team members to address building issues. All

three principals have empowered their team members through positive leadership, the delegation

of non-academic assignments, and the brokering of strong working relationships between

outsourced companies and the DPS facilities department. Such strong partnerships help to

maintain the productive learning environments that currently exist within the three schools.

Productive schools must be able to fulfill the basic needs of the students, such as

nutritional, emotional, and physical health needs. These basic needs also include the ability of

the school to supply essential academic necessities such as books, technology upgrades, and

certified teachers. All three principals have contrived creative methods to produce productive

learning environments without requiring the support from the district. Figure 5.2 provides a

visual aid for a cumulative overview of school attendance rates for all three schools.

FIGURE 5.2 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES
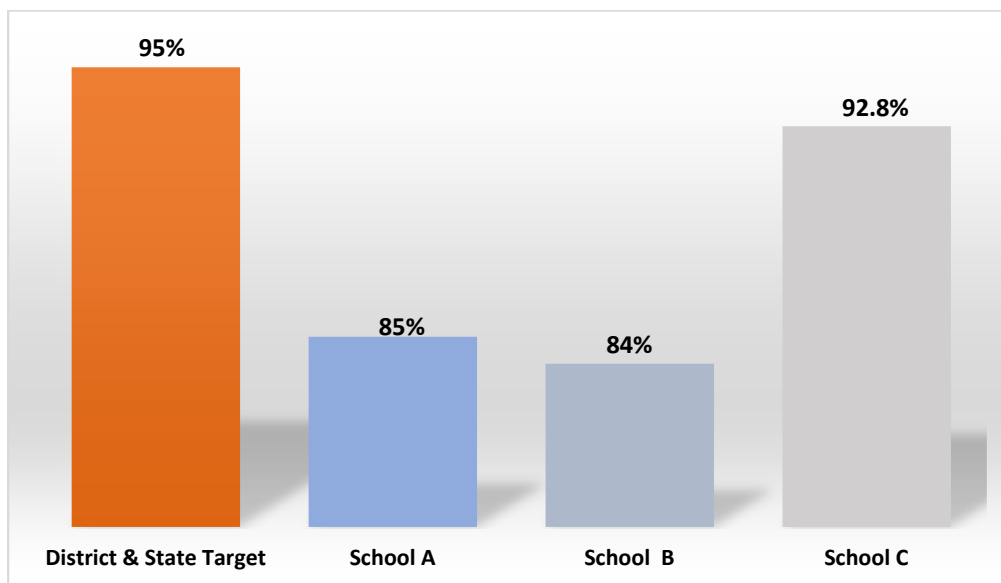
A striking factor in the principal's revelations on productive learning environments is the

lack of reference to standardized test scores. All three schools were reported to have displayed

contrasting scores across the board examinations in comparison to the 2015 district and state

average. The researcher found some of the obtained standardized scores to be above the district

and state averages, and some to be far below. However, none of the principals referred to the

standardized test scores while discussing their individual viewpoints. This finding is significant

given the highly-publicized critiques given by the media and SRO about low M-STEP scores

across DPS schools.

All three principals expressed that the state struggled during the first two years after the

initiation of the M-STEP. They deemed such tests to be inadequate indicators of the learning

taking place in such schools. In addition, the principals stated that even the updated online

versions of the standardized test impose additional infrastructure challenges. These

infrastructural obstacles can include outdated internet connection systems, outdated computers

used for test administration, a lack of sufficient technology to administer the test, and lack of

similarity among the students in using the required technology prior to taking the standardized

tests. However, despite these numerous infrastructure obstacles, the three principals claimed to

have gained a certain level of improvement on standardized tests between the MAP and M-STEP

throughout their tenures within their respective buildings.

The three principals attributed this improvement to their success in regularly providing

the students with simulated test activities to break the cycle of fear related to standardized test

taking. Furthermore, the school leaders have used their partnerships to improve the technology

in the buildings. These improvements in technology allowed the students to become familiar

with using crucial components of online standardized tests such as the keyboard, mouse, and

headphones. The principals claimed this familiarity to be vital for the students since the former

MEAP test was conducted using pencil and paper without any emphasis on the use of

technology. The principals further asserted that the students will continue to show growth with

increased levels of familiarity with the test structure and use of the latest technology in non-

entertainment aspects.

Common Obstacles for Productive Learning Environments

All three principals agreed that DPS Human Resources did not have a significant positive

impact on the creation of a productive learning environment. The principals further expressed

their disappointment regarding the inability of the Human Resources to attract, hire, and retain

talent in the district. They mentioned the sluggish methods of processing and placing new hires

in school buildings. Each principal gave accounts of personally recruiting teachers, securing

interviews with candidates, and selecting candidates, only to have the candidate take another position outside of the district due to the delayed process.

Principal Bethune referred to the DPS Human Resources issue as a misalignment in the district. Human Resources possesses no knowledge about the individual needs of the schools which further aggravates the problems imposed by the current teacher shortage. The principals expressed a desire for effective Human Resource and DPS Budget Departments to create robust compensation packages to entice the most talented educators in the area. Despite the obstacles imposed by the lack of Human Resources, all three principals reported having devised methods to withstand staffing deficits.

All three principals agreed that DPS Procurement, which serves as the financial liaison between a school's funds and potential vendors, did not have a significant positive impact on the creation of a productive learning environment. Each principal expressed her frustration with the timeliness of the mandatory process for approving any vendor contract. The principals reported that a huge amount of money is wasted due to the delay in getting services approved, processed, and paid. A majority of the vendors have refused to provide supplemental academic, conflict resolution, parent resources, extracurricular activities, technology upgrades, extermination services, and professional development sessions due to the inability of the district to pay them in-full and/or on-time. The principals noted that such misalignment was a constant obstacle. However, the principals have effectively utilized their relationships with local businesses, parent groups, and current staff members to overcome the inability to spend funds in a timely fashion to improve their buildings. An effective use of external links and relationships to fulfill the job responsibilities, as is seen in the present case, is another visible example of the effective use of Appreciative Intelligence and Appreciative Inquiry.

The principals reported parental involvement as having a significant impact on the creation of a productive learning environment in their buildings. Fostering relationships with parents has been successful in expanding the academic reach of the schools into the students' homes. Each principal has enforced unique methods to increase parental involvement and the reinforcement of school norms outside the school. The principals have created spaces within the school building to serve as centers for parents, thus allowing them to have a home base within the school setting.

These parent resource centers within the schools grant the parents an opportunity to improve upon their personal situations and apply for employment and other forms of assistance training with the help of technology and materials. The principals encourage parent partnerships by arranging academic nights for adults, multiple daily roles and responsibilities within the school premises, and a background check and clearance procedure from the DPS Office of Parent Engagement and school police department. All three principals have put special attention on strengthening their relationships with parents to create a productive learning environment. Such an attitude further demonstrates the principal's use of Appreciative Inquiry and positive organizational leadership.

All three principals agreed that the current school board has no impact on the production of a productive learning environment. As previously stated, the school board has been rendered powerless due to the appointment of the Emergency Managers. The school board could not implement any significant policies to influence the decision-making process in the district before January 1, 2017. In January of 2017, the district returned to local control and the newest school board, elected on November 8, 2016, has revived the ability to make decisions for DPSCD. All

three principals have been able to create productive learning environments without the influence of a school board.

Another core area which of mutual consensus among the three sampled principals is the district compensation package. As stated in the research, a majority of the employees in the district have not received a salary raise over the past decade, which has caused several educators to leave the district. Furthermore, new employees are reluctant to work in the district due to the low wages and lack of attractive benefit packages. Such factors have resulted in an acute shortage of teachers, general employees, and substitute teachers in all three schools.

Lastly, the principals claimed that the insufficient compensation package has saturated the district with low skilled and unenthusiastic employees. Some employees hold their positions only because of the district's willingness to fill critical shortage areas with employees that would not be hired in other districts. The principals expressed extreme difficulties in improving the test scores with some low-skilled and unmotivated employees because of the available compensation package.

The ability of Detroit Public Schools Facilities Department and the outsourced companies to address building concerns is a crucial factor that impacts all three principals. This can be supported by the fact that the poor building conditions of the district appeared in national headlines during the year 2015-2016. All three principals listed the presence of detrimental factors such as leaking roofs, malfunctioning heating units, mold, and rodents running through the building during instructional time, all of which significantly impacted the maintenance of a productive learning environment. The principals were also found to agree with the claim that the financial conditions of the district negatively impact their ability to create positive learning

environments. In addition to the lack of basic supplies, the absence of adequate finances to supply security to all schools decreases overall safety and morale.

Principal Angelou put forward the desire for certified law enforcement to secure school buildings. The limited DPS police force was another major concern for all three principals. The current DPS police force must respond to all DPS schools and the EAA schools under emergencies. The EAA is classified as another district run by the state which may require urgent attention of the DPS police force in its various schools, particularly six large high schools that have been regarded as highly problematic. The insufficient district police force adds to the anxiety of the three principals regarding safety in their buildings. Remarkably, all three principals have used their effectively positive communication skills, warrior principal mentality, and unconventional motivational methods to counteract the negative aspects of recurring safety concerns to produce productive learning environments in their school buildings.

Universal Characteristics of Productive Principals

The three principals in the research were all African American women in their 50s.   Each possessed a wealth of knowledge and experience as educators in the district. However, the principals within the study shared some extremely similar characteristics that were not dependent on their age, race, sex, and years of experience. The universal characteristics of the productive principals in the study transcend racial, physical, and cultural attributes.

Each principal was the absolute leader in the building. Their authoritative demeanor and businesslike focus were the symbols of strength and stability within the schools. These individuals provided a calming presence within the productive learning environments. The principals had to take on the initiative of acting as the chief of safety and security procedures based on the needs of the school community. They created a school culture based on flexibility

and teamwork which allowed the buildings to withstand unexpected challenges to the productive learning environments.

Each principal exhibited the ability to successfully and respectfully communicate with multiple stakeholders to meet the needs of the students. The communication took place in the form of positive reinforcement, clear and measurable goals, praise, one to one conversations, and demonstrations of appreciation. The ability to motivate and inspire diverse groups of people with differing needs was an apparent characteristic of the building leaders across the three schools. The productive principals were able to foster relationships that worked beyond the limitations of a contract.

The three principals presented a determination to be the instructional leader in their respective schools. Each principal was forced to prioritize their time and devote considerable time to dealing with non-academic concerns. The ability to compartmentalize various tasks to maintain a focus as the instructional leader was a universal characteristic of the three principals. The role of the instructional leader took the shape of physically teaching classes, designing lessons, assisting struggling educators, and formulating alterations to the academic schedules to withstand the obstacles of a teacher shortage.

Conclusions

The principals' perspectives studied in the present research indicate that the concept of a productive learning environment is closely associated to the current conditions that impact the district. All three sampled principals envision a school with all necessities of education being provided in a clean, safe, and modern school building. Despite the commonly held notion that the system works against productivity, the principals must remain positive and proactive. As described in the research, the severe misalignment of curriculum, facilities, Human Resources,

Procurement, district leadership, parent involvement, and safety imposes a set of challenges in the production of productive learning environments.

The principals sampled for the present research overcome tremendous financial, environmental, and systematic obstacles to achieve productive learning environments in their buildings. An innovative and efficient use of the available resources based on the idea of "doing more with less" was a common strategy adopted by all three leaders. The production of the productive learning environment contained an extreme overreliance on the principal within the three schools in the research. The success and failure of the schools place a massive dependence on the individual building leader.

It may be difficult for future leaders to be expected to perform at such a level for the duration of their careers. Requiring an unswerving sacrifice of individual health, personal wellbeing, and enduring constant stress is an unrealistic expectation for the sustainability of productive principals in the district under the current system. The overall collected averages on the MAP and M-STEP add to the criticism from adversaries and acts as disconfirming evidence regarding the existence of productive learning environments within the three schools in the research. The harsh reality is that the productive learning environment attained in Detroit Public Schools may not be considered productive in other districts owing to the lack of materials, programs, and services that must be supplemented by principals like the individuals sampled.

Recommendations for Further Research

The current study showed what productive learning environments look like from the perspective of three elementary principals. The study also revealed the obstacles faced by the various schools in the district that have a significant impact on the learning environments. The researcher analyzed some of the actions of principals who were successful in attaining

productive learning environments in their buildings. However, there is a significant need for additional research to explore the current situations of Detroit Public Schools and the significant role played by principals within the system.

The largest public school system in the state is in dire need of additional scholarship and analysis of the district's current conditions to ensure a productive future for the nearly 50,000 students. According to SRO, almost half of the school buildings in the district (47 out of 97) have been termed as "failing schools" and are reported to possibly face closure within the next one to three years. The indispensable role of principals in creating productive learning environments in early education pre-school buildings, K-8 buildings, middle school buildings, and high schools is evident. Researchers can also consider the physical, emotional, and mental pressures imposed on the principals in the district due to the multiple challenges faced in the position. The longstanding health of building leaders also has some significance to the stability of productive learning environments.

Furthermore, researchers can examine the actions and characteristics of similar building leaders to replicate these abilities to produce new generations of urban principals who excel at operating in the most severe circumstances. If the conditions and challenges of the district do not change, the next generation of building leaders must be equipped with the necessary components to overcome the obstacles present in urban districts. The success of urban students largely depends on the creation of a stronger research base to impact the development and sustainability of urban principals.

The present research has highlighted the absolute necessity of strong leadership in schools under DPSCD. Each principal possesses a unique aura that becomes the foundation of the vibe and energy that emanates from each building. The structure of both the current and

former systems place the ultimate responsibility for the achievement of a productive learning environment on the building leaders. Principals are expected to outperform their contracts and complete tasks that are not listed in their yearly contract renewal agreements. Productive principals must use unorthodox methods to achieve higher productivity with limited resources. Such individuals sacrifice their health, safety, and overall quality of life for the betterment of their students, staff, and school community. Their persistent sacrifice acts as the emotional, physical, and academic nourishment that fuels productive learning environments and generates the essence of hope for a brighter future in the city of Detroit.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Principal Research Questionnaire

Interview Question Examples

1. Tell the researcher about your background. What did you do before becoming a principal?

2. What compelled you to become a principal in DPS?

3. What are your most difficult obstacles and challenges for success?

4. Tell the researcher about your most important role as a principal.

5. Tell the researcher about your daily job duties and responsibilities.

6. What do you spend the majority of your time doing as a principal within Detroit Public Schools?

7. What do you wish you had time to complete as a principal in Detroit Public Schools?

8. What are your present major concerns regarding your role and the impact that this role has on student achievement?

9. How do you define a productive learning environment?

10. Do you consider yourself a principal who has been able to cultivate a productive learning environment? Why or why not?

11. (If yes to 9): What do you believe you've done that separates you from other principals in DPS who have not been successful at creating a productive learning environment?

12. How does the financial crisis of the district impact your ability to produce productive learning environments? How so?

13. What future concerns are anticipated in your role as a principal?

14. Is there anything else about your experiences in DPS that you think it is important for the researcher to know?

15. Do you have any questions for me?

Questions for interviews 2-5 emerged based on preliminary analyses from the first interview with each participant.

APPENDIX B

Principal Research Survey

Productive Learning Environment Principal Survey

Scoring Scale

Strongly Agree   **Strongly Disagree**

      1   2   3   4   5

1. The support from Human Resources assists in the execution of a productive learning environment in your building.

      1   2   3   4   5

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☑ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

2. The support from Procurement and having adequate supplies from all academic departments assists the execution of a productive learning environment in your building.

      1   2   3   4   5

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

3. Parental involvement and support of the community assist the execution of a productive learning environment in your building.

      1   2   3   4   5

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

4. The support of the school board assists the execution of a productive learning environment in your building.

      1   2   3   4   5

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

5. District leadership assists the execution of a productive learning environment in your building.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

6. The district compensation package and morale of the employees assist the execution of a productive learning environment.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

7. Having adequate teacher service and adequate substitutes assist the execution of a productive learning environment.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

8. The financial conditions of the district assist the execution of a productive learning environment in your building.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

9. The support of facilities and maintenance assist the execution of a productive learning environment in your building.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

10. Having adequate security and public safety support assist the execution of a productive learning environment in your building.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5

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