

## **Effective Instructional Leadership Practices in High Performing Elementary Schools**

Jesse Sanchez

*Dinuba Unified School District, Dinuba, USA*

Jennifer M. Watson

*California State University, Fresno, USA*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the connection between principals' instructional practices and student achievement. A phenomenological case study examined 13 Title I elementary schools in central California that exhibited a) a high percentage of students from poverty, b) higher than average state assessment results, and c) principals that remained in their schools for 3 years or more during the same time period. The study analyzed instructional leadership practices (ILP) and the monitoring tools used by the principals and its effect on student achievement. The impact of this study provides a model for ILP of principals that can be incorporated into their daily habits that provide opportunities for instructional changes that can lead to increased student achievement.

**Keywords:** instructional leadership practices, Title I school, achievement gap

---

Every student deserves a quality education where they can achieve their highest potential. Despite educator and policy efforts over the past 50 years, the achievement gap between students living in poverty and those who do not continues (Flores, 2007). Instructional strategies and practices to help close this gap have been a point of discussion (Leithwood, 2010; McGee, 2004). Research suggests that the role of educational leadership in general, and of principals specifically, is important to advance student achievement (McGee, 2004). Principal ILP and behaviors can affect student achievement and is the purpose of this study.

Studies have been dedicated to the role of the principal and student performance. Heck et al. (1990) studied the impact of instructional leadership behaviors of elementary principals and teachers on academic achievement. The authors identified types of instructional leadership behaviors strongly associated with high student performance. Among such behaviors were goal communication and frequent classroom visits (Heck et al., 1990). Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009) studied leadership practices in high-performing, high-poverty rural schools in California and found that strong instructional leadership that focused on standards and high expectations was an important factor in the academic success of students. Although both studies provided insight, student inequities continue.

To better understand the ILP of principals at high performing Title 1 schools, this study relied on the qualitative research design of a phenomenological case study. Qualitative description is a low-interference description of a phenomenon (Sandelowski, 1993). Instructional leadership refers to the type of leadership in education, which consists in "defining a school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate" (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986, p. 351). Based on the association between the principal's instructional leadership and student achievement, it was important to investigate specific curricular behaviors and practices of principals that may be conducive to the improvement of students' academic success. One central question and two associated sub questions guided the inquiry:

What instructional practices do principals of high achieving Title I schools implement to support student academic achievement?

- a) To what do principals of high achieving Title I schools attribute their success?
- b) How do collaborative discussions between teachers and administrators on instruction contribute to student achievement?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The role of the principal has changed in the last 10 years and requires that instructional leadership be evident to increase academic achievement (Lunenburg, 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). Educational researchers have looked at the role of principals in improving student achievement and school performance. Inquiry has found that a principal's leadership and decision-making style significantly affects a school's performance (Leithwood, 2010), and furthermore, that principals could improve instruction by instituting instructional practices that close the achievement gap (Wenglinsky, 2004). It is important to understand the influence principals have on student performance, particularly in schools where the highest percentage of students living in poverty attend.

Literature analysis on the principal's responsibility to improve student achievement shows two consistent themes: general leadership issues and instructional leadership. McGee (2004) found that principals in high performing schools create a conducive school culture and are actively involved in improving instruction (McGee, 2004). Reyes et al. (1999) revealed that principals in high-performing schools demonstrate collaborative leadership and provide opportunities for collaboration and communication between teachers, students, and parents. Such principals also show humanistic leadership, meaning a genuine concern to values, abilities, and achievement of the students (Reyes et al., 1999). A collaborative style of leadership and a focus on instruction were significant features displayed by principals of high-performing schools (Leithwood, 2010).

### **Poverty and Effective Title 1 Schools**

The effect of poverty on schools is well documented. Lippman et al. (1996) examined the effects of poverty in schools. The researchers found that high urban poverty schools are different from others and concluded that students from these schools demonstrated lower academic performance than schools with low numbers of students from poverty.

Title I schools derive their name from Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 are those attended by high numbers of students who qualify for free and/or reduced-price lunches (FRPL). Studies indicate that Title I programs lead to increased student achievement among students living in poverty; however, achievement of Title I students did not rise to the level of non-Title 1 students (Borman & D'Agostino, 1996). While studies generally indicated improvements in academic achievement of students from poverty, the achievement gap still persisted.

Among Title I schools, there are effective schools in which students perform at higher-than-expected levels. Moreover, high achieving schools presented stronger evidence of monitoring student achievement. Teachers in high achieving schools had improved access to resource materials outside the classroom (Edmonds, 1979) and expressed stronger job satisfaction than teachers in low performing schools. These findings reinforce the expectations of high performing Title I schools.

### **Principals and Student Achievement**

The analysis of high achieving Title I schools suggested that principals play a vital role in student achievement (Glasman, 1984). Principals used their power to implement management, instructional, and school climate related practices (Glasman, 1984). Further research addresses principal leadership, including instructional leadership, and student achievement. Additional analysis determined three kinds of principal behavior were significant factors in improved student achievement: (a) direct observation of classrooms by the principal, (b) initiating discussions about instructional issues, and (c) emphasizing assessment results in such discussions with teachers (Heck, 1992).

While many studies attempted to establish direct links between principal leadership and students, the current consensus is that principals affect student achievement indirectly (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Specifically, the principal affected student achievement indirectly through the development and implementation of the school's mission, which provided instructional focus and created an environment conducive to learning (Soehner & Ryan, 2011). In other words, the view that principals directly influence student achievement has been left with principals indirectly affect student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Quinn, 2002).

Moreover, the instructional behaviors and practices of principals are also very important in their effort to improve student achievement. Hallinger (2015) noted that effective instructional leaders are closely involved in monitoring student progress to the extent that they may know the reading levels and progress of all students in the school. In addition, a good instructional leader develops high expectations and standards. Research has found that staff in high performing schools have higher expectations for student achievement than the staff in low performing schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Maintaining high visibility in the classrooms is yet another function connected to school effectiveness (Waters et al., 2003). The high visibility function is exercised through “frequent visits to classrooms, having recurring contact with students, and being highly visible around the school” (Waters et al., 2003, p. 10).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Instructional leadership continues as a practice in schools to increase academic achievement. A conceptual framework of instructional leadership was developed (Murphy, 1983) that highlighted the functions and activities for high levels of student performance outcomes. The importance of the framework focused on the role of the principal as the instructional leader (Murphy, 1983). The critical functions of instructional leadership are the supervision and evaluation of the instructional program and the work that principals and teachers engage in to ensure lessons are tied to school goals (Murphy, 1983). Instructional leadership practices reveal that principals have influence on teaching quality and student learning (Leithwood, 2010; Raelin, 2016). Based on this work, principals communicate with teachers to help them better facilitate instruction in the classroom.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Based on the association between the principal’s instructional leadership and student achievement, it was important to investigate specific curricular behaviors and practices of principals that may be conducive to students’ academic achievement. This study relied on the qualitative research design of a phenomenological case study, which refers to the examination of the lived experience of various phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), including the attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and opinions (Percy et al., 2015) of participants. This approach was chosen because the answer to the second sub research question suggested studying principals’ ILP behaviors that contributed to improve student achievement. The committee for the protection of human subjects at a large public university approved the research.

### **Participants**

A purposeful selection was used to recruit the targeted population. This selection helped the researcher connect both the problem with the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Participants consisted of elementary principals of Title I schools in central California whose schools performed above the state average for two consecutive years on the English language arts’ (ELA) portion of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. The state average for ELA in 2016-17 was 48.5% and 49.9% in 2017-18 (California Department of Education, n.d.). These two years are significant to the study as they registered the most recent data at the time of the study. These schools had over 50% of their students come from low-income households, based on their socio-economic status (education, income, and occupation) and their participation in the FRPL. The population was large; therefore, the focus was narrowed down to schools in central California. Out of the 434 Title I schools identified, 24 met the criteria for this study. The participant selection was determined to include a sample of schools in which principals have been continuously present since their presence meant that the principal’s instructional behaviors and practices had sufficient time to make an impact. Only Title I principals in central California who were principals for at least three years and specifically, in the school years of 2016-17 and 2017-18, were invited to participate. Thirteen out of 24 targeted participants expressed their willingness to participate in the study.

Participant school information differed in size, location, percentage of students receiving FRPL, and principal tenure at the same school. All 13 principals were asked five demographic questions related to the following: 1) years as an administrator, 2) gender, 3) ethnicity, 4) years at current school, and 5) years working in Title I schools. The number of years participants had served as an administrator ranged from 7 to 31 years, averaging 15 years. There were eight female principals: five white, two Hmong, and one Latina. There were five male principals: four white, and one Latino. The number of years in their current schools ranged from 3 to 21 years, averaging 8 years. The number of years working in Title I schools ranged from 7 to 28 years, averaging 18 years. The number of years working at the same school as principal ranged from 3 to 21 years, averaging 9 years.

## Data Collection

Data was obtained through face-to-face interviews and/or phone calls based on a protocol with semi-structured questions and audio-recorded answers. Another data source obtained was a collection of an artifact(s) from principals on how they monitored student achievement in their schools. This source served as an instructional leadership tool to monitor student achievement after classroom visits or teacher discussions. The main instrument of data collection was a protocol consisting of open-ended questions found in Appendix A. All the participants were asked the same predetermined questions. In each of the interviews, probing and follow up questions were introduced to gain more in-depth information.

After all the interviews had been conducted, data analysis commenced (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A five-step model of analysis was used where participant responses were: compiled, disassembled, reassembled, interpreted, and concluded (Yin, 2010). A transcription of the recorded responses was made whereas reflection occurred on the way responses were related to the purpose of the study and the insights they provided (Yin, 2010). Furthermore, data was disassembled by breaking the interview responses into small fragments (Yin, 2010). In other words, at the disassembling stage, each interview response was broken into question-answer sets. Next, the fragments were examined for comparisons and then reassembled participant answers by categorizing them (Yin, 2010). Finally, interpreted narratives were summarized, and conclusions were determined to obtain a broader knowledge about the study. The data analysis process was cyclical to move from one stage to another to make sure that the findings made were relevant to the purpose of the study (Yin, 2010).

A second method of coding was used to look for patterns while collecting data. In this work, *pattern coding* (Saldana, 2009) examined initial codes while identifying trends, patterns, and then labeling them for categories or themes. For this process, patterns were identified from the interviews in order to categorize them. A second cycle of coding was used to identify themes. These two steps of coding helped to examine initial codes while identifying trends, patterns, and then labeling them for categories and then themes.

## RESULTS

A purposeful selection of 13 principals were identified for individual interviews conducted with an open-ended protocol that lasted between 30 - to 40 minutes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The first wave of data collection consisted of interviews transcribed and coded. Bhattacharya (2017) proposed that one should familiarize themselves with the data and have data sources for pulling information. Files were created and organized for each principal that contained interview transcripts, notes, artifact documents and audio file of the interview.

Types of ILP and behaviors served as criteria for categorization. A unique identifying system was created according to which the reference to a participant would be made through a code consisting of a combination of letters to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of their participation. Identified categories were then developed to build narratives and then used to interpret the data. In Table 1, codes and categories were developed during the interview to build narratives and thus moved to interpreting the data. Of the responses, the principals discussed five themes during the interviews. Those themes were: 1) shared leadership, 2) high expectations, 3) data driven communication, 4) high visibility, and 5) professional growth.

In capturing the principals' instructional practices for this study, it was crucial to examine the instrument for collecting and monitoring their schools' data in connection to student achievement. Printy and Marks (2006) noted that a principal's instructional leadership was tied to monitoring student progress. In listening to each principals' purpose for each tool, and examining each one, it was determined that instructional tools fell into three categories: 1) goal setting with teachers, 2) classroom feedback, and 3) grade level collaboration. Table 2 highlights how each principal utilized their tool(s) for each of the three categories

The themes from the interviews and the categories from the instructional tools are discussed below. These practices paint a clear picture of effective instructional practices of principals in high performing Title I schools.

### Theme 1: Shared Leadership

Shared leadership has become a framework for school improvement (D'Innocenzo, et al., 2016). Instead of looking at the principal as the lone instructional leader, schools today aim to develop leadership capacity among all members in the school community. Shared leadership may be defined differently from principal to principal, such as leadership or collaboration teams and professional learning communities (PLC). Yet, several common definitions emerged when principals practiced shared leadership to improve student achievement. The most common was that principals saw their teachers working together for a common goal. School Principal M mentioned that through their PLC meetings, it helped

“build capacity and shared responsibility of our teachers.” According to all principals, these shared-decision discussions came from both principal and teachers’ involvement and participation in grade level collaboration meetings.

**Table 1**

***Codes to Themes***

Codes	Categories	Theme
Teamwork Leadership teams Sharing the work	Professional collaboration PLCs	Shared Leadership
Setting goals Monitoring goals Vision High expectations Relentlessness	Vision of the school Expectations of students Expectations of teachers	High Expectations
Monitoring data Decisions based on data Assessments results Sharing data	Data analysis Goal setting	Data Driven Communication
Monitoring classrooms Classroom walkthroughs Feedback Supporting instruction	Visibility in classroom Student learning Feedback to teachers Progress monitoring goals	High Visibility
Learning Teamwork Professional learning Internal coherence	Professional development Building capacity	Professional Growth

**Theme 2: High Expectations**

Hallinger and Murphy (1986) posit that high expectations in schools transform to high expectations among students and lead them to achieve even more. Principals had high expectations for teachers and students according to the interviews. Principals mentioned that the first activity of each year is goal setting with teachers. From the interviews, principals’ expectations came from vision casting, setting goals, monitoring data, and giving teachers feedback on these goals. School Principal F mentioned, “The first thing we (principal and teachers) do at the start of year is we set goals for ourselves and students. The expectation to improve is high, it’s necessary here.”

**Theme 3: Data Driven Communication**

Interviews revealed different data analysis and communication practices with teachers. Assessment data from formative and summative tests were shared with teachers. Glasman (1984) found that when principals shared achievement data with the teachers, they believed that it had a positive effect on student achievement. Four principals mentioned that at the start of the year, they set goals with teachers and progress monitored these goals through assessments results with them. School Principal M stated, “We use student data to gauge student learning and provide effective interventions if students are falling behind. We also use the data to develop strategies that are going to best serve the needs of the school, which can change yearly.”

**Theme 4: High Visibility**

According to their interviews, all high performing principals visited classrooms to collect instructional data and were intentional about sharing feedback to teachers. Hallinger (2005) stated that a positive school-learning climate included the principal’s high visibility in the classroom. In addition, that high visibility was exercised through “frequent visits to classrooms, having recurring contact with students and teachers” (Waters et al., 2003, p. 10). Leaders maintained high visibility in classrooms and initiated discussions on instructional issues. Two principals mentioned that when visiting classrooms, they provided feedback to teachers based on school goals. School Principal A stated, “I do walkthroughs, gather the data, look at the data and then I talk to teachers about the data.”

**Table 2**

*Themes/Tools to Literature Findings*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Literature</b>	<b>New Findings</b>
Shared Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● D’Innocenzo et al., (2016)</li> <li>● Raelin (2016)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Trust (teachers and principal)</li> <li>● Commitment to goals</li> </ul>
High Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Masumoto &amp; Brown-Welty (2009)</li> <li>● Tilley et al., (2012)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relentless attitude (meeting goals)</li> <li>● Growth mindset (a belief in students)</li> <li>● Resources for struggling students</li> </ul>
Data Driven Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hallinger (2015)</li> <li>● Heck et al., (1990)</li> <li>● Murphy (1983)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Monitoring tools</li> <li>● Frequent communication of grade level and school goals to teachers</li> </ul>
High Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hallinger (2005)</li> <li>● Heck (1992)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Feedback to teachers (tied to goals)</li> </ul>
Professional Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hallinger (2005)</li> <li>● Hallinger &amp; Murphy (1986)</li> <li>● Yoon et al., (2007)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A focus on areas of improvement and teacher needs (instruction)</li> </ul>
Monitoring Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hallinger (2015)</li> <li>● Lunenburg (2010)</li> <li>● Printy &amp; Marks (2006)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Goals with teachers (beginning of the year)</li> <li>● Classroom walkthroughs (feedback based on goals)</li> <li>● Grade level collaboration (monitoring of goals while analyzing data)</li> </ul>

**Theme 5: Professional Growth**

Key ILP that focus on professional development opportunities aligned to school goals and offered by the principal to teachers are linked to student achievement (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Lyman & Villani, 2004; Yoon et al., 2007). Interviews suggested that principals helped their teachers build their instructional capacity by facilitating and or offering staff development opportunities. For example, one principal mentioned their professional development opportunities for teachers were differentiated based on teacher need. Most principals felt professional learning brought forth improved teaching and learning practices and therefore provided the resources for staff development.

**Collection of Monitoring Tools**

Leithwood (2010) and McGee (2004) discussed the monitoring of school data in the form of analyzing assessments results with teachers in order to help close the achievement gap. Both researchers found that the solution was to improve instruction through constant progress monitoring of the school goals. All 13 principals shared their instructional tools for improving student achievement. There were differences in how tools were used in the collection of instructional data. Such as, data was collected at the start of the year with teachers, during the year through principal and/or teacher

classroom visitations, and weekly discussions with principals and teachers. Tools were categorized into three different areas based on their usage and purpose: 1) goal setting with teachers, 2) classroom walkthroughs, and 3) grade level.

## **DISCUSSION**

This case study examines ILP and behaviors of principals in connection to high performing Title I schools. In addition, this study provides insights to school reform and instructional practices being used, which can lead to student academic gains. Furthermore, data analysis explored possible links between high performing Title I schools and principals' ILP. The literature on instructional leadership supports the themes and tools that were identified in this study.

Data collected included the interview protocol, artifacts of principals' monitoring tools, school demographics, and principals' work experiences related to this study. The 13 principal interviews resulted in 20 first-level codes that were placed into 13 categories that later produced five themes: 1) shared leadership, 2) high expectations, 3) data driven communication, 4) high visibility, and 5) professional growth. Also, the principals' instructional tools were categorized into three major areas based on their usage: 1) goal setting with teachers, 2) classroom walkthroughs, and 3) grade level collaboration. These practices paint a clear picture of instructional practices of principals in high performing Title I schools.

### **Central RQ: What instructional practices do principals of high achieving Title I schools implement to support student academic achievement?**

The experiences of principals at these schools are key indicators of effective ILP and express answers to the research question. Principals' ILP in leading their schools have produced high academic achievement results that surpassed the state average. Several key codes were applicable to this question: a) collaboration, b) setting goals, c) vision, d) monitoring data, and e) feedback to teachers. These codes are applicable to the following themes that were supported by principals' responses: a) shared leadership, b) high expectations, c) data driven communication, and d) high visibility.

These findings relate to the literature of principals working in Title I schools and their efforts to improve student performance. Tilley et al., (2012) uncovered several components of ILP when researching Title I schools: 1) the principal's high expectations of students and staff, 2) collaboration between teaching staff which took form of weekly grade level meetings at which teachers discussed upcoming lessons and units, 3) the principal's high knowledge of curriculum and effective instructional practices, and 4) the accountability of teachers for implementing the principal's ideas. Furthermore, Lambert (2002) mentioned that when teachers and principals analyzed data, it helped them to find solutions to why students were not having success. These practices such as skillful participation, collaboration, student achievement, and posing questions call for shared leadership decisions to be made by both the principal and teachers (Pearce et al., 2009; Printy & Marks, 2006; Raelin, 2016).

### **RQ 1A: To what do principals of high achieving Title I schools attribute their success?**

Several key codes were applicable to this question: a) setting goals, b) monitoring goals, c) expectations for staff and students, d) vision, and e) relentlessness. These codes are applicable to the following theme of high expectations that were supported by principals' responses.

These findings relate to the literature of principals' instructional leadership centered on a vision for the school and having high expectations for meeting the schools' goals. Leadership requires vision. According to Edmonds (1979), vision was about setting goals and communicating them to teachers. He added that principals are instrumental in "setting the tone of the school" (p. 16). In addition, the impact of having high expectations for student learning plays a role in instructional leadership. Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009) found that high expectations were an important reason in the academic success of students in the surveyed schools. Both vision and high expectations were two practices found in the interviews as related to answering the research question.

### **RQ 1B: How do collaborative discussions between teachers and administrators on instruction contribute to student achievement?**

Key codes applicable to this question were: a) PLCs, b) collaboration, c) leadership teams, d) data analysis, and e) sharing the data. These codes are applicable to themes around shared leadership and data driven communication and helped answer the research question.

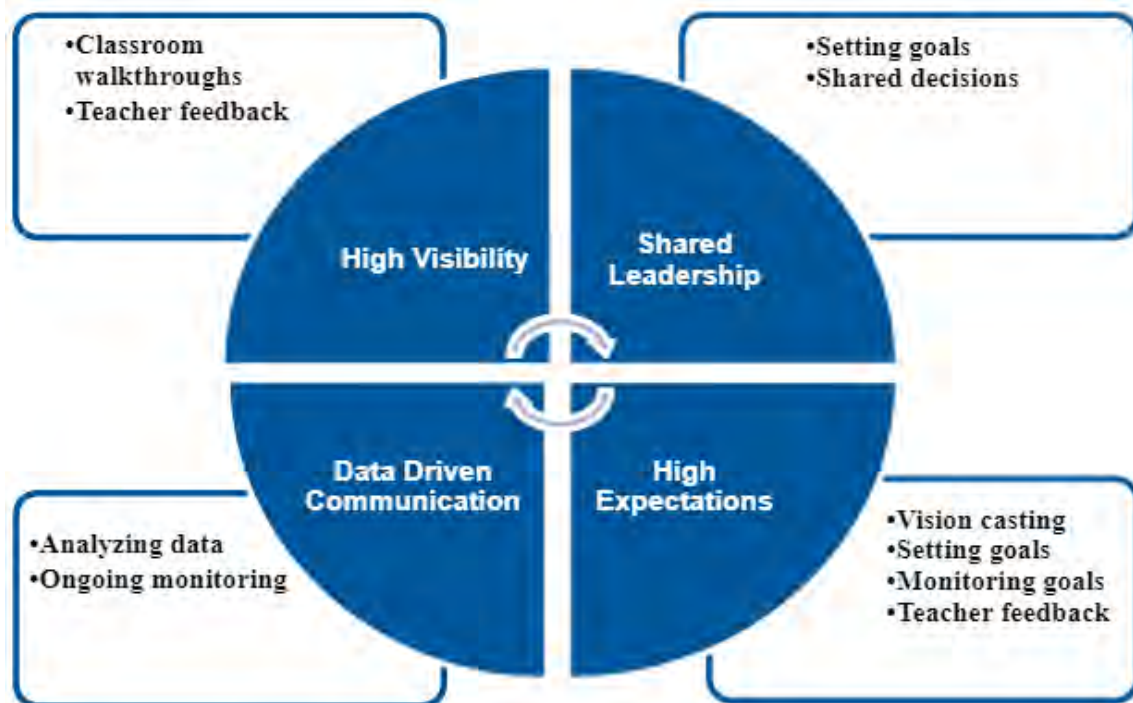
These findings relate to the literature of principals' instructional leadership specifically through a shared leadership lens. Printy and Marks (2006) noted that the conditions for teacher interaction are facilitated and supported by the principal. Additionally, when principals interacted with teachers on professional development, it improved teaching and learning practices (Printy & Marks, 2006).

### New Findings

Several key findings and emerging concepts are reflected in Table 3 that add to the learning on ILP. Under Theme 1: shared leadership, trust between principals and teachers played a key role in the commitment to shared goals, according to participants. In addition, Theme 2: high expectations, principals talked about their schools' efforts in meeting school goals and having a growth mindset about their students' potential. The belief in students' growth and the desire for student success were attributes of having high expectations at these schools, alongside their school goals. Additionally, in alignment to Theme 3: data driven communication, principals utilized different instruments (tools) to monitor school data and communicated grade level goals and school goals to teachers frequently. Also, under Theme 4: high visibility, while visiting classrooms, principals provided feedback to teachers in relation to school goals and they also communicated findings from classroom visits to all staff members. Finally, a new concept emerged in Theme 5: professional growth. Principals provided professional development opportunities for teachers, solely on improving instruction that were related to school goals. These concepts highlighted by principals added to the findings in the development of themes and tools for this study.

Skilled principals are invaluable to schools. The results of this study provide a four-pronged approach to instructional leadership. Figure 1 highlights behaviors and practices related to instructional leadership. The impact of this study provides a model for ILP of principals that may lead to improved student achievement. Implications and recommendations will be outlined next.

**Figure 1**  
*The Four-Pronged Approach to Instructional Leadership Practices*



This study has implications for school principals who want to improve student achievement, especially in schools with a high percentage of students living in poverty. The findings of the ILP of principals developed in this research point to goal setting with teachers and the monitoring of student progress. Effective principals consistently communicate to teachers that academic gains are essential at their schools (Smith & Andrews, 1989). Therefore, the implications to districts about principals utilizing data for setting student performance goals and monitoring student progress leads to high



expectations of teachers and students in schools. In addition, professional learning is an essential component to improving student achievement (Purkey & Smith, 1983). The support from district offices in building principals' capacity around setting student performance goals and monitoring student progress will need to center on the development of these practices through professional development opportunities. Superintendents communicating with principals about their ILP that affect student achievement is similar to how principals interact with teachers about their progress. Lastly, it is essential that principals utilize instructional tool(s) to monitor and record school performance data. The emergence of an instructional monitoring tool suggests that principals of Title I schools possess certain instructional behaviors and practices that address the need for collecting and monitoring student data.

Several limitations are noted in this study. Like many qualitative studies, the number of participating principals were small, although 13 of the 24 principals were interviewed, it registered 54% of the population studied. According to Marshall et al. (2013), qualitative studies of the studied population generally contain 14 to 30 interviews. Yet, the authors specified that an appropriate sampling size for a study is one that answers the research question(s). Finally, the study explored the ILP of principals in high achieving Title I schools and their impact on student achievement. Studying teachers' experiences in relationship to their principals' instructional practices may have supported the research even more. Having teachers identify the instructional practices of principals they attribute to increasing student achievement would have added to the accuracy of this research. Overall, these limitations encountered a small sample size and factors related to the data collection and analysis.

## CONCLUSION

Principals' implementation of ILP were examined to determine if there were factors to improving student achievement at their schools. The results strongly suggest that these practices of varying degrees played an important role in how their schools were identified as high achieving Title I schools. Based on the data, it is evident that the principals in this study believed that the practices they put in place were reasons as to why they achieved continued success.

## REFERENCES

- Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide*. Routledge.
- Borman, G. D., & D'Agostino, J. V. (1996). Title I and student achievement: A meta-analysis of federal evaluation results. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 18*(4), 309-326.
- California Department of Education (n.d.). *Timeline of California Standards-Based Reform*. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/re/hd/yr96-10tl.asp>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- D'Innocenzo, L., Mathieu, J. E., & Kukenberger, M. R. (2016). A meta-analysis of different forms of shared leadership–team performance relations. *Journal of Management, 42*(7), 1964-1991.
- Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational leadership, 37*(1), 15-24.
- Flores, A. (2007). Examining disparities in mathematics education: Achievement gap or opportunity gap? *The High School Journal, 91*(1), 29-42.
- Glasman, N. S. (1984). Student achievement and the school principal. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 6*(3), 283-296.
- Hallinger, P. (2005). Instructional leadership and the school principal: A passing fancy that refuses to fade away. *Leadership and policy in schools, 4*(3), 221-239.
- Hallinger, P. (2015). The evolution of instructional leadership. In *Assessing instructional leadership with the principal instructional management rating scale* (pp. 1-23). Springer, Cham.
- Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. F. (1986). The social context of effective schools. *American journal of education, 94*(3), 328-355.
- Heck, R. (1992). Principals' instructional leadership and school performance: Implications for policy development. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 14*(1), 21-34.
- Heck, R. H., Larsen, T. J., & Marcoulides, G. A. (1990). Instructional leadership and school achievement: Validation of a causal model. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 26*(2), 94-125.
- Lambert, L. (2002). A framework for shared leadership. *Educational Leadership, 59*(8), 37-40.
- Leithwood, K. (2010). Characteristics of school districts that are exceptionally effective in closing the achievement gap. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 9*(3), 245-291.

- Lippman, L., Burns, S., & McArthur, E. (1996). *Urban schools: The challenge of location and poverty*. (NCES Publication No. 96-864). Government Printing Office.
- Lunenburg, F. C. (2010). The principal and the school: What do principals do? In *National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal*, 27(4): 1-5.
- Lyman, L. L., & Villani, C. J. (2004). *Best leadership practices for high-poverty schools*. The Scarecrow Press.
- Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational administration quarterly*, 39(3), 370-397.
- Marshall, B., P. Cardon, A. Poddar and R. Fontenot (2013). 'Does sample size matter in qualitative research: a review of qualitative interviews in IS research', *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 54, pp. 11-22.
- Masumoto, M., & Brown-Welty, S. (2009). Case study of leadership practices and school-community interrelationships in high-performing, high-poverty, rural California high schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 24(1), 1-18.
- McGee, G. W. (2004). Closing the achievement gap: Lessons from Illinois' golden spike high-poverty high-performing schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 9(2), 97-125.k,
- Murphy, J. (1983). Instructional leadership: A conceptual framework. *Planning and Changing*, 14(3), 137-49.
- Nettles, S. M., & Herrington, C. (2007). Revisiting the importance of the direct effects of school leadership on student achievement: The implications for school improvement policy. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 82(4), 724-736.
- Pearce, C. L., Manz, C. C., & Sims, H. P. (2009). Where do we go from here? Is shared leadership the key to team success? *Organizational Dynamics*, 38(3), 234-238.
- Percy, W. H., Kostere, K., & Kostere, S. (2015). Generic qualitative research in psychology. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 76-85.
- Printy, S. M., & Marks, H. M. (2006). Shared leadership for teacher and student learning. *Theory into Practice*, 45(2), 125-132.
- Purkey, S. C., & Smith, M. S. (1983). Effective schools: A review. *The Elementary School Journal*, 83(4), 427-452.
- Quinn, D. M. (2002). The impact of principal leadership behaviors on instructional practice and student engagement. *Journal of educational administration*, 40(5), 447-467.
- Raelin, J. A. (2016). Imagine there are no leaders: Reframing leadership as a collaborative agency. *Leadership*, 12(2), 131-158.
- Reyes, P., Scribner, J. D., & Scribner, A. P. (Eds.). (1999). *Lessons from high-performing Hispanic schools: Creating learning communities*. Teachers College Press.
- Robinson, V. M., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational administration quarterly*, 44(5), 635-674.
- Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Sandelowski M. (1993). Rigor or rigor mortis: The problem of rigor in qualitative research revisited. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 16(2), 1-8.
- Smith, W. F., & Andrews, R. L. (1989). *Instructional leadership: How principals make a Difference*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Soehner, D., & Ryan, T. (2011). The interdependence of principal school leadership and student achievement. *Scholar-Practitioner Quarterly*, 5(3), 274-288.
- Tilley, T. B., Smith, S. J., & Claxton, R. L. (2012). Success despite socioeconomics: A case study of a high-achieving, high-poverty school. *Journal of School Public Relations*, 33(4), 292-317.
- Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Wenglinsky, H. (2004). Closing the racial achievement gap: The role of reforming instructional practices. *education policy analysis archives*, 12, 64.
- Yin, R. K. (2010). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. The Guilford Press.
- Yoon, K. S., Duncan, T., Lee, S. W. Y., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K. L. (2007). Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement. (Issues & Answers. REL 2007-No. 033). US Department of Education, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest.

**APPENDIX A**

***Semi-Structured Interview Questions***

---

**Question**

---

1. What practices (i.e., student data analysis, alignment of standards to resources and daily lessons, goal setting with teachers and/or students) do you and your staff engage in that can be attributed to your school's academic improvement and being identified for this study as a high achieving Title I school?
  2. How do you monitor student progress and provide feedback to teachers on meeting the schools' achievement goals?
  3. How do you use assessment data to gauge student learning and what decisions are made to provide targeted assistance for students performing below grade level?
  4. What are some practices that you use to supervise and evaluate instruction (i.e., Walk throughs, teacher evaluation process, Instructional Rounds)?
  5. How do you promote and use professional development?
  6. What strategies (high expectations for all students, goal setting teachers/students, and strong academic policies) do you implement to establish a culture of success?
  7. How do collaborative discussions between teachers on instruction contribute to student achievement?
  8. What artifact(s) do you use to monitor student achievement at your school? Can I get a copy of the tool?
- 

**JESSE SANCHEZ**, EdD, is a District Administrator for Dinuba Unified School District. His major research interests lie in instructional leadership, mentoring and coaching, and continuous improvement in K-12 Title I public school settings. Email: [Jesse.Sanchez@dinuba.k12.ca.us](mailto:Jesse.Sanchez@dinuba.k12.ca.us)

**JENNIFER MORADIAN WATSON**, EdD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Fresno State. Her major research interests are teacher retention, principal preparation, and the equitable implementation of the teaching and learning process. Email: [jmoradianwatson@mail.fresnostate.edu](mailto:jmoradianwatson@mail.fresnostate.edu)

*Manuscript submitted: June 25, 2021*

*Manuscript revised: September 30, 2021*

*Accepted for publication: October 6, 2021*