AN ASSESSMENT OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICE IN HIGH SCHOOLS:

IMPROVING GRADUATION RATES

by

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation co-advisors, Dr. Patricia Maslin-Ostrowski and Dr. Ira Bogotch, Department of Educational Leadership, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
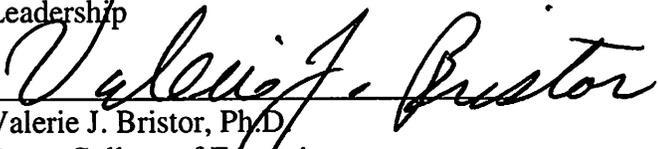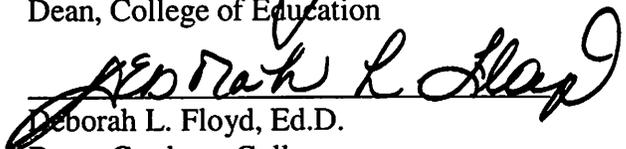
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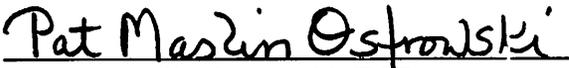
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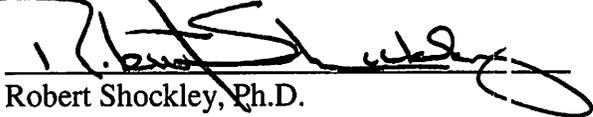
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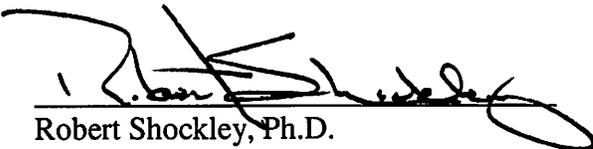
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ABSTRACT

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This research was based on a multi-case study design focused on the leadership practice of high school principals and assistant principals and their roles in improving graduation rates. The study sought to answer one overarching research questions: In schools that demonstrate an increase in graduation rates what leadership practices are evidenced in principals and assistant principals and teacher leaders. One sub-question addressed the tools and interventions that the leadership team practices in relation to improving graduation rates and the second sub-question addressed the accountability of changing standards with respect to graduation rates. A third sub-question sought to answer how interactions of principals and assistant principals relevant to improvement in student performance are interpreted by faculty and staff. The purposeful sample from each of the three high schools consisted of one principal, four assistant principals and one teacher leader. Data collection methods included interviews, observations and

qualitative document review of high school graduation rates.

The study reveals six major findings: (a) school leaders establish a clear vision, mission or goal to increase graduation rates, (b) identification, management and evaluation of academic enrichment programs are necessary interventions for student success, (c) school leaders build a culture of student learning and achievement through a system of processes, programs and support initiatives, (d) the leadership team is knowledgeable, strongly motivated and devoted to their role as leaders in serving all students, (e) school leaders use data as guiding variables in making decisions regarding at-risk student achievement and success, and (f) school leaders develop and foster positive relationships with students and teachers.

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my family, particularly to my energetic, jovial and loving husband Regulo, who supported me throughout every dimension of this life project. To my children Gregory, Jessica and Sofia who see the power of education in their lives, and who I hope will be inspired to continue with their academic journeys. I would also like to dedicate this work to my late parents, who lived their lives by believing and professing that one of the great pillars of this nation lies in the opportunities offered by the education system. Go seek them.

AN ASSESSMENT OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICE IN HIGH SCHOOLS:
IMPROVING GRADUATION RATES

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In high schools, principals and assistant principals are an important and integral part of the school community, not only as members of the leadership team, but as educators who have a special interest in all students to be successful academically. High school leaders need to demonstrate that there is an improvement in graduation best practices in the form of increasing graduation rates from year to year (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2010). Leaders need to seek answers to how leadership practice improves student learning and which leadership practices account for that improvement (Leithwood, 2011).

The recent passage of legislation specifies that the state of Florida must follow initiatives that improve graduation standards. Senate Bill 1908 (SB 1908), passed by the 2008 Florida Legislature, is a comprehensive education reform initiative which promotes graduating better prepared students.

Background of Problem

In recent years, a great deal of importance has been placed on the administration of high schools to raise graduation rates and improve graduation best practices (Heckman & La Fontaine, 2010; Mishel & Roy, 2006). This emphasis of improving the academic performance of students at the high school level has been shifted to the administration as an accountability measure (FLDOE, 2010). A great deal of this accountability falls on the shoulders of the leadership team, because high school graduation is one academic requirement that constitutes part of the annual school grade granted by the state.

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With the passage of state legislation specifically SB1908 in Florida, high schools have greater accountability in ensuring that their graduation practices meet state expectations. One of the goals of the bill delineates that high school graduation rates must increase for all students including students at risk. At risk students, defined as students who scored at a deficient Level 1 or Level 2 on the eighth grade FCAT assessment, must demonstrate improvement and gains in school performance and in meeting graduation requirements. The at risk cohort is usually exemplified by students who underperform on state and local assessments, who have poor grades and who demonstrate a pattern of non-attendance, while gains and improvement in meeting graduation requirements must be demonstrated.

SB 1908 also specifies that practices which focus on student performance specifically in meeting graduation requirements, need to be improved from year to year. Examples of these practices include: increased participation and improved performance in advanced courses, post-secondary readiness of students and an improvement in the performance of students on state End of Course (EOC) assessments.

Maintaining an increase in graduation rates from year to year for all students while adapting and applying different graduation rates to different student cohorts, is a logistically difficult and inaccurate process for all high schools. From 1998-2012, three different graduation rates were used in the state of Florida, where each rate defined graduates differently depending on the student's graduating year. This legislation has prompted high school leaders to become more knowledgeable in improving graduation practices for regular and at risk students and in becoming more accountable for policy

changes regarding graduation rates. Each of the graduation rates will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Heckman and La Fontaine (2010) and Mishel and Roy (2006), address federal and state graduation rates and the identification of high school graduates in their extensive research. However, this research does not encompass the themes of principals and assistant principals and their leadership practice in improving graduation rates. Current literature on graduation rates is deficient in understanding the problem. (Alliance for Excellent Education 2012; MacIver & Grozinsky, 2011; Kuntz, Gildersleeve, & Pasque, 2011; FLDOE, 2011a).

As a result, high school leaders are prompted to become more knowledgeable in improving graduation practices by becoming more actively involved in graduating students. There is greater accountability for principals and assistant principals in improving performance for all students in high schools. Principals and assistant principals are now held accountable for the monitoring of information relevant to student equity issues, student achievement data, trends in high school graduation rates, reports of school failure, assessment profiles, community and family involvement all of which impact student performance and the subsequent school grade (FLDOE, 2012).

Besides the positive and explicit outcomes that graduates may have on the economy for example, school communities, school leaders and students are generally fulfilled when students meet this important benchmark. It is the intent of this cross case study to gain greater understanding and insight to inform the leadership literature by focusing on principals and assistant principals and noting their roles as leaders in understanding how to improve graduation rates.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand the leadership practice of principals and assistant principals in three high schools, by determining what their role is with respect to improving high school graduation rates. Specifically, schools that sustained an increase in different or changing graduation rates will be analyzed to gain a better understanding of what leadership practices may have any relevance in improving graduation rates. At this stage in the research, leadership practice will be generally defined or framed as a) a product of the joint interactions of school leaders, (principals and assistant principals) which may be connected or related to increasing graduation rates and, b) aspects of their *situation* such as tools and routines (Spillane, 2006, p.10) which may be connected or related to increasing graduation rates and c) leader actions. Interactions would include forms of communication, collaborative behaviors among principals and assistant principals, collaboration among the faculty and administration, and collective interactions among faculty and students. In addition, interactions can include interpersonal skills that ignite motivation, provide empowerment, and maintain trust which leads to commitment (Spillane, 2006).

Tools considered would include the Virtual Counselor, BASIS, Data Warehouse and the Total Education Research Management System (TERMS) databases, FLDOE graduation rates data, and student academic, progression and graduation plans. Actions may be considered individual decisions or activities of principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders within the school setting. Actions are outcome-based and generally should include an evaluative component to determine its effectiveness. Actions may also evolve into tools or routines.

Principal and assistant principal routines would include day to day interventions, and consultations with teachers and students. Graduation practices will generally be defined as actions, interactions, tools and routines which support best practices for improving high school graduation rates for the regular and the at risk student cohort.

Research Questions

The central focus of this study is based on the question:

> In schools that demonstrate an increase in graduations rates, what types of leadership practices are evidenced in principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders?

Sub-questions of the study include:

1. What are the actions, interactions, tools and routines that principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders use as part of their leadership practice when seeking to improve high school graduation rates?
2. How do high school principals and assistant principals manage the accountability of changing standards in graduation rates and graduation requirements?
3. What interactions of principals and assistant principals are observed relevant to improving high school graduation rates?

Significance of Study

This proposed study is significant because it will add to the literature on the leadership practice of principals and assistant principals at the secondary level and assess their role if any in improving graduation rates. From a leadership perspective, the study will explore relationships and interactions in the practice of principals and assistant principals which may provide knowledge on how such relationships, actions and

interactions may contribute to improving graduation rates. By exploring relationships and interactions of principals and assistant principals, and the "how" of leadership practice, greater knowledge may be gained in the area of best practices when graduating students at the high school level. In addition, it may be found that as members of a leadership team, decision-making by principals and assistant principals on issues related to student success and fulfillment of academic goals, such as in graduation rates, could be strengthened.

Conceptual Framework

Over time many definitions of leadership have been developed. Views and variables of leadership have focused on group processes, leader personality and its effects, the power of influence and persuasion, and as a social influence of relationships (Bass, 1990, p.11). Bass (1990) defines leadership in general as:

> The interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members. Leaders are agents of change- persons whose acts affect other people more than other people's acts affect them. Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group. (Pp.19-20)

The conceptual framework of the study builds on this general definition but adds a specific purpose: that is, increasing graduation rates. Therefore, as this study examines four extensively researched leadership theories, it will do so purposefully. That is, specific aspects of each one of the leadership theories will be reviewed to identify which leadership principles, are evidenced in the leadership practice of principals and assistant

principals with respect to increasing graduation rates. The study will review

instructional, transformational, distributed, and learning leadership theories by exploring

the principles and tenets of each one to determine which leadership practices may be

related or connected to increasing graduation rates.

It is anticipated that from both the review of the literature of the above-mentioned

leadership theories and the empirical data from this study, that an integrated leadership

model will emerge that will highlight leadership actions and interactions of principals,

assistant principals, and teacher leaders. This model may help to explain how high school

leaders practice leadership with respect to increasing graduation rates from year to year.

A Proposed Integrated Leadership Model

In developing a conceptual framework, the emphasis will be on delineating which

principles of the four leadership models may be considered effective for leadership

practice with respect to improving student graduation rates. A proposed integrated

leadership model is considered by this researcher to be one that shares, includes, or

supports actions, interactions, tools or routines that are included within each one of the

four leadership theories previously mentioned.

Integrated is defined as a cohesive, concordant, connected, harmonious,

interrelated and unified concept, which supports many of the ideals, presented through

the instructional, transformational, distributed and learning leadership models. Important

characteristics for this study from each of the four leadership theories will be discussed.

Figure 1 presents A Proposed Integrated Leadership Model which includes

leadership practices which may be relevant, when referring to increasing graduation rates.

The model is depicted by a sequence of six hexagonal figures connected to each other

through arrows demonstrating possible linkages to each and among each of the leadership theories to the proposed integrated leadership model. Each of the theories has characteristics which may yield a greater understanding of leadership practice with respect to increasing graduation rates and through the convergence of these theories and their principles an integrated model may emerge. The central hexagon of the figure is depicted by select characteristics such as actions, interactions, tools and routines which may be integral in deciding which leadership practices may be important when considering increasing graduation rates.

Moving clockwise, the first hexagon, Instructional Leadership, stresses the importance of a directive leader who is actively involved in the monitoring of the school's curriculum in developing and promoting instructional practices for improved student performance (Hallinger, 2005). An additional and important characteristic of the instructional leadership model is the importance of teacher-principal relationships within a school to foster and promote student achievement (Barth, 2001).

The second hexagon, Distributed Leadership explains the idea of collective force within a school, moving the attention away from the principal to a group of leaders. While the principal still plays a pivotal leadership role in distributed leadership, the focus is that leadership emanates from different levels within a school to include, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and key staff members, such as guidance counselors (Spillane, 2006). Seminal authors in the distributed leadership literature include P. Gronn (2002), A. Harris (2008), and J.P. Spillane (2006).

The third hexagon illustrates characteristics of Transformational Leadership. Qualities of transformational leaders include collaboration, motivation, stimulation and

charismatic behavior or disposition. Developing followers is deemed important within a school through a deep rooted commitment to improved student performance. Bass (1990), Bass and Avolio (1993), and Bennis and Nanus (1985) are considered seminal authors in transformational leadership.

The fourth hexagon, Learning Leadership focuses on principles which make learning a priority among all school members. The theory balances the need for a setting or culture which ignites and promotes learning with leadership that maintains the focus of learning as a sole priority. Macbeath refers to learning leadership as an emotional activity which should involve all members of the school community (Macbeath & Cheng, 2008).

The fifth hexagon highlights the hypothesis that through the integration of qualities and characteristics of each of the leadership theories, there may be a greater understanding of how graduation rates may improve in high schools. This idea then leads to the sixth and central hexagon which is at the core of the integrated leadership model and is also depicted by arrows from each of the leadership theories. It is believed that by identifying the major themes of leadership practice it may be possible for principals and assistant principals to make decisions which may enhance student achievement in the form of improved high school graduation rates.

In my experience I have worked shoulder to shoulder with school leaders who understand their role, position and vocation. First, these leaders are seen and respected as school leaders by colleagues and students. Second, they have a passion for what they do which is demonstrated in everyday actions and is genuinely interpreted as such by teachers, staff and students. Third, a dual priority of these leaders is the learning of their

students and the means by which this is accomplished by teachers. These leaders

effectively and accurately communicate their goals, a vision, or a mission statement and

the school community feels inspired to follow through. Fourth, when insurmountable

obstacles surface in daily leadership routines, the leader is the first to assume

responsibility for a solution by seeking a collaborative approach with the leadership team.

A leader, who fits within an Integrated Leadership model, pursues and analyzes

data methodically and regularly in order to establish patterns of student achievement and

for further data research and interpretation. Lastly, a leader believes relationships with

teachers, staff, students and the community is an essential principle in the running of the

school. I believe the Integrated Leadership Model will highlight many of these points. A

summary of the above-mentioned points is highlighted in Figure 1: An Integrated

Leadership Model: A Relationship of Four Noted Leadership Theories and Graduation

Rates.

Figure 1. An Integrated Leadership Model: A Relationship of Four Noted Leadership Theories and Graduation Rates
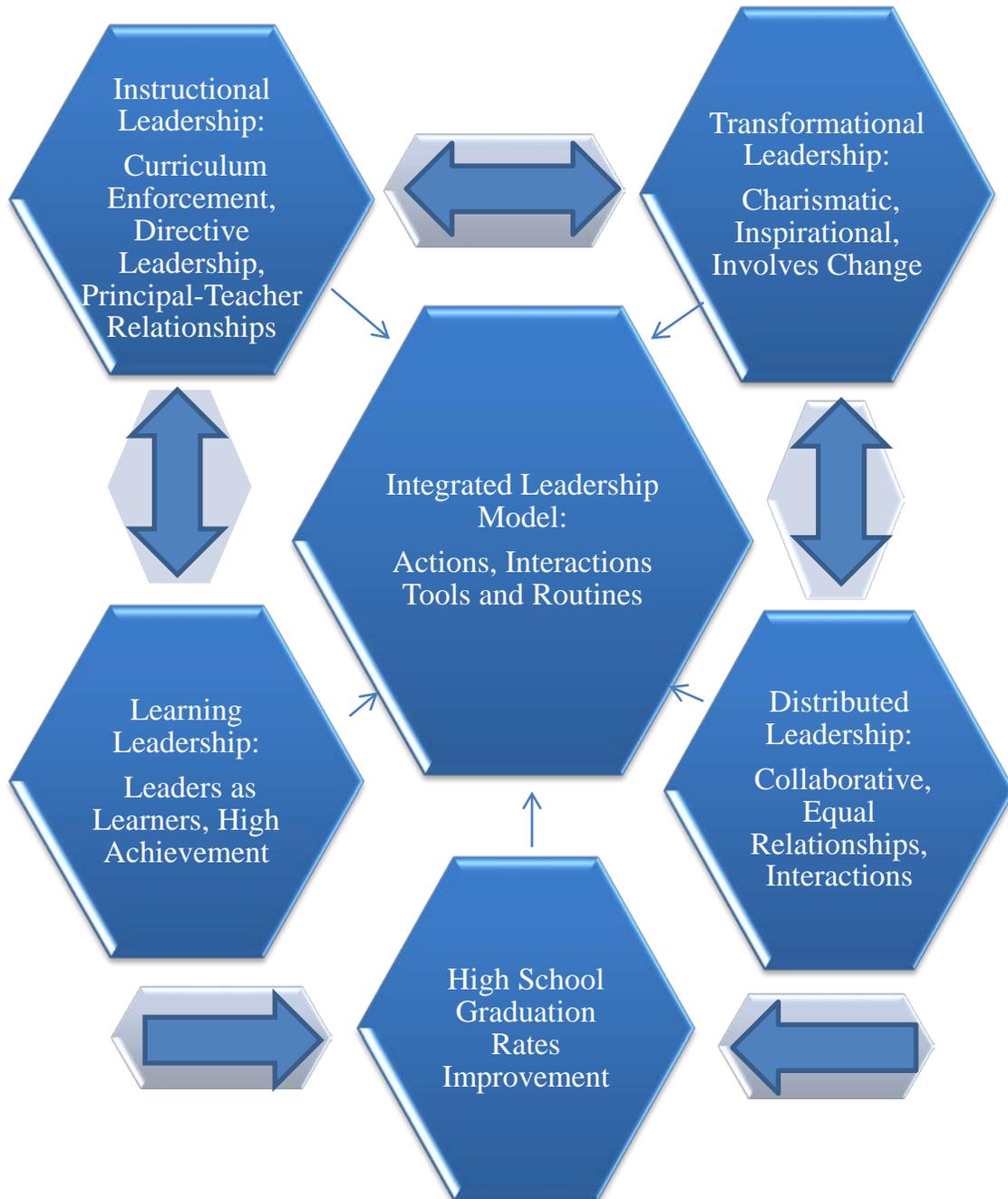
School leaders must keep abreast of the multiple processes involved in promoting student achievement. Knowledge of state policies, individual pupil progression, the number of credits per academic discipline required for receiving a diploma, additional graduation requirements, appropriate pedagogy and content in department areas, in addition to an understanding of the social factors both in and outside of the school that impact student learning and performance are essential tools and routines for school leaders in managing schools (Glanz, 2004). An overview of Florida education policy to include Senate Bill 1908, graduation promotion practices and the different graduation rates used in the state of Florida up to 2012 will be included in the literature review of the study. By exploring the changes in policy with respect to graduation rates, and graduating more and better-prepared students it is hoped that one will gain a greater understanding of the important role of the leadership of principals and assistant principals in high schools.

Role of the Researcher

This study is influenced by several variables including personal career decisions to learn and to pursue leadership opportunities at the high school level. I have always been inspired by leaders who know and understand their trade, who are able to move groups of individuals towards a goal, no matter what the philosophical and operational obstacles seemed to be and who more often than not eloquently speak of, and maintain a positive attitude about education in general. Not surprisingly, such emotions, personal beliefs and biases shaped in part the theoretical framework, design and research questions for this study. I have made a commitment to discover and understand leadership behavior and

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through this study I hope to be able to paint a verbal picture of what leadership practice looks like in three high schools.

I have served the Broward County Public School (BCPS) district for 21 years as a district level administrator, a school and district-based guidance counselor, a high school assistant principal and for the past three years as a graduation coach/ academic dean. As a member of the school's leadership team, I have engaged in practice that promotes graduation for all students. Among other duties, I have supervised core and elective departments, ninth grade academies, ESE and guidance departments, school-wide professional development, and supervised school operations including the school's master schedule. It is through these experiences that I have seen the positive forces of leadership practice and the need to further research this area as it applies to principals and assistant principals and teacher leaders.

According to Creswell (2013), a researcher must maintain openness with respect to one's own biases, values and judgment regarding the study. Ethical and professional behavior will be demonstrated at all times during the study. While maintaining an open mind and spirit, I acknowledge that bias, personal values and perspectives and positional power may be a limitation. To reduce the effect of any such inadvertent filtering of personal beliefs, advisor affirmation, and literature review will be necessary. Lastly, as I engage in this study it is expected that that these same perspectives will bring additional meaning and understanding to the topic being researched.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 1, this researcher has presented an overview of leadership as viewed through a proposed integrated leadership model, by seeking what kinds of leadership practice may play a role in improving high school graduation rates. The framework of the study, research questions, and a description of the purpose and the significance of the study were presented. A graphical interpretation of an integrated leadership model was presented in Figure 1, which highlights leadership practice that may play a role in improving student performance in the form of improved graduation rates.

In Chapter 2, the literature review includes an overview of four leadership theories, with specific attention given to characteristics and principles of leadership practice that may be relevant in improving high school graduation rates. A review of instructional, transformational, distributed and learning leadership will be discussed and leadership principles which are intricately connected to improving high school graduation rates will be covered. An overview of three graduation rates will also be included in Chapter 2. Each rate and the period of time during which they were used will be discussed to highlight its specific factors with respect to graduation. The graduation rates are: the Federal Graduation Rate, the National Governors' Association Rate and the Florida Regular Rate.

In Chapter 3 the methodology for the study is discussed. In this study, a case study design is selected because it will provide more insight and perhaps strengthen our understanding of the forms of leadership practice that may be considered effective for increasing high school graduation rates.

In Chapter 4, findings are discussed including a cross-case analysis of the three schools. Chapter 5 presents a discussion, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Delimitations-Limitations

A delimitation of the study is that it will examine leadership practices and graduation rates at the high school level only in the Broward County Public School district. Principals, assistant principals, and one teacher leader designated by the principal will be interviewed.

A limitation of the study is that it is a small sample and will be conducted in three schools in the BCPS district. Secondly, the study will use two different graduation rates to demonstrate an upward progression of graduation rates from year to year in the school sites selected. These rates include the National Governors' Association (NGA) rate, in effect from 2005-2011, and the Federal rate in effect since 2012. The study will cover a span of three years from 2009 -2012 when both graduation rates were used to determine graduates. A third limitation is that neither parents nor students will be interviewed for the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

An important goal of high schools when addressing student achievement is to assess the leadership role of administrators regarding instruction and student performance. It is also important for high school administrators to assess their role as leaders when looking at best practices to increase high school graduation rates. The argument that school leadership impacts organizational change (Fullan, 2006), and influences student learning outcomes is an important finding to note in this study.

The literature review will examine the frameworks of four extensively researched leadership theories. Specific aspects of each one of the leadership theories will be reviewed to identify which leadership elements may improve student performance, in the form of better high school graduation rates. The study will review instructional, transformational, distributed, and learning leadership models by exploring the principles and tenets of each one as they relate to improving graduation rates and performance through leadership practice. It is believed that by identifying the major themes of leadership practice, then it may be possible for principals and assistant principals to use this information to make decisions which may enhance student achievement in the form of improved high school graduation rates. Hence, research on school leaders and student achievement as viewed through the lens of educational leadership theories will be reviewed.

This review of current literature is organized into four parts. First, each one of the leadership theories will be examined to reveal its major framework. A summary of the four leadership models that will include leadership principles and practices will form Table 1.

Second, a 'working theory' will be discussed which highlights the major tenets of each one of the theories previously discussed. Through this working theory model, this researcher will propose an integrated leadership model identifying the major themes that include actions, interactions, tools and routines in leadership practice which may be related to improving graduation rates. Figure 1, A Proposed Integrated Leadership Model is included in Chapter 1.

Third, Florida Education Policy as it relates to graduation promotion practices will also be discussed. Points relevant to the mandates enacted by the state of Florida, specifically Senate Bill 1908, which specifies the criteria for graduating better prepared students is part of this discussion. Florida Education Policy is inherent within each of the four leadership theories.

Fourth, an analysis of three graduation rates from 1998 to 2012 will be included. The graduation rates that will be discussed include the National Governors' Association (NGA) rate and the more recent Federal rate. This discussion will reveal how each one of these rates determines and defines how and which students are considered high school graduates depending on their year of graduation. In addition to highlighting the various graduation rates in the state of Florida, this point will clarify how specific requirements based on the year of graduation, grants students graduate status while other students are considered non-graduates (Table 2).

<center>**Leadership Theories**</center>

Instructional Leadership

The Instructional Leadership model is important to cite in this study because it situates the school leader as an instructional leader responsible for improved student teaching and increased student learning. It positions the principal as one who is deeply involved and committed to the school's instructional program (Hallinger, 2005). In order for students to graduate from high school, instructional leaders focus on curriculum implementation which may improve student achievement. When school leaders are aware of school improvement practices such as actions, interactions, tools and routines that influence student progress, then they will be able to impact, and make better decisions regarding leadership practice as it applies to improving graduation rates.

Instructional leadership models emerged from research on schools that were deemed effective during the school reform movements in the decade of the 1980's (Hallinger, 2003). This body of research identifies strong, directive leadership that is focused on curriculum and instruction from the principal. The principal's role is to foster high teaching and learning expectations for teachers and students, supervise classroom instruction, coordinate the school's curriculum and monitor progress. The more crucial role of the principal is as head learner.

Principals in the instructional leadership model should experience, display, model and celebrate what is hoped and expected that teachers and students will accomplish (Barth, 1986). This principle is fundamental because it emphasizes the dominant role of the principal in leadership functions which include teaching and learning. Moreover, it is

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important in this study to be able to identify which functions of instructional leadership

practice contribute to improved learning and student performance.

In addition to noting the important role of the principal as an instructional leader,

Barth (2001) cites adult relationships as an important factor. He states that these

relationships have more of an impact on the quality and character of the school and on the

achievement of students, than any other factor. The relationship between teacher and

principal is a very important one. Barth (2001) summarizes his position in the following

quote:

> I have found no characteristic of a good school more pervasive than healthy
>
> teacher-principal relationships- and no characteristic of troubled school more
>
> common than troubled, embattled, or antiseptic administrator-teacher
>
> relationships. The relationship between teacher and principal seems to have an
>
> extraordinary amplifying effect. For better or for worse it models what *all*
>
> relationships in the school will be (p. 105).

A review of the literature also reveals that while research on instructional or

managerial leadership abounds, there is little specificity on what behaviors or practices

can be applied in schools to measure the effectiveness of the leadership practice

(Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Viewing this lack of specificity as an opportunity to

describe what leadership practices may lead to more effective schools, Hallinger through

his research, further defined the role of the principal by emphasizing three general

themes: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program and promoting a

positive learning climate (Hallinger & Murphy 1985). By identifying these leadership

themes, Hallinger seeks a clearer definition by linking the themes to specific job

functions. It is important to this study to identify which specific leadership job functions

effective schools use, because the description of these job functions may provide a

greater understanding of actions and interactions which principals and assistant principals

can use in improving graduation rates (Hallinger, 1992).

Marks and Printy (2006), explore instructional leadership as a model of shared

practice. Instructional leadership as defined by the researchers replaces a hierarchical

model with a model of shared instructional leadership. The authors present a theory of an

active collaborative approach of key leadership team members including the principal,

assistant principal and lead teachers on curriculum, assessment, instruction and support of

students towards improved student performance. Through a common bond among the

leadership team members and an interest in shared instructional leadership, the principal

seeks out ideas, insights and expertise for further school improvement and for

improvement of student performance. This is important because through collaboration

and sharing of important leadership functions, principals and assistant principals in

addition to teacher leaders, may understand what types of leadership practice may play a

role in determining or assessing which high school students pose a risk for not

graduating. More specifically, in Marks and Printy's (2006) shared instructional

leadership model, the principal shares responsibility in areas such as professional

development of faculty and staff, curriculum development and supervision of

instructional staff. This is significant because the principal is not viewed as the sole

leader, but rather as the one who leads other instructional leaders.

It is important to note that leadership is a complex process to understand. It just

does not involve the instructional leadership of the principal or assistant principal but the

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leadership of a "conglomerate" of specialized teachers who understand that in high

school the educational goal is to graduate students. As instructional leaders, principals

and assistant principals need to clearly communicate this goal while managing,

coordinating, and evaluating the instructional program towards improved graduation

rates.

This theme of shared instructional leadership is deemed an important literature

piece for this study, because it is felt that the idea behind both the instructional and

shared leadership practice may hold more of a variety or a "hybridization" of actions and

interactions that may prove useful and productive if used by school leaders to understand

factors which may improve high school graduation rates. By combining both the shared

and instructional models into one, principals may be afforded more flexibility in

leadership practice as they seek to positively impact student performance.

Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), introduce an interesting perspective in their

research, involving different types of leadership styles and their impact on students'

academic outcomes. Their research supports that of Marks and Printy (2006), by

favorably describing leaders that profess and practice an instructional leadership model.

They also believe that an instructional leadership style carries more weight when

addressing student outcomes than did a transformational leadership model. Both

leadership theories, instructional and transformational were selected by Robinson et al.

(2008) in their research, because they dominate empirical research on educational

leadership. If empirical research indicates that some leadership practices have a stronger

impact on student outcomes than others, then as researchers and practitioners we can

move beyond analyzing leadership, to examining and increasing the frequency and

distribution of practices that foster a more positive impact on student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). Thus, defining which elements of leadership practice have the greatest impact on improved student performance is important to note in this study.

An important piece of the literature review acknowledges that as reform movements rose in the decade of the 1990's, practitioners began to use popular terms such as teacher leadership, distributed leadership and transformational leadership to express dissatisfaction with the instructional leadership model, which some believed attributed too much power and authority to the principal. In addition, for principals who lacked the skills to be effective instructional leaders, the actual practice of instructional leadership was challenged by other researchers (Cuban, 1984; Murphy & Hallinger, 1987).

Nevertheless, over the past 25 years, both the instructional leadership model and the transformational leadership model, which will be discussed next, have been subjected to extensive empirical study and remain foremost leadership models by focusing on how educational leadership exercised by principals, assistant principals and teachers aligns with improved educational results (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership model is important to cite in this study. This model uses such key words as collaborative, development of followers, motivation, and stimulation, to describe leadership qualities which a principal must use in running a school in order to make it more effective (Bennis &Nanus, 1985). These leader characteristics are important in leadership practice, because it can move a school towards

achieving higher standards and improved learning goals which may be translated into improved student performance in the form of improved graduation rates.

More importantly, transformational leadership inserted a moral purpose into leadership and to deny graduation to high school students is not only an issue of student achievement, it is an ethical responsibility of teachers and administrators in schools. In other words, as transformational leaders we instill a sense of "purposeful morality" through our relationships with our teachers and staff. As transformational leaders we communicate clearly to motivate and inspire our teachers to look and think beyond the teaching and finding a moral purpose to what they do on a daily basis.

As school reform movements gained ground in the 1990's, researchers looked to leadership models that were less hierarchical than the instructional leadership model, and to models that favored more of a collective force of school members when making decisions that ultimately impacted student performance. One of these theories was transformational leadership.

To develop a collective force, transformational leadership seeks to involve school members through their commitment to the school cause (e.g. improved student performance), and encourages them to reach their highest potential, by not focusing on oneself, but rather by concentrating on the larger good of the entire school community (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Developing followers in transformational leadership is important. In their research, Bass and Avolio (1993) found that effective transformational leaders exhibit leadership factors such as influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. These factors are important to acknowledge in leadership research, because as we seek answers in defining

which leadership practices are significant for improving student performance, we may find that motivation, stimulation, and inspiration play and important role in improving practices that will foster and promote improved student performance.

While transformational leadership holds a respected status in the research community, the theory lacked an explicit focus on curriculum and instruction (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Fernandez, 1994). This is significant for this study because while investigating best leadership practices for improved student performance, perhaps an integrated model of leadership action to include both instructional and transformational leadership is needed to improve graduation rates.

Transformational school leadership as described in Australian educational journals, involves individual support, builds a culture of support and promotes a structure of working with and through others. It also includes delineating a school vision, and fostering high expectations for performance and intellectual stimulation.

In a study of 19 Australian government schools, principals completed questionnaires on leadership practice that confirmed a tendency for principals to use a transformational style in their schools (Gurr, 2002). In addition transformational leadership provides intellectual direction and aims at innovating within the organization, while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision -making (Conley & Goldman, 1994; Leithwood et al., 1994).

Distributed Leadership

The Distributed Leadership model represents leadership which is not limited to one individual or formally appointed leader (Spillane, 2006). A surge in the accountability practices in high schools and the need for keen coordination of curricular and operational

matters, in addition to considering distributed leadership as an alternative to the formal top-down leadership model, has inspired educational leaders to consider a distributed leadership model. Terms such as dispersed, democratic, collaborative, coordinated and co-leadership are used to describe the model (Fitzsimons, James, & Denyer, 2011).

While both distributed and shared leadership may be used interchangeably, there are important theoretical differences between both models. For purposes of this study, distributed leadership practice will be researched to support how principals distribute responsibilities among the leadership team and staff to facilitate many of the routines or processes that have to be established in a high school for improved student performance (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

There are a number of studies dating from the decade of the 1940's which supports a strong theoretical framework for distributed leadership. Benne and Sheats (1948), in their research on leadership, suggest that it is not the importance of one individual but of several individuals assuming differentiated roles in order to fulfill functions. Two researchers who also observed a similar timeline in the emergence of the distributed leadership model were Ogawa and Bossert (1995). These researchers observed that the principles of distributed leadership were developed over 50 years ago in the decade of the 1950's and 1960's. Organizational theorists at that time had started to analyze the importance of leadership that impacts an entire organization versus leadership that focuses on a specific position, role, or individual.

By the mid 1990's the education literature stressed the importance of how leadership was being practiced not only by individuals in positions of authority but also by individuals outside of these formal positions (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). This

shift emphasized moving away from individual empowerment to more collective, shared and organization-wide approaches. It was deemed important to school improvement and school reform models that leadership be distributed and performed across various roles, and across various school functions throughout the organization.

The distribution of these activities extends beyond the confines of a high school and into the community. Members of local governments such as Mayors, Vice Mayors and Commissioners usually are members of the School Advisory Council (SAC) of local schools, and support and sponsor activities related to graduation. Awards ceremonies for graduates, athletic banquets and events which support and celebrate the educational goals of graduating students is espoused by local government and community agencies as well. Depending on the school and where it is located, several organizations including the Boys and Girls Club, the local Y, and mentoring groups, support and sponsor events for the graduates to be. It is through this sharing of events and activities that community agencies support up and coming graduates.

A distributed leadership model shifts the spotlight from the school principal to a group of leaders and their work settings which in turn gives form to leadership practice. According to Spillane (2006), the practice of distributed leadership is a product of the mutual interactions of school leaders (principals and assistant principals) and variables within their specific work situation such as tools and routines (p.128). At the core of the distributed leadership model is the idea that leadership results from multiple interactions at different levels in the organization. (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2008).

Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2007) have worked collaboratively through their research to define and identify the application of distributed leadership in multiple school

settings. The researchers use the term distributed leadership to signify, democratic leadership, shared leadership or, collaborative leadership. A distributed perspective depends on the willingness of multiple school members to lead and manage a school. In distributed leadership, positional power such as that of a principal or assistant principal is not as important as that of a web of leaders. A distributed perspective moves beyond the idea of a sole school leader to that of a team or assemblage of school leaders who exert influence on the school's instructional practices toward a specified goal. Distributed leadership also emphasizes the importance of the work of all individuals who have a voice in leading and managing the school. School leadership then takes shape through the interaction of leaders, followers and their situation (Spillane et al., 2007).

   Spillane et al. (2007) explain the practice of distributed leadership in simple terms. The concept of how distributed leadership is practiced and what it may look like in a school, is made clearer leading to a better understanding of the model. For this study, what Spillane refers to as "routines, tools and situations" will be important processes to consider, in the practice of distributed leadership.

      Alma Harris a notable researcher in the area of school leadership and management presents a model of distributed leadership for school improvement in the United Kingdom. Harris (2008) cites the importance of *how* roles and responsibilities that each educator assumes are carefully reviewed and defined for greater impact in a school. In an important international study, which included a mix of schools namely primary, secondary and specialist schools, findings suggest that moving leadership practice closer to the classroom practice can benefit learning (p.111). The research supports the idea that new school routines, expectations and behaviors produce a different perception of the

culture, resulting in changes to organizational performance and outcomes (p.111).

Furthermore, Harris emphasizes the importance of each educator's role within a school as

important contributors within a distributed leadership model.

Although there were studies related to distributed leadership in the social and

organizational sciences, these organizational models and their concepts had not crossed

over to the education sector thereby not making connections in the literature. It wasn't

until Gronn (2002), through the publication of *Distributed Leadership as a Unit of*

Analysis, where he discussed his view of distributed leadership. Gronn upheld the idea

that leadership practice needed to move away from the top of the organization. One

reason for considering this model for this study is that power is shifted from one

individual to several individuals. The importance of this thought is that there are other

qualified individuals within the organization, who are being given the opportunity to

exercise their knowhow in an area, or practice in an area of expertise, by being invited, or

allowed to participate in leadership teams where decisions are made regarding student

achievement and performance.

Gronn is recognized as one of the pioneers who has made significant contributions to

the distributed leadership literature. According to Gronn (2002), a distributed leadership

model can be used by school principals to manage school improvement and to support

organizational learning. School leaders must keep abreast of the multiple processes

involved in promoting school improvement. Gronn's work on distributed leadership cites

that it is widely present across organizations and takes a variety of forms. Some of these

forms may be in hierarchical settings but also may be present in groups and organizations

where relationships are more equal (Gronn, 2002).

Gronn specifies two broadly defined meanings of distributed leadership. One of the most commonly used refers to the aggregated leadership behavior of some or all members of an organization which is dispersed rather than concentrated. The second definition specifies distributed leadership as "concertive action" which emerges from groups within an organization who exert influence as a result of members acting in concert (p.28). It is a distributive perspective that values "collective interactions" among leaders and followers in a specific environment (Gronn, 2002). This is important to note in this study because the theory counts as significant those practices which are spread and shared across positions within a school or organization and which are demonstrated through the joint actions of individuals.

In high schools there is a formal structuring of processes and procedures as evidenced by formal core area and elective departments (High School Faculty Handbook, 2011-12). By dividing leadership and teaching responsibilities, it is suggested that high schools become fertile ground for practicing this model of leadership. Specifically, principals and school leaders would be best served by acknowledging research and using tools which support the practice of distributed leadership by several individuals to improve graduation rates.

Learning Leadership

Learning focused leadership is based on principles which make student learning a priority among all school members. A continuous improvement in practice and capacity building are important factors. Macbeath (2008) proposes a leadership model, whereby leadership and learning are re-assessed within the context of schools. This research which extensively covers international arenas, explores the nature of learning and the

qualities of leadership that make schools special places of learning. Macbeath's research

supports the idea that there needs to be an evident connection between the practice of

leadership and the learning of students on a global basis. There must be a formal link

between what students learn and how we lead in our schools (Macbeath, 2008, Chapter

1).

In the vision of leadership for learning are principles which support the view that

leadership, teaching and learning are integrally connected, leading is a shared and

individual enterprise, leadership is distributed, and relationships are characterized by

trust, honesty and openness (Macbeath, 2002).

Macbeath (2008) further defines his position on the strong connection between

student learning and leadership as one which involves teachers, students, managers,

governors, support staff and parents as key members with "conjoint power" to re-invent

the school as a learning and leading community. A "sense of agency" is important for

leaders because it describes the capacity for intentional action and knowledge which

allows leaders to monitor their own actions. It may be interpreted as a "human impulse"

to make a difference through each person's capacity thereby challenging the status quo

(p.328). He summarizes some of his ideas on leadership for learning in the following

quote:

> learning-led schools see themselves as communities of leaders. They are places
>
> in which student learning is inseparable from professional learning and the culture
>
> is one in which learning flows across boundaries of role and status. It gives a
>
> central role to social learning and takes cognizance of the crucial importance of
>
> the social composition of the school. (p.329)

Through this quote, Macbeath (2008) highlights several important factors which add to the social composition of a school. Within this framework, characteristics of schools such as culture, and communities of learning are referenced. It is felt that these characteristics are important in determining which aspects of leadership practice need to be present in schools with respect to improving graduation rates. It is important to pay attention to the particular characteristics of schools such as culture, relationships and learning and their connection to student performance. It is worthwhile noting that these characteristics and practices in learning leadership may help principals and assistant principals make informed decisions regarding improving graduation rates.

Connected to the learning for leadership model is the idea that redesigning leadership roles by specifying actions and functions of school leaders is necessary. Examples of actions and functions include, informing and taking leadership action with data that is directly related to learning needs and performance, ensuring that resources are aligned with learning priorities and providing for an environment which supports learning focused leadership. Currently high school principals and assistant principals must analyze and provide effective reporting of student data, to include data which is directly related to graduation and graduation trends, in addition to providing a learning conducive environment that will maximize a student's attainment of knowledge.

Extensive research in Australia on cultures of learning can be found in research by Mulford (2007). Mulford cites the important role of school leaders in creating and nurturing an environment which fosters a culture of learning. His research focuses on defining the significant connection that exists between leadership, professional community and student achievement thus stating that leaders alone are not able to

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accomplish this task on their own. It is through the product and actions of the professional community as it relates to student achievement that this link is made. Learning leadership emphasizes a continuous process of learning and successful adaptation of a school to the multiple changes and challenges faced on a daily basis. An emphasis on continuous improvement and development of the school community is deemed important.

Cheng (2008) explores effective school reform movements and dedicates special attention to movements that occurred at the start of the new millennium. Characterized by globalization, an explosion of information technology, in addition to social and economic developments world-wide, this "third wave of sustainable development and future leadership" (p.22), prompts the professional education community to deeply reflect on education reform. As younger generations of students immerse themselves in countless information technology opportunities, a call for meeting the future educational challenges of this generation is being pushed to the forefront.

Cheng (2001) introduces a paradigm shift in the way we think about leadership and learning. This researcher has written extensively on how educational reform movements have experienced waves of change and how these transitions affect the learning, teaching and schooling of students in addition to the implications it poses for school leadership. "Paradigm shifts in learning relate to changes in school leadership, when reform movements move from one wave to another" (Cheng, 2001, p.17).

Consequently, researchers, policy-makers, and stakeholders throughout the world contend for a transformation of educational frameworks into a model that would ensure that relevance of *what* and *how* students learn is necessary. Moreover, the globalization

and international variables which define the third wave, serve as the markers or benchmarks for developing models whereby the notion of "world-class education movements" are emphasized. This is important in leadership practice as the needs of the student and learning leadership communities shift with new advances in pedagogy and technology. School leaders need to be not only cognizant of the day to day advancement in school communities, but remain engrossed in leadership practices which support improved student performance.

What emanates from the above passage is that schools need to provide a rich learning environment where students through various tracks or programs, within educational and policy guidelines, pursue high school graduation successfully. Day to day learning for students is much more intricate. It not only involves learning about a multitude of different subjects that serve as a stepping stone for further education once students graduate. Learning is how a student absorbs information within a particular context and is able to apply this knowledge through comprehension and application to build on it towards higher levels of knowledge acquisition and understanding. Leadership is inherent within this process not implicitly, but rather explicitly.

Leadership Theories Summary

A brief synopsis of each of the four leadership theories follows and sets the platform for the Proposed Integrated Leadership Model discussed in Chapter 1. Table 1, provides a brief description of the leadership theories and the seminal authors associated with each theory.

Instructional leadership: strong leadership from the principal focused on the supervision and evaluation of instruction and management of curriculum. There are high

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teaching and learning expectations for teachers and students and a positive learning climate is evident.

Transformational leadership: problem finding, problem solving and collaboration with stakeholders on improving school performance are important. A transformational leader develops followers and exhibits motivational and inspirational behaviors to influence others.

Distributed leadership: the spotlight is not on the principal but rather on a group of leaders. Leadership results from multiple interactions at different levels in the organization.

Learning leadership: Leadership and a culture of learning are paramount. Leading is shared and relationships are characterized by trust and honesty.

Each one of the aforementioned theories holds the school leader accountable for improved student performance through the different interpretations and application of approaches to leadership. Moreover while each theory is distinct and separate from the next, there are common leadership variables which they share. Shared and distinct leadership characteristics will be researched to better understand leadership practice in high schools and to develop a model of integrated leadership practice with respect to improving graduation rates.

Table 1

Leadership Theories

Authors	Theories	Leadership Principles and Practice
Barth (2001,2002)	Instructional leadership	Leadership that provides a culture that creates and sustains a community of student and teacher learning. Positive principal and teacher relationships important.
Hallinger (2003, 2005)		Directive leadership within school context that is focused on curriculum and instruction from the principal.
Bass and Avolio(1987, 1993) Bennis and Nanus (1985)	Transformational leadership	Transcend self-interests for the good of the group or organization; qualities include charismatic and inspirational leadership, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.
Gronn (2002)	Distributed leadership	Manage school improvement and support organizational learning; present in groups and organizations where relationships are more equal. Aggregated leadership behavior; concertive action.
Spillane (2006)		The practice of distributed leadership is a product of the mutual interactions of school leaders; sees trust as a necessary variable in the collaborative leadership relationship
Harris (2008)		Cites the importance of, how roles and responsibilities that each educator assumes are rearranged within a school.
Macbeath (2008) Cheng (2008)	Learning leadership	A formal connection is established between student learning and leadership practice

Note. Table adapted from description of leadership theories in literature review.

Florida Education Policy

Senate Bill 1908

Senate Bill 1908 enacted and signed into law by the Governor of the state of Florida in 2008, requires a cooperative effort between the secondary and post-secondary levels for expanded college and career readiness opportunities for high school students who are in the 11th and 12th grades. There are various related components which comprise Senate Bill 1908. One of the provisions of this law was to increase the number and percentage of students who graduate from high school, and who are college and career ready. According to the bill, graduating better prepared students will ensure they have increased access to post-secondary opportunities.

In addition to these points, Senate Bill 1908 provides criteria and student assessment data for designating school grades for high schools. Fifty percent of a school's grade will be based on the existing FCAT-related factors such as assessments. The remaining 50 % of the school grade will be based on factors that include a high school's graduation rate (the focus of this study), participation and performance of students in advanced courses, post-secondary readiness of high school students, the performance of students on end of course (EOC) assessments and the positive progression of graduating at risk students (FLDOE, 2010).

Improving graduation opportunities for students considered "at risk" is important to note, as these students receive this label from the eighth grade through their high school years for scoring a Level 1 or Level 2 on the FCAT 2.0 state assessment. For purposes of this study, the focus within Senate Bill 1908 will be on the area which addresses increasing the number and percentage of students who graduate from high

school. Within this research there will be a discussion of high school graduation rates for the state of Florida and how differences in these rates determines high school graduate status and identifies students as high school graduates.

Defining School Grades

Graduation Promotion Practices

School Board of Broward County Policy 6000.1, Student Progression Plan, establishes the standards for quality instruction, specifies criteria for grade level promotion and provides a description of equal educational opportunities for all students. This policy delineates the different types of diplomas available to students, the number of credits (24) required for each diploma, and the various assessments students need to pass in order to qualify for a diploma. In addition, other requirements which include students maintaining a minimum grade point average and fulfilling a minimum number of community service hours within their four-year high school career are included in the policy. This policy is frequently referenced when seeking information regarding graduation requirements and policies and procedures governing high school graduation.

The expectation from each of the Offices of School Performance and Accountability (OSPA) of the BCPS is that principals and assistant principals fully understand and apply the policy to ascertain and make operational all variables which promote graduation of students, and to disseminate this information to all staff and faculty who are involved in improving student performance. Principals are expected to share the details of the policy with the leadership team, department heads, counselors, academic deans, and any other individual that has contact or plays a role in a student's performance.

School leaders must also inform parents and students of the expectations stated in the policy. By making all better informed, the principal is adhering to policy and following ground rules regarding expectations of student performance. For example, information as basic as identifying students who form the at risk population, students who are underperforming and who continue to underperform even as seniors, are some examples of important information and data that principals and assistant principals need to know and be able to manipulate. At important times in the school year, principals and assistant principals refer to Policy 6000.1 for procedures from enrolling new students to the latest on changing standards regarding graduation.

Florida's Graduation Rates

The state of Florida through the year 2012 has used various graduation rates to determine high school graduation: The Federal Graduation Rate, the National Governors' Association Rate (NGA), and the State of Florida Regular Rate. The three rates have been used by high schools to measure the number of graduates in the state in the last 12 years. What makes this point compelling and worth discussing is that all three rates use different standards and student variables to determine what defines a high school graduate. This created confusion among educators when comparing the different rates to each other or when evaluating which students are considered high school graduates. In addition, the accurate reporting of the data is crucial in identifying which students are considered graduates. The shift from one graduation rate to another, defined by a "moving target" of higher standards, created confusion and anxiety among high school staff including principals and assistant principals.

As the BCPS started to adopt Florida's Federal Graduation Rate, all principals and assistant principals were required to participate in trainings and professional development, which delineated the changes among all three rates. In addition, rules regarding which students would not count as graduates concerned administration and teachers alike. The concern rose from the fact that students who were considered graduates in a past year under the NGA and the state of Florida rate, would now be classified as non-graduates (FLDOE, 2011a). What this new ruling unveiled was that graduation rates would automatically decrease by not including certain groups of students in the formula. It was important for principals and assistant principals to understand the new standards of Florida's Federal Graduation rate in order to assess the needs of students about to graduate and to determine which students would not meet the criteria to graduate.

Each graduation rate defines a high school graduate differently depending on their graduation year. All three rates are included in the research as this study covers graduation rates from 2009-2012. The most recent graduation rate is the Federal Graduation rate which will be discussed first.

Florida's Federal Graduation Rate

In Florida, educational activists have for some time, attempted to better define and understand the calculation of a high school graduate (Watson, 2010). With the various types of graduation rates during the last decade many educators remain in the dark as to what constitutes a high school graduate.

In October 2008, the US Department of Education (USED) amended the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of

2001 (NCLB), to include new guidelines for determining high school graduation rates

(FLDOE 2012). These new regulations which require each state in the nation, to

calculate and report a four-year adjusted cohort rate by 2010-11, must include and

exclude certain students from the calculation of the graduation rate. Under this USED

directive, states must include in their graduation profiles and rates, students who graduate

with a standard four-year diploma, but exclude students who seek graduation through the

attainment of a General Education Diploma (GED), as well as exclude students who

graduate with a special education diploma. The recommendation either by counselors or

assistant principals or principals for the student to seek a GED would unfavorably impact

the graduation rate of the school, as GED students (who fall under the dropout umbrella)

were removed from the graduation cohort and not counted as graduates. Heckman and

La Fontaine (2010), are strong supporters of estimating graduation rates through a

"common core of data estimates" which is similar to the cohort method of calculating

graduation rates by tracking the progress of entering ninth grade students and determining

how many in the cohort made it to graduation four years later.

Through this calculation method, the USED expects to streamline and better

define the various graduation rate calculations that have been used in the past to

determine each state's and each high school's graduation rate. It appears that in addition,

the USED is seeking a more uniform, comparable and accurate method of defining high

school graduation rates not just locally but across state lines (FLDOE, 2012). This would

allow states, districts and schools to implement and develop a process to better

understand what defines a high school graduate. Enhanced reporting of graduation rates,

will allow school districts to more effectively compare their graduation data using

specified standards. However, as standards continue to increase as dictated by state and

federal reforms, school systems at the local level are left to decipher how to increase

graduation rates from year to year.

As per the USED, states must use a "cohort graduation rate calculation" to ensure

uniformity in their reporting of their rates. School districts must ensure through the

various internal databases that all longitudinal data and information relevant to

graduation for each student is kept updated, and accurate. In Broward County Public

Schools (BCPS), data from the Total Educational Resource Management System

(TERMS), Data Warehouse (DWH) and Virtual Counselor databases, will allow

principals, assistant principals, and information management technicians (commonly

referred to as data processors) to review, update and accurately report, changes in the

graduation status of each student.

National Governors' Association Rate

The National Governors' Association Rate, commonly referred to by the acronym

NGA, was mandated by the Florida Legislature in 2006 to meet an agreement with the

National Governor's Association Compact. The Graduation Counts Compact of the

NGA reflected four key commitments: to use a common four-year adjusted cohort

graduation rate form; to build a state data and collection capacity; to develop additional

student outcome indicators and to report annually on progress towards meeting these

commitments. (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2010). The NGA rate was first

implemented using graduation data from the 2004-2005 school years. It used the cohort

method of tracking students in and out of a school system. Each school's cohort is

defined by the date of enrollment of a student from ninth grade through the completion of

12th grade four years later. Under this rate, which differs from both the Florida Federal Rate and the Florida Regular Rate, students who receive either a standard or special diploma are counted in the graduation rate, while recipients of GED diplomas do not count.

However, high school students who transfer to an adult education program with the intent of receiving an adult high school diploma are removed from the cohort, as are students who are admitted into the facilities of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) (FLDOE 2012). In other words, the student would not count against the sending school, but rather would become a member of the receiving school's cohort. Although this exclusion and inclusion of different groups of potential graduates as members of a particular cohort also led to confusion and inconsistency, the NGA rate was a precursor to the Federal graduation rate inasmuch as it established the standards and guidelines for promoting a clearer policy to determine which students were considered high school graduates.

State of Florida Regular Rate

Florida's regular rate has been calculated consistently since the 1998-99 school year. One variable which distinguishes this rate from the Federal Graduation rate and the NGA rate is that this rate counts all diploma recipients as graduates. Under Florida's regular rate all students including standard diploma, special diploma and all GED diploma students are counted as graduates. In addition, students who transfer to adult education high school programs or who are processed into the facilities of the DJJ are removed from the cohort. In other words, these students are not counted as non-

graduates and likewise do not negatively impact the high school's percentage of
graduates.

Table 2 compares Florida's graduation rates, denoting graduate and non-graduate
status and graduation year. It appears the Florida Regular Rate, provided more
opportunities for students to be considered high school graduates by including special
diploma students, GED students, and adult education students. This in turn favored
graduation rates for schools as more classifications of students were considered to be
high school graduates, by being included in a school's graduate cohort.

Table 2

Comparison of Graduate and Non-Graduates Using Florida's Graduation Rates (1998-2008)

	Standard diploma students	Special diploma students	General education diploma students	Adult education students	Must remain in cohort to count	Subject to a 4-year cohort
Federal Graduation Rate 2008	Graduate	Non-Graduate	Non-Graduate	Non-Graduate	Graduate	Graduate
National Governors' Association Rate (NGA) 2005	Graduate	Graduate	Non-Graduate	Non-Graduate	Non-Graduate	Graduate
Florida Regular Rate 1998	Graduate	Graduate	Graduate	Graduate	Non-Graduate	Non-Graduate

Note. Table adapted from http://www.fldoe.org

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this multi-case study is to describe and understand how principals and assistant principals work collaboratively to improve high school graduation rates as viewed through an integrated leadership lens in three high schools. Specifically, schools that sustained an increase in different/changing graduation rates will be analyzed to gain a better understanding of what leadership practices may have any relevance to improving graduation rates.

This chapter begins with a reintroduction of the research questions which will guide the study. Next, the research design of the study is presented followed by the sampling plan, data collection methods, and will end with the data analysis section.

Research Questions

The central focus of this study is based on the question:

In schools that demonstrate an increase in graduations rates, what leadership

practices are evidenced in principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders?

Sub-questions of the study include:

1. What are the actions, interactions, tools and routines that principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders use as part of their leadership practice when seeking to improve high school graduation rates?

2. How do high school principals and assistant principals manage the accountability of changing standards in graduation rates and graduation requirements?

3. What interactions of principals and assistant principals are observed relevant to improving high school graduation rates?

Research Design

A qualitative approach aligns with seeking information regarding "constructing social reality, cultural meaning and a focus on interactive processes and events (Neuman, 2003). In this study, a case study design has been selected because it will provide insight into the process and perhaps strengthen our understanding of the forms of leadership practice that may be considered effective when referring to high school graduation rates.

One strength of case study research is that it is appealing for researchers in the education field who wish to understand " processes, problems and programs to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice" (Merriam, 1998). This is significant as this study seeks to unveil what processes and practices school leaders are implementing when considering how to move a high school forward. Moreover, an understanding of leadership practice as leaders engage in actions and interactions, within their setting may permit this researcher to comprehend which practices are viewed as more effective.

The research design used for this study will be a qualitative multi-case study. I will explore in depth leadership practice, specifically collaborative relationships between, principals and assistant principals, and whether specific leadership actions have any relevance when evaluating high school graduation rates. It is anticipated that by studying three school sites, one may gain a greater understanding of how the actions, interactions,

routines and tools that principals and assistant principals use, play a role in the leadership practice of high schools.

Sampling Plan

An important factor in qualitative research is to purposefully select participants, documents or visual images that will provide an answer to the study's research questions (Creswell, 2013). For this study, a purposeful sample will allow the researcher to gain valuable insight of daily leadership practice. Following is a description of the school district site, high schools selected, participants in the study and data collection methods that will be used in the study.

Site. The school district that will be used for this study is The Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) district in Florida. BCPS is the sixth largest public school district in the United States with a student population of approximately 260,000 students during the 2013-14 school year. The district's population is composed of approximately 70,000 high school students enrolled in grades 9 through 12, across 33 high schools in the district. Approximately 190,000 students attend elementary, middle, center, charter or adult education programs. Students from 171 countries who speak 53 languages represent the diversity of the student population of the BCPS district (www.browardschools.com)

Table 3 introduces the Federal Graduation Rate for Broward County and for the state of Florida from 2009-2012. The new Federal graduation rate of 2011-12, defined graduates differently than in past years when the National Governors' Association (NGA) rate and the state of Florida rate were used to determine graduate status. For example, the Federal graduation rate does not include or consider Exceptional Student Education

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(ESE) or General Education Diploma (GED) students as high school graduates, subsequently reducing the number of students considered high school graduates. The NGA rate used prior to the Federal Rate in 2012 included and classified these students in the above example as high school graduates.

Table 3

2009-2012 Federal Graduation Rate in Broward County Public Schools and State of Florida

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
BCPS District Rate	68.4	72.4	71.6	76.4
State of Florida Rate	65.5	69.0	70.6	74.5

Note. Table adapted from http://www.fldoe.org

High school sites. Five types of criteria were used to select three high schools for this proposed study. First, an accountability measure of the state directly related to graduation rates (Senate Bill 1908), specified that schools who qualified for a state awarded grade of an "A" would have to demonstrate a 1% increase in the current graduation rate applied in that academic year, among its at risk student population. From 2008 through 2011 when the NGA rate was used to determine high school graduates, at risk students needed to show a minimum of a 1% increase. This same percentage increase was needed for at risk students, when the Federal rate was first implemented to determine high school graduates from 2012 and beyond (FLDOE, 2011a). At risk students as defined by the state, are students who in the eighth grade scored a Level 1 or Level 2 on the reading or math sections of the state assessment, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The *at risk label* follows students all through

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high school regardless of improving test scores or improving academic grades.

Taking this measure into consideration, it was determined that the schools in the sample would need to demonstrate a minimum threshold of a 2% increase in graduation rates from 2009 through 2012. This is the second set of criteria. If more than three high schools met criteria, the sample would be narrowed further by including schools which show a higher cumulative improvement in graduation rates over a four-year period.

One high school from each of the regional areas in the BCPS school district, as in south, central, and north will be selected for this study. This is the third set of criteria.

From the initial set of schools that are identified as showing an increase in graduation rates, the list will be narrowed further to include schools that demonstrate diversity in student demographics, schools that have special programs such as magnet or technical programs, and schools that are considered community schools. Magnet Schools or schools with innovative programs offer additional educational choices for students to pursue high school courses which provide a richer academic experience in a specific area. Including magnet schools in the sample may provide a better understanding and richer information of high school graduates from these specific programs. This is the fourth set of criteria.

The fifth and final set of criteria addresses the period of time or tenure that the principal has practiced at the school. A minimum of two years at the school in the role of principal or Intern Principal will fulfill these criteria.

After a review of graduation rates data, the list of high schools was reduced to nine schools as potential schools to be included in the sample. These were schools that had maintained an increase in high school graduation rates from year to year while the

NGA rate was used to determine graduates from 2008-2011. These schools were also able to maintain an increase in graduation rates in 2012, when the Federal Rate was first used to report graduation rates. Florida's adoption of the Federal Graduation Rate in 2012, which followed the NGA rate, produced lower graduation rates for six schools thereby reducing the sample to three schools. Schools that meet the sampling criteria and are selected for a more in-depth review for this study include North High School in the northern part of the school district, Central High School in the central part of the school district and South High School in the southern part of the school district.

Table 4 illustrates the use of each of the graduation rates for each of the nine schools that showed an increase in graduation rates from the 2008-2009 through the 2011-2012 academic years. In addition, the percentage difference in graduation rates from year to year is delineated for each school. Schools notated in bold font will be the three school sites identified as meeting the sampling criteria for the study and include North High School, Central High School and South High School.

Table 4

Sampling of School Sites and Graduation Rates 2009-2012

School Sites	2008-09 NGA Rate	2009-10 NGA Rate	2010-11 NGA Rate and Federal Rate	2011-12 Federal Rate
High School "A"	91.9	94.6	98.9	N/A
			96.3	95.3
% Difference		(+2.7)	(+4.3)	(-1.0)
High School "B"	75.7	82.9	85.2	N/A
			81.1	87.3
% Difference		(+7.2)	(+2.3)	(+6.2)
South High	78.7	82.6	84.7	N/A
			76.4	85.2
% Difference		(+3.9)	(+2.1)	(+8.8)
High School "C"	71.0	84.3	89.1	N/A
			84.2	89.9
% Difference		(+13.3)	(+4.8)	(+5.7)
High School "D"	88.2	86.6	91.3	N/A
			89.2	88.3
% Difference		(-1.6)	(+4.7)	(-0.9)
North High	78.5	78.8	89.4	N/A
			81.0	92.9
% Difference		(+0.3)	(+10.6)	(+11.9)
Central High	89.3	92.1	95.2	N/A
			91.6	94.9
% Difference		(+2.8)	(+3.1)	(+3.3)
High School "E"	84.3	91.2	95.3	N/A
			88.8	87.9
% Difference		(+6.9)	(+4.1)	(-0.9)
High School "F"	—	95.3	98.3	N/A
			97.1	96.1
% Difference		(—)	(+3.0)	(-1.0)

Note. Numbers indicate graduation rate in percentages. ― = No data. NGA = National Governors'
Association Rate. Federal Rate required for federal reporting beginning in 2011-2012.
Table adapted from http://www.fldoe.org

Principal and assistant principal sample. Research Question 1 seeks to gain information on the leadership practice of principals and assistant principals in relation to high school graduation rates. For this study, there will be an overall purposeful sample of 18 high school administrators comprised of three principals, 12 assistant principals and three teacher leaders, averaging six participants from each school site. One principal, four assistant principals and one teacher leader from each school site will be interviewed. After district approval is obtained, approval will be obtained from the school site principal to participate in the study. Upon IRB approval, this researcher will gain entry into each of the school sites by contacting the principal through the internal e-mail CAB system, and follow-up the initial communication by a phone call to the principal's office. Once contact is made with the principal, participants in the study will be informed of the purpose of the study, the selection criteria used for the study, the methods used for data collection and the analysis and reporting of the data.

Events. Observations will include meetings of the leadership team which include topics such as review of graduation rates data, discussion of graduation best practices or programs and curriculum addressing interventions for graduating students will be observed. Meetings that include topics on overall student achievement, progression, and promotion practices will also be observed. Any special meetings, forums or assemblies for students that involve principals and assistant principals discussing graduation best practices will form part of the observations. It is expected that 15 hours of observation will be completed per school for a total of 45 hours of observations. This researcher will obtain permission from each school principal to conduct observations before, during and after school hours and will gain access to each school, by contacting the principal via

e-mail or by phone to set up an appointment to discuss the study.

       Documents. Various types of documents will be reviewed for this study. Specifically, the documents include School Board Policy 6000.1 Pupil Progression, and memos from the State of Florida and BCPS district regarding graduation. Documents such as school site meeting agendas for principals and assistant principals, district meeting agendas, and minutes/summaries of administrative meetings, for the current school year (2015-2016), will be reviewed. Documents of meeting agendas available from 2009-2012 will be requested by the researcher for review to maintain an accurate record of topics discussed and participants involved.

    Electronic data review of student databases such as the Virtual Counselor, BASIS, Data Warehouse and TERMS will be included. Student databases provide detailed information on the graduation requirements of students and on the academic progress achieved from year to year. New and creative data collection methods such as those online, or via the internet are an important component of more recent studies (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection

       An important factor in qualitative research is to extensively collect data from multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2013). Data will be collected over a three month period and will include 45 hours of field work. For purposes of this study, the primary methods used to collect data will include interviews, observations and document analysis.

Table 5 presents a data collection and sample table. This table will allow the researcher to link data collection methods to each of the research questions and to the participants of the study.

Table 5

Crosswalk of Participants, Data Collection Methods, and Research Questions

Participants	Overarching Research Question: Leadership practice	Sub Research Question 1: Daily tools and interventions	Sub Research Question 2: Accountability of changing standards	Sub Research Question 3: Interactions observed; teacher leader perspective
Principals	(I), (O), (D)	(I), (O), (D)	(I), (D)	(O)
Assistant Principals	(I), (O), (D)	(I), (O), (D)	(I), (D)	(O)
Teacher Leaders	(I), (O), (D)	(I), (O), (D)	(D)	(I), (O), (D)

Note. Interviews = (I), Observations = (O), Documents = (D). Adapted from Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014.

Interviews

According to Merriam (1998), interviewing is the preferred approach when conducting case studies of a few selected individuals. In this qualitative research study, interviews will be used as the primary means of obtaining data. The type of interview will involve a direct person to person encounter where this researcher will be able to obtain information from principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders. The main purpose is to explore and decipher what is in the interviewee's mind. Patton (1990) explains interviewing in the following manner:

We interview people to find out from them things we cannot directly

observe…We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in

time…We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings

they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about

those things. The purpose of interviewing then is to allow us to enter into other

person's perspective (p.196).

At each site the researcher will interview the principal, four assistant principals

and a teacher leader regarding their daily leadership practices and their leadership role

with respect to graduation. An interview protocol has been designed for the participants

to be used during the interview. Each school's graduation rates data from 2009 through

2012 will be shared with the participants during the interview.

The interview protocols found in Appendices A through C will include seven

specific questions that this researcher will ask principals, assistant principals, and teacher

leaders. These questions will be followed up by probes to allow participants to provide

additional information regarding their experiences of leadership and graduation rates.

The questions in the interview protocol are divided by categories which illustrate or

emphasize a main idea of leadership. The reasoning behind dividing the questions by

categories is to highlight the role of leadership within a high school as it pertains to the

leadership function itself, how leadership is practiced among the various levels of the

school and how leadership practice may be *applied* or demonstrated when speaking of

graduation practices. This protocol is important in this study because it is hoped that

through these questions one may gain a better understanding of leadership practice in

high schools.

Once contact is made with participants, this researcher will schedule interviews at times and locations that meet the needs of the participants. It is expected that a total of 18 interviews will be completed each of which will last between 45-60 minutes. All interviews will be recorded to ensure accuracy and will be later transcribed. All information will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the participants.

As part of a pilot program, the researcher will practice the protocol questions with at least one principal and three assistant principals who will not form a sample of the study, before interviewing the participants of the study.

Observations

Observations are an important source of data collection for this qualitative study. According to Merriam (1998), there are two important points or characteristics which set observations apart. First, they take place in a natural setting and secondly, the observational data generated is a first hand or real life encounter of the situation being studied.

Observations will be conducted in high school settings in order to better understand the working relationship of principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders and their leadership practice. Observations will triangulate findings from interviews and document analyses. As an active observer this researcher will use knowledge and experience to interpret what is being observed. In addition, through observations, the researcher can draw on a specific situation within the context of the study and address these more in detail during the interview process, for example by observing day to day

interactions of the leadership team, or by observing the communication of teacher leaders with students and faculty and staff on topics relating to graduation.

Meetings of the leadership team where topics regarding review of graduation rates data, graduation best practices or programs/curriculum will be observed. These observations may yield important information regarding tools and processes used and provide a better understanding of leadership practice.

An observation guide will be developed for the study. Through the use of this guide the researcher will observe how principals and assistant principals interact with each other during meetings and how they interact with teacher leaders involved in the planning and execution of graduation activities or events. An interest in observing these interactions will possibly yield information on the use of routines, tools and processes by the leadership team which may be deemed as important for understanding leadership practice. A copy of the observation guide may be found in Appendix D.

This researcher will also observe the high school campus, and look for the availability of after school programs, events and announcements regarding the student body and graduation. Field notes will be recorded for information seen and heard within each school site. Any discussions or informal conversations while on the school site will also be notated in field notes. All observations will be conducted in such a way where the researcher will become familiar with the school setting. The researcher will remain unobtrusive and acknowledge the importance of all school functions.

Documents

A review of documents will serve an important purpose in this study.   The use of documents provides a source of data which is readily available to a researcher. According to Merriam (1998), the use of documents does not alter the research setting and provides additional information which may not surface during other data collection methods such as interviews and observations. In addition a review of documents will provide secondary support to this researcher, by yielding information relevant to graduation rates, and data on school grades.

Two out of the three schools in the sample have magnet programs. Through document review I will be able to assess how much of an impact magnet students had on the rates by reviewing pupil progression plans, academic grades and graduation ranks. Procedural documents, identifying tasks and interventions related to graduation that leaders and teacher leaders need to complete within a specific timeframe will also be reviewed. A Document List is found in Appendix E.

While some of the documents that will be reviewed for this study may not contain information which is directly related to leadership theories it is expected that most will yield valuable information on graduation rates and data from the 2009-2012 academic years. Furthermore, the alignment of documents issued by the state and district will be reviewed to establish the timing of announcements regarding graduation. A research journal and field project memos will also be used to develop an in-depth picture of the cases (Creswell, 2013). A Document Summary form is found in Appendix F.

Data Analysis

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), data analysis is a systematic process of reviewing and interpreting data that has been collected for the study. This includes an analysis of field notes, observations, transcript of interviews, documents and any other information collected that will allow one to answer the research questions of the study. Each case will be analyzed individually and this will be followed by a cross case analysis. Findings regarding graduation rates from each of the magnet schools will be compared to the graduation rates of the traditional high school.

A coding method to identify information about the data and to identify interpretive constructs from the data has been developed (Merriam, 1998). It is expected that coding will identify emergent themes of leadership theory and practice. Each school's data will be individually analyzed to determine principals and assistant principals' perceptions of leadership practice collectively and as individuals within the school. Several coding methods will be used to identify categories, themes, and constructs. Saldana (2013), states "qualitative codes are essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story … they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections" (p.8). Various coding methods will be used to identify categories, themes, and constructs. Specifically, Descriptive, Structural, and In Vivo Coding, will be used during the first cycle of coding and Pattern coding will be used to develop themes which reflect leadership practice during the second cycle of coding.

Descriptive Coding will be applied first to the participants' answers after interviews are transcribed. The data will be analyzed to determine categories and basic topics of the principal's, assistant principals' and the teacher leaders' perceptions of

leadership practice collectively and as individuals within the school.

Structural coding will be used for several reasons. The study is considered exploratory, the study involved multiple participants, and the study used a semi-structured protocol for interviewing participants. "Leadership practice" from RQ1 will be used as a conceptual phrase to illustrate each participant's answer to the research question.

In Vivo Coding, also referred to as verbatim coding, will be used to "honor the participants' voice" (Saldana, 2013). In Vivo coding will add to a deeper understanding of each participant's values, ideals and goals with respect to leadership practice and increasing graduation rates. It will express in their own words the responsibility they have and the challenges they face to increase graduation rates.

Pattern coding will be used as a second cycle coding method to develop major themes from the data. This type of coding will allow for condensing large amounts of data, for understanding incidents and interactions while still collecting data and by laying the groundwork for cross-case analysis.

This will be followed by a cross-case analysis where data from each school will be analyzed for similarities and differences. The high school leadership team (principal, assistant principal, and teacher leader) is the unit of analysis.

The data will be analyzed to identify key operational terms, actions, interactions, tools and routines from the interview transcripts, documents, observations and field notes. It is believed that by collecting data which is open-ended, this researcher will be able to develop themes and patterns which may lead to a greater understanding of leadership practice in high schools. Member checking by participants will occur to ensure validity.

From an inductive perspective this researcher will build from the data by developing

processes, themes and concepts at each school site that will lead to a model or theory of

leadership practice in three high schools.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In the first three chapters of this dissertation, I presented an introduction to the problem of the accountability of principals and assistant principals in maintaining increasing graduation rates while following different graduation rates standards, followed by a literature review of specific principles of leadership theories which were purposeful for the study, and continuing with a description of the methodological design that was used in the study. This chapter reports the findings which evolved from the data collected and analyzed using the conceptual framework developed to guide the study.

For this study, one overarching research question and three sub-questions were used to understand the leadership practice of principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders in three high schools that had experienced an increase in graduation rates over a period of three years. Following are the research questions that formed the framework of the study.

The central focus of this study was based on the question:

In schools that demonstrate an increase in graduations rates, what types of leadership practices are evidenced in principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders?

Sub-questions of the study include:

1. What are the actions, interactions, tools and routines that principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders use as part of their leadership practice when seeking to improve high school graduation rates?

2. How do high school principals and assistant principals manage the accountability of changing standards in graduation rates and graduation requirements?

3. What interactions of principals and assistant principals are observed relevant to improving high school graduation rates?

The research design used for this study was a qualitative multi-case study with data collected from interviews, observations and document analysis. An important feature of qualitative research is to be able to understand and interpret the phenomenon or case being explored, by focusing on more than the reader, researcher or participant (Creswell, 2013). The first case study is referred to as Central High School, the second case study is South High School and the third case study is North High School. The profile for each school site was compiled from interviews, observations, and a review of documents from the Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) main website. As noted in Chapter 3, the three school sites were selected based on criteria which included schools that demonstrated an increase in graduation rates. Through an IRB process, the Research and Assessment department of the BCPS granted permission to use the name of the school district. Pseudonyms were used to identify each of the school sites and its participants.

A background of each case will be followed by the findings of the case study in relation to the research question. The findings for each case study will be presented

individually and a cross-case analysis will follow to compare findings among the three

schools. Finally, a chapter summary will highlight the main points discussed.

Case Study: Central High School (CHS)

Background

Central High School (CHS) forms part of a compound of schools that includes

two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. Its campus is expansive

and open and the high school shares its campus with the middle school which includes

grades 6 through 8. It is an older campus dating to the early 1960's, but a well

maintained and neatly landscaped entrance to the campus flanked on each side by raised

planters, warmly welcomes visitors.

An important attendance benchmark for all schools on the first day of school is

the enrollment count. Table 6 illustrates the first day enrollment count by grade level for

the current school year 2015-2016, and for the 2009-2010 school year which marks the

first year of the timeframe of the study.

Table 6

Central High School (CHS) First Day Student Enrollment by Grade Level-Current School Year vs. Study's First Year Mark

	2015-16	2015-16	2009-10	2009-10
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
9th Grade	630	28	519	29
10th Grade	625	28	457	25
11th Grade	467	21	458	25
12th Grade	518	23	383	21
Total	2,240	100	1,817	100

Note. Table adapted from http://www.browardschools.com.

It is important to note that the number of students, who enroll in ninth grade, does not remain the same, usually decreasing during the span of four years. Factors such as students transferring to other schools in or out of the county or state, students pursuing credit recovery or General Education Diploma (GED) options, or students dropping out of school, account for a reduction in the number of students who successfully graduate four years later. The steps that need to be taken to address the consequences of a diminishing graduating class will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Another type of student enrollment data is the official Benchmark Day enrollment count which provides a picture of the racial and ethnic designations of all students. Usually recorded on the 15th day or the Monday after Labor Day, the Benchmark Day enrollment count for CHS for the 2015-16 illustrates the racial and ethnic breakdown of the student population as follows: White 36.4%; Black/African American 51.4%; Hispanic 21.5%; Multi-Racial 4.2%; Asian 5.3%; Native American and Pacific Islander 2.4%. There are 1,009 males and 1,178 females for a total enrollment of 2,187 students. Table 7 displays the enrollment percentages for CHS for the 2015-16 school year as well as for the 2009-10 school year, which marked the first year of the timeframe of the study (www.browardschools.com).

Table 7

Central High School (CHS) Benchmark Enrollment by Diversity Categories-Current School Year vs. Study's First Year Mark

	2015-16 (n)	2015-16 (%)	2009-10 (n)	2009-10 (%)
Male	1009	46.1	1019	48.2
Female	1,178	53.9	1096	51.8
White	795	36.4	633	29.9
Black	1124	51.4	857	40.5
Hispanic	(470)	(21.5)	(433)	(20.5)
Asian	117	5.3	130	6.15
Native American	53	2.4	3	0.14
Multi-Racial	92	4.2	59	2.8
Total	2,187	100	2115	100

Note. Table adapted from http://www.broward.k12.us./dsa/enrollmentcounts.shtml. Ethnically Hispanic students are included within each of the diversity categories.

CHS has a student population of 2,187 students. Each student depends on one administrator, one guidance counselor, and one guidance director and six to seven teachers for support, guidance and instruction. For students who fall into special instructional categories such as ELL or ESE, their support group may be larger to include an ELL coordinator or an ESE specialist. In dividing the total number of enrolled students by each grade level, each group of leaders addresses the academic needs of approximately 540 students. It is a large number which is ingrained in the minds of the principal and assistant principals from the moment the students enter the doors of CHS as ninth graders. Yet the leadership team interviewed and observed at CHS, assume their leadership practice with a clear vision of student success with fervent enthusiasm, evident pride, and quick operational skill.

CHS uses a lottery system and draws students from Broward County to attend their school. A residency boundary system, where students are assigned to a school based on their residence, is not used as CHS in not considered a "neighborhood" school. As such, students are bused from various sectors of the county to attend school here. CHS is the only traditional high school in the district that in the last ten years has earned a state-awarded school grade of an "A".

The first point of entry, the main office, is inviting and small with subdued colors, multiple posters, pictures of students and has a seating area for parents, students and visitors alike. The principal's office is immediately to the left of a rectangular reception area, which during my visit was covered by a female volunteer student who cordially greeted me and other visitors and assisted with answering questions and directing parties to their destination.

The principal's office was large and tastefully decorated. Pictures hang from the walls, and a dark wood executive desk is positioned facing the door, while a matching long conference table is off to the side of the office. All administrative meetings are held in this office. Next to this comfortable office is the office manager/principal's secretary who is cordial and professional when speaking with me. There is typical office furniture and technology equipment in this assistant's office. A second door toward the back of this office connects to the principal's office for easy access.

As one walks toward the back of the main office, there are several offices which make up a second administrative area. The ninth and 10th-grade assistant principals, the guidance director, and the ninth and 10th-grade level counselors have their offices in this area. There is an open area for secretarial and clerical support as well. Construction of some sort is apparent a few feet from this area, where a future computer station/lab for student use is scheduled to be finished before the start of the 2015-16 school year. Another group of offices is found further towards the back of the main office. The 11th and 12th-grade offices appear almost as replicates of the first set of offices. A team of one assistant principal, one guidance counselor and clerical support form part of this office configuration.

Participants

At CHS the participants of this study consisted of one principal (male), three assistant principals (two females, one male), and two teacher leaders (male and female). In this case study, the principal recommended that a second teacher leader (female) be interviewed because of the individual's ample knowledge with respect to increasing

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graduation rates. A total of six participants were interviewed. Professional experience as administrators and teacher leaders among the group exceeded 100 years.

Each administrator served as the leader for a specific grade level and worked hand- in- hand with the same grade level counselor and secretary. Three assistant principals and two teacher leaders were interviewed. A fourth female assistant principal was unavailable and not interviewed. Guidance counselor and assistant principal offices are found in various student services areas where student assignments are divided by grade level. Table 8 provides a summary of the participants' demographics and years of professional experience.

Table 8

Central High School (CHS) Participants' Demographics, Years of Professional Experience

	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Years of Experience Current School
Principal	M	W	32	16
Assistant Principal 1	F	W	19	4
Assistant Principal 2	F	W	16	4
Assistant Principal 3	M	W	29	6
Teacher Leader 1	M	W	14	8
Teacher Leader 2	F	W	4	4

Note. Table adapted from interview data.

Findings: CHS

Two findings were identified in this case study. They are (1) These school

leaders establish a clear vision, mission, or goal to increase graduation rates and (2)

Identification, management and evaluation of academic enrichment programs are

necessary interventions for student success. Finding one addressed RQ 1 and SQ 3.

Finding two addressed SQ 1 and SQ 2.

These school leaders establish a clear vision, mission or goal to increase

graduation rates. The theme of school vision emerged throughout all the interviews. The

principal, three assistant principals and two teacher leaders highlighted the importance of

having a focused and clear vision as leaders in improving graduation rates. The data

analysis revealed that while the definition of a well-defined vision usually comes from

the principal, there is enthusiastic "buy-in" from the assistant principals and teacher

leaders in creating a sense of ownership of the vision.

The following passage emerged from pattern coding and illustrates a major theme

found in the data: the vision of the school as expressed by the principal at CHS:

> Leadership is about having a vision. If the school or principal doesn't have a
>
> vision then the ship doesn't really have a captain. I think it starts with a vision
>
> and the vision needs to be clear to everybody. At this school we're all about
>
> accountability from top to bottom and it all starts with me…we're all about
>
> expectations whether it's our school letter grade, graduation or anything else…I
>
> think what really counts is having high expectations for all students because they
>
> will rise to the occasion. It starts with me, the vision is about accountability and
>
> high expectations and that's the groundwork.

CHS teacher leaders 1 and 2, expressed their views of how the school operates through a vision that is well-crafted, that has the support of the every member of the leadership team *and others* in the school, and where each team member works to the best of their ability to get the job done. By "get the job done" teacher leader 1 referred to the context of graduating students. "Being a counselor is being a graduator. The people that are involved need to do it need to get it done". When probed further, CHS teacher leader 1 continued: "student success is an overall school focus…getting the kids out of here is the goal, and when you have that collective direction the goal is much more attainable". Still referring to vision, teacher leader 1 spoke of expectations and "role models" in leadership as important attributes in setting the tone for the school. He stated: " the main goal of leaders on campus is to set the example by establishing a climate of what the expectations are… anyone that helps to establish guidelines and enforce them from their own areas of expertise, helps makeup our leadership". Teacher leader 2 concurred with her colleague by expressing that the vision, fostered by the principal and communicated to his team as a collaborative practice, is what has contributed to their success in graduating students.

CHS assistant principals 1, 2 and 3 also reflected on their school vision. "School leadership in my opinion, is establishing direction …to determine the goal, the vision, and doing whatever it takes to move people towards that vision…first and foremost it's establishing the vision for your school and for students". Further elaborating on "moving people towards that vision" assistant principal 2 stated: "my job is more of a supporter; it is truly about collaboration and getting teachers to buy in to what you're trying to do". This thought expressed the idea that in moving towards the set vision of the school, the

leader as a supporter *needs* to work collaboratively with others to accomplish the goal of graduating students. This can be viewed as an example of an action or interaction on behalf of the leadership team that evolves into a routine

Finding two revealed that: The identification, management and evaluation of academic enrichment programs are necessary interventions for student success. There are many duties that principals and assistant principals are responsible for, in addition to graduating students in a four-year time period. Some of these responsibilities include teacher evaluation and supervision, professional development of teachers and staff, curriculum/instructional leadership, student discipline, supervision of facilities and transportation operations among others. It is a professional position which requires the practice of a keen set of leadership skills and best practices to maintain one-self a step ahead of the monumental set of tasks for which principals and assistant principals are held accountable. The "student component" is integrated into each one of the leadership team's preceding responsibilities and makes up most of their decisions regarding the multiple aspects of a school's enrichment programs.

An examination of the data collected revealed a large number of enrichment programs at CHS that serve as an example for the actions, interactions, tools and routines that leadership team members use as part of their leadership practice to improve high school graduation rates. A description, purpose and outcomes of the programs will be discussed.

Academic enrichment programs. Enrichment programs form an important part of the interventions and student support initiatives at CHS.   These programs developed, managed and evaluated by administrators and select faculty members are intended for

students who are trying to fulfill graduation requirements in four years, but who need additional instruction and support to meet the requirement. These programs may be viewed as routines which have been developed by members of the leadership team and by teacher leaders, department heads, guidance counselors and staff who are involved in a student's progression towards graduation. A short description of each one of the school's enrichment programs follows.

Credit recovery program. The credit recovery program at CHS is held on their campus, and housed in the middle school which also serves as a community school. Various adult and technical education programs including co-enrollment and credit recovery are offered at the community school. In an online credit recovery program, students are able to complete credits for courses that they have failed in ninth through 12th grade via online courses. Credits may be taken through the district's Broward Virtual School (BVS) program or through the state's Florida Virtual School (FLVS) program. Students complete their course requirements in segments or semesters and each course needs to be approved by the student's counselor or administrator to ensure that the course meets graduation requirements. A virtual teacher becomes the point of instructional contact for the student and parents and the student may work towards completing course requirements at any time, not just while they are present in school.

A second type of credit recovery program also held on campus is what is traditionally referred to as night school or more formally co-enrollment. In the co-enrollment program students may enroll in online courses using different software (generally not from BVS or FLVS). Programs such as APEX or EDMENTUM provide the online coursework for credit recovery. Also, student athletes who experience credit

deficiency may complete their co-enrollment courses through a paper curriculum (versus the online classes model) as required by the various national athletic associations. In much the same manner and at the end of the school day, students usually complete lessons, assignments, tests and semester exams leading to the awarding of passing grades and credits upon completion of the academic requirements of the course.

One of the advantages of an "in-house" credit recovery program is that there is more control over the location of the program, teachers are familiar with their students, and there is better monitoring of students' progress because of the close contact among teachers and administrators. Usually students in off-campus credit recovery programs need to register in a school different from the one they are accustomed to, they need to become familiar with new teachers who are supervising the course, and they need to remain motivated to pass courses with good grades, despite the class' mostly homogeneous composition: all students are taking the class to recover credits previously failed or to accelerate course completion to meet graduation timelines. Credit recovery is one of the most popular routines used by high schools to help these students complete graduation requirements.

Pull-out labs/workshops. This type of class is held during two periods of a typical school day at CHS. Based on an assessment of the academic need students have an opportunity to work on course requirements, homework, or projects during the school day. Students are pulled out of elective classes from their regular student schedule and assigned to the pull-out labs or workshops. Lab classes also provide students with practice tests that include ACT, SAT, PERT, and USA Test Prep among others.

After careful analysis of the data to determine who gets to participate, and usually

before testing season begins in March or April, students can work in a lab setting for improvement of test-taking strategies, for practicing to retake state assessments and for general academic improvement on tests and academic courses. In addition, students who are in the midst of completing a course online are provided with the tools and resources to complete the course in one of the schools labs. An experienced teacher is assigned to each lab to monitor student progress and to ensure that students participate and fulfill the course requirements in a lab setting.

During one of my observations, a small lab of two to four computers was under construction in a small area of the 12th-grade office. As explained by teacher leader 1 during the interview, the idea for the lab developed after the leadership team saw how students frequently resorted to poor excuses for not completing on-line work. The "no more excuses" lab was fully functional by the start of this new school year. Teacher leader 1 explains:

> We have a few students that don't have the equipment at home to be able to complete the online classes, so if all of the other labs in the school are full, they can always come to this one which is right by my office and I can keep an eye on them. They also have access to a printer. I'm usually at school long into the afternoon, so if I'm here, then the students need to be here too completing their online work.

According to the leadership team the pull-out labs and workshop sessions contributed greatly to a drop in the number of students that had not met all of the requirements for graduation according to the leadership team. Data analysis by the leadership team at the beginning of this school year revealed that there were

approximately 107 students who were not likely to graduate if they did not complete

course requirements within a prescribed period of time. With the implementation of the

pull-out labs, the number of students who still had not met all requirements for

graduation by the end of the school year was now 17. The leadership team indicated that

the increase in the number of students who would now be graduating was largely

attributed to the development and evaluation of the strategies used in the various

labs/workshop sessions, as well as to the efforts of the teachers monitoring progress in

the labs. This serves as an example of a popular routine at CHS that serves the student

body by not only providing critical information on the technical aspects (test-taking

skills) of the state assessments required for graduation, but also by providing additional

instruction in core academic areas for improved performance in courses and in

assessments such as the FSA, and EOC exams.

    Graduation-centered group assemblies. Graduation-centered group assemblies

were held several times during the year to call attention to senior students whose

graduation profiles were still weak as a result of not fulfilling graduation requirements

typically achieved in earlier high school years.   Frequently attended by the principal,

these assemblies were held at the beginning of the year, at the mid-year point and even as

late as the third quarter of the school year, to address students who were in danger of not

graduating. The leadership team used assemblies as a forum and strategy to inform and

charge large groups of seniors with the responsibility to move forward or compromise

graduation. The leadership team also developed "strategic individual plans" for each

student based on the strategies that needed to be followed in order to meet graduation

requirements. The plan was shared both with the student and the parent, and both parties

were held accountable for successfully completing all of the components of the plan. Teacher leader 1 summarizes the plan by stating: "it takes a village; students who have lower graduation potential we open up the book and do anything to help them, from teacher negotiations to walking them over to the community school… assemblies helped us tremendously in reaching that goal". The student assemblies started as a principal action and has remained an important program for helping students especially those not close to graduation to achieve this goal.

   Senior mentoring program. The senior mentoring program at CHS was started by assistant principal 2 during the 2014-2015 school year. The senior mentoring program was started as an intervention to address students who had not obtained passing scores on the reading component of the FCAT and continued to struggle in achieving a passing score during their last year. Seniors were paired up with experienced senior teachers that offered a good "fit". One of the expectations of the program was that both student and teacher would meet twice per week, every week to discuss challenges as well as achievements regarding progress towards meeting graduation goals. Reading test packets were completed by the students, and teachers provided the appropriate feedback to the student regarding work completed. Incentives, one component of the program, were important motivators for students. Relationship-building was also an instrumental goal of the program. Once the match between the student and teacher was established, the teacher and the leadership team identified the areas of concern regarding their academic success. In the mentoring process the student gained another advocate who listened and understood the student's particular academic situation. Assistant principal 2 summarized her thoughts regarding the program by stating:

These were students that had a little bit of an edge and attitude. I had a football coach that happened to be the reading teacher and it was a great mix. Kids that were assigned to this teacher made that connection…you're meeting them where they are…you're assessing where they are all the time. It's that feeling of someone caring and supporting them along the way. I got so much positive feedback from the kids about that program.

The student mentoring program highlighted the importance of interactions, relationships among faculty and students, and passion that the teachers and leadership team felt in providing academic support for students. Participants revealed how obstacles and challenges both of a personal and academic nature were overcome, through a well-developed program that matched students and teachers together fostering a valuable mentoring experience in the process.

Saturday academy. The Saturday Academy, considered a very successful enrichment program by the leadership team, was developed by the CHS's principal 14 years ago. During four months of the spring semester, the Saturday Academy which operates from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. opens its doors to approximately 200 to 300 students (each Saturday) for intensive test preparation in reading and math. In addition to the reading and math instruction, students have the opportunity to participate in writing skills sessions, and ACT/SAT test prep courses. Students are picked up at bus depots, usually the elementary school closest to where the student lives, and they are transported to CHS. Five math and five reading teachers, one reading coach, and one assistant principal are in charge of the instructional operations. According to the principal, the Saturday Academy is a major yearly investment of approximately $60,000 which is

equivalent to an experienced teacher's yearly salary but which he believes is money well spent as the academic benefits it provides the students outweigh the cost of the program. According to the data reviewed by the participants, students who participate in the Saturday academy have additional opportunities through focused instruction to increase their concordant test scores on the ACT/SAT tests. Once students pass these tests, students move one step closer towards graduation as a concordant score fulfills the state testing requirement in reading and math. This is an example of a principal action that evolved into a routine after 14 successful years of funding the program.

Funding of ACT/SAT testing. For many years, some students have been unable to achieve a passing score on the FCAT even after multiple attempts. In order to assist students in meeting this graduation requirement, the state allows students to take the ACT or SAT (college entry level tests) and if they score in the passing range, then the new concordant score would satisfy the state assessment graduation requirement. While there are fee waivers that both testing companies (the ACT and the College Board) provide to students who are on free or reduced lunch, two waivers per student, per year are simply not enough for students who need to take the assessment multiple times during the school year.

According to the principal of CHS, this past school year there were approximately 50 to 60 students who could not afford to pay the testing fee for the ACT or SAT. The students had taken the test several times but they had not been successful in passing it. They also had been unable to achieve passing scores on the FCAT or the newer FSA. In April, before one of the nationally scheduled testing days, the leadership team gathered the group for intensive test taking strategies workshops, and practice test immersion over

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a period of several weeks. The principal knew that these students needed at least another

chance to take the test, and revealed that they did not want to see students worrying about

the funds to pay for the test. He therefore authorized payment for all of the student tests

through his internal accounts budget. A few weeks later, the leadership team learned that

50 % of that group had met the concordant score, automatically adding 30 students to the

list of students who now met the state assessment requirement for graduation. This is

another example of leadership practice, that involved actions, interactions and routines

and that proved beneficial for the students and for the school, in improving graduation

rates.

Following is Table 9 which provides a summary of the various academic

enrichment programs at CHS highlighting the names of the programs, components of the

programs, the grade level participating in the program and the time of the day the

programs are offered.

Table 9

Central High School (CHS) Academic Enrichment Programs

	Time of Year Offered	Components of Program	Grade Level	Before(B)/During(D)/ After(A) School
Credit Recovery	September– May	BVS, FLVS, APEX, EDMENTUM	9th -12th	B, D, A
Pull Out Labs/ Workshops	September– May	Test Prep ACT, SAT	11th-12th	B, D, A
Graduation- Centered Group Assemblies	September, January, March	Academic Improvement Plan	12th	D
Senior Mentoring	September– May	Teacher/Student Mentoring	12th	B, D, A
Saturday Academy	January– April	Reading/Math/ ACT/SAT Test Prep	11th-12th	A
Funding ACT/SAT Testing	September– May	Funding of ACT/SAT Test Fee	12th	A

Note. BVS = Broward Virtual School. FLVS = Florida Virtual School. APEX and EDMENTUM are software programs used in credit recovery. Table adapted from interview data and document analysis.

Case Study: South High School (SHS)

Background

In May 2015, the administration, faculty, students and alumni of South High School (SHS) celebrated its 100th graduating class. Officials from the City of Fort Lauderdale and the Broward County Public School district were present to mark this historical milestone of the oldest, continuously functioning school in Broward County. In 1915, South High School had a graduating class of five boys (Yi, 2015). In June 2015, over 400 students received their high school diplomas (www.browardschools.com).

An important benchmark for all schools on the first day of school is to obtain an accurate count of the number of students who are present in class. This count usually taken during a second period class or approximately at 9:00 a.m. is commonly referred to as the "warm-body count", to avoid confusion in including students whose names appear on class rosters but who may not be present in class on the first day. Table 10 illustrates the first day enrollment count by grade level for the current school year 2015-2016, and for the 2009-2010 school year which marked the first year of the timeframe of the study.

Table 10

South High School (SHS) First Day Student Enrollment by Grade Level-Current School Year vs. Study's First Year Mark

	2015-16 (n)	2015-16 (%)	2009-10 (n)	2009-10 (%)
9th Grade	578	27	435	29
10th Grade	563	26	416	27
11th Grade	500	23	362	24
12th Grade	508	24	308	20
Total	2,149	100	1,521	100

Note. Table adapted from http://www.browardschools.com.

While the first day enrollment count provides a reliable estimated count of the number of students that will attend school, the official Benchmark Day enrollment provides a more detailed breakdown of students' enrollment in each of the schools in the district. The Benchmark Day enrollment for South High School for 2015-16, usually reported on the 15th day of the school year, illustrates the racial and ethnic breakdown of the student population as follows: White 40.8%; Black/African American 52.5%; Hispanic 16.7%; Multi-Racial 3.9.%; Asian 1.8%; Native American and Pacific Islander 1.1%. There are 978 males or 45.4% and 1,176 females or 54.6% for a total enrollment of 2,154 students. Table 11 displays the enrollment percentages for SHS for the 2015-16 school year as well as for the 2009-10 school year which as noted previously, marked the first year of the timeframe of the study.

Table 11

South High School (SHS) Benchmark Enrollment by Diversity Categories-Current School Year vs. Study's First Year Mark

	2015-16 (n)	2015-16 (%)	2009-10 (n)	2009-10 (%)
Male	978	45.4	755	45.1
Female	1,176	54.6	918	55
White	879	40.8	408	24.4
Black	1131	52.5	1012	60.5
Hispanic	(360)	(16.7)	(174)	(10.4)
Asian	38	1.8	37	2.2
Native American	23	1.1	11	.66
Multi-Racial	83	3.9	31	1.84
Total	2154	100	1673	100

Note. Table adapted from http://www.broward.k12.us./dsa/enrollmentcounts.shtml. Ethnically Hispanic students are included within each of the diversity categories, if applicable.

Magnet Programs

SHS is a double Magnet school offering specialized curriculum in Pre-Law/ Public Affairs and the Cambridge AICE Program. The Pre-Law program is a college preparatory course of study designed for students who wish to pursue careers in law, criminal justice or public affairs. A distinct advantage to housing this program in a geographically eastern location such as SHS is that students have the availability of internships and practicums in government agencies and in the legal community in close proximity to the school. These offices which are typically found in a city's downtown sector are a short distance from the school and provide opportunities for students to participate in internships and gain practical experience.

The second Magnet program is the Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) Program, an internationally recognized secondary education program, which allows students to gain college credit, while still attending high school. Students who attend SHS's Magnet programs reside in all areas of the county. Students generally board school buses at 5:45 a.m. allowing enough time for an early arrival for breakfast, followed by the start of classes at approximately 7:15 a.m.

School Expansion and Remodeling

Construction is a common sight at South High School. For approximately the past 10 years the school has undergone major physical construction and development. A new aquatic center, a two-story cafeteria and a state of the art auditorium, in addition to major renovations to the school's layout and architectural updating of building structures are now complete. A new senior student parking lot is due to be ready by the end of the school year.

The main building, a three-story structure, is a carefully balanced replica of the

façade which stood before with fresh blue and beige paint colors and modern touches of

Art-Deco design. The emphasis on glass which includes an oversized central window in

the administration building provides light and views that would not be discernible

otherwise. From the second floor and facing west, the views offer a picture of the "older"

sector of the city of Fort Lauderdale. The same general exterior colors coincide with

those of the main office, administration, guidance and student services departments. The

modern furniture and sectionals are functional and comfortable for students, parents,

visitors and school staff alike.

The first floor main entrance leads to the first security checkpoint where

identification credentials are processed for access to the various offices in the school.

This school lobby area offers a second instance of the "fluidity" of the architectural

design and layout. An accommodating desk reception area, a comfortable seating

arrangement for three to four persons, a well-lit trophy/award case, and a large poster

celebrating the 100th graduating class at South High School, provide a welcoming

message to all visitors. To the right of this reception area and separated by glass doors

are the Student Support Services office suite and support staff offices. This large area

which maintains the same modern layout includes a large central reception area for

students, bordered on all sides by the guidance counselors' and guidance director's

offices.

Once granted access and beyond the glass doors, an elevator carries visitors to the

second floor for the administrative offices and to the third floor to the Magnet Program

office. A large reception area with three-story glass windows greets visitors as one exits

the elevator on the second floor. This office reception area is similar to that of the first floor, except that is more expansive and seating capacity accommodates from 12 to 15 visitors. The design also supports two reception areas on opposite sides of the room overseen by support staff. A large poster which highlights the values of the "Flying L's" the school mascot is elegantly displayed in this area. The Flying L values include: learning, life, leadership loyalty and legacy. Each value is identified by characters which define it and informs students of the Flying L's values.

In moving past the reception area and through a long sleek hallway of hung pictures, I found the principal's office. It is a modern, conference room size office with all the amenities pertinent to an executive-level position. The interview for assistant principal number 4 was held in this office. On the day scheduled for the principal and assistant principal interviews, both participants were experiencing scheduling conflicts between a budget meeting, which included the participation of the budget keeper, the bookkeeper, and the principal and assistant principal and with this researcher. The budget meeting which included time sensitive topics took precedence over the interview as was expected.

While I waited to interview the participants, I was escorted to a small lounge area, which had typical office equipment such as printers and scanners, a small library and two items that caught my attention. One was an early sketch of what appeared to be the main entrance of SHS from 40 to 50 years ago. The other item, propped up against a bookshelf, was a framed award from the Washington Post newspaper nominating South High School as one of America's Most Challenging High Schools for the year 2015.

Participants

At SHS the participants of this study consisted of one principal (female), four assistant principals (two females, two males), and one teacher leader (male). In this case study, one of the female assistant principals who had been a member of the SHS leadership team for five years, had recently accepted a leadership position in a middle school setting. This assistant principal was interviewed in her newly assigned school setting due to the transfer in location. A total of six participants were interviewed. Professional and career experience among the members of the leadership team was 89 years. Years of experience as leaders at South High School was 22 years.

Each assistant principal served as the leader for a specific grade level and worked hand in hand with the same grade level counselor, and with the teacher leader. The offices of the administration and student support services are on two different floors; however there appears to be focused communication among the members of the leadership team and with the teacher leader who serves as the Director of Student Support Services. Table 12 provides a view of the participants' demographics and years of professional experience.

Table 12

South High School (SHS) Participants' Demographics, Years of Professional Experience

	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Years of Experience Current School
Principal	F	W	14	5
Intern Principal 1	M	B	25	4
Assistant Principal 2	M	W	11	1
Assistant Principal 3	F	W	11	5
Assistant Principal 4	F	W	8	3
Teacher Leader 1	M	B	20	4

Note. Table adapted from interview data.

Findings: SHS

Two findings were identified in this case study. They are (1) These school leaders build a culture of student learning and achievement through a system of processes, programs and support initiatives and (2) These school leaders demonstrate a strong devotion to the job function in the form of compassion and love towards the student body. Finding one addresses RQ 1 and SQ 2. Finding two addresses SQ 1 and SQ 3.

These school leaders build a culture of student learning and achievement through a system of processes, programs and support initiatives. The development and operations of processes, programs and student support initiatives were relevant themes during interviews and emerged vividly as part of the data analysis. The data showed that the participants consider important the practice of having systems, which will support

initiatives associated with improving student achievement. All of the assistant principals stressed that any intervention that involves the success of a ninth through 12th-grade student, involves a system of processes that start early in the student's high school career. According to the leadership team, interventions that are grade-level specific and need to occur at certain points in the year are necessary for student success. Programs and student support initiatives included an after-school tutoring program, a supper program and a mentoring program.

Assistant principal 4 and intern principal 1 believe that in order for students to be successful and graduate in four years, interventions need to start as early as the summer before ninth grade. Once ninth graders are ready to enter in the fall semester, information and processes for making the transition from middle school need to already be operational at the high school level.   One example cited, which is considered an early intervention for ninth grade students, is the participation in the community school credit recovery program. This recommendation to attend a community school program can be made as early as the conclusion of the first semester of ninth grade. In this program which is conveniently located across the street from SHS, students enrolled in credit recovery courses as recommended by counselors, and assistant principals.

While this external program was considered effective, the leadership team found that there were gaps for students who needed to enroll in specific courses. One factor was that science classes were not offered at the community school, which quickly compromised the number of students who needed to complete a graduation requirement such as biology. Courses such as biology, algebra, geometry and American History require students to take an End of Course (EOC) state examination as a graduation

requirement. SHS decided that in order to fill this need, they would need to start a credit

recovery on their own campus, which included science classes such as biology in addition

to others.   Intern principal 1 expressed his concern as follows:

> A community school is not built for it, they're not built for the numbers or to deal
> with the type of issues that a child like that brings and there's a distinct difference
> between a ninth and 10th-grade student or a 14 and 15 year old, who you have to
> motivate, and watch over and mentor …than when you send a junior or senior
> who is motivated by: 'I see the end'.

Planning and development for a new interactive credit recovery program involved

several operational steps. Among them was the dissemination of information to students,

parents and faculty regarding the program, individual academic counseling, allocation of

resources such as teachers and leaders who supervised the program, and decisions

regarding classroom assignments and technology capabilities for the credit recovery

program were made.

The STAR (Student Tutoring and Resource) program was developed to allow the

students to seek alternative credit recovery options and to receive tutoring for the ACT

and SAT tests on their campus. The timely operation of the program, the tutoring

schedule from Monday to Friday every week after school, and a review of student

demographics and testing data were considered important. Intern principal 1 commented

on the timeliness of the process of graduating students: 'the greatest opportunity to

increase graduation rates, comes with your students of color…. having the freshman class

[this year] I plan to catch them as soon as they hit the door… and help them understand

what this four-year process looks like'.

Assistant principal 4 sees a systems approach in helping students be successful. She stated this point several times during the interview. This excerpt summarizes her thoughts:

> The leadership makes it clear that it is our goal to move these students through the process as successfully as we can to ensure that students achieve at the optimum level, to ensure that the students understand that graduation is the ultimate goal….we've already started [second week since the start of school] tutoring in all subjects and for the SAT, and we've started talking about the push-ins for math....I've got 80 to 100 students that have not passed reading and/or math….we mean business and we need to walk them through this step by step…they just need to know we're there, 'come see us if there's a problem, we will fix it, we will work it out'.

A second program which has been very successful at SHS is the supper program. The leadership team explained how by extending the instructional hours in the day, a supper program for students who participated in after-school activities became necessary. This is an example of an action that has now become a routine for the leadership team at SHS. It was clear in their summary of the program that they did not want the students to think that this was a second lunch or an extension of lunch, but rather a healthy food option composed of larger portions and with menu items that may be classified as dinner entrees. Dinner time at SHS, needed to feel like a dignified dining occasion with peers as a start to the second part of a student's day.

A third program which serves juniors and seniors at SHS is the iCon program. iCon is a mentoring program sponsored by the SBBC school district in conjunction with

Career Service Broward, and it is coordinated at SHS by the guidance director. Students who are struggling with academic, personal or social issues are paired up with a faculty member for mentoring sessions. The sessions can take place before the start of school, during lunch, or after school. The guidance director saw a need for the program when he started working at South High School several years ago and every year the program has seen an increase in student enrollment and in teachers who wish to fulfill the role of mentors. iCon is another example of a program that was initiated by one of the leadership team members through effective networking with the SBBC, became a routine and has evolved into a respectable and valuable program for students and faculty.

Finding two revealed that: The leadership team is knowledgeable, strongly motivated, and devoted to their role as leaders in serving all students. A recurring theme of caring and compassion for all students was evident in the data analysis for this case study. Themes regarding the passion the leadership team experienced regarding their role, and the love and dedication for the students quickly emerged from the data. Examples of these themes include, caring for students, nurturing and accommodating practices, hands-on leadership, time commitment and collaborative team effort among other similar terms.

The guidance director who is also known as the director of student services, fervently described his role of leader as one who cares for his students by providing them with any support they need to reach the goal of graduation. With frequent pounding on his desk to make a point, he indicated that leadership is about the inspiration and motivation that starts at the top with the principal and filters to the faculty and to the students. He stated that he received his guidance from the principal because he sees that

she is empathetic and nurturing with the students and is always supportive of them by encouraging them to be successful students. He sees this principal attribute as an important quality for his leadership style. He explains it further by stating:

You've got to be able to inspire teachers and when you inspire teachers you are able to inspire the kids…and it starts from the top with the principal. She lets everyone know her love and compassion for the kids and we feel that love, that passion…and it trickles down so we never say to no to kids. That's the number one reason why the success rate is so high, we never say 'no' to kids, they come first. If you don't care about the kids then why are you even here?

There is a strong sense of ownership and pride among the leadership team in seeing the success of their students and of their school's programs. The Magnet program which consists of two very different curriculum programs, the Cambridge Academy Studies and Pre-Law programs have a combined enrollment of approximately 1,300 students who are almost evenly divided between both programs. This academic year approximately 150 ninth-graders became Cambridge freshmen. This type of success in student enrollment in signature programs for example, creates an incentive and motivates the leadership team to aspire in reaching higher goals for their school.

For example, each one of the team leaders concurred in their motivation to be the 'best' for their students. Assistant principal 4 expressed it in the following manner when speaking about how proud and excited she is when working as a team with her teacher leaders and with colleagues when addressing the at-risk student population:

We have an amazing support facilitation network at this school. They are focused on the seniors to make sure that they get the accommodations that they need to

pass their courses….last year we implemented the 'blended EDMENTUM'

program and we had administrators over it, and five to six teachers teaching it and

our guidance director was involved in it; they're already doing the graduation

letters. They're all over those kids, calling them in and then the parents, you've

got to be kidding. This shows how amazing this school is!

Assistant principal 2 caps off this idea by stating: "it's a desire to be the best in

the east, it's fun to be competitive" in reference to the pride and the "glory" he feels of

being a leadership team member at SHS.

The concept of devotion to the role of leader emerged as a theme in terms of the

dedication and time devoted in order to be able to run the school. Finding one illustrated

how these school leaders build a culture of learning through a system of processes,

programs and student support initiatives that (in finding two) requires numerous work

hours beyond the ordinary work day.

During the multiple times that I visited and conducted observations at SHS, which

was usually in the afternoons, the leadership team was starting the second part of their

day usually after 3:00p.m. This is the time when the leadership team met for their

administrative meetings, supervised the after school program, scheduled meetings with

students who form part of the credit recovery program or their parents, supervised the

supper program, took care of their phone calls, emails or text messages, from parents the

school district, colleagues or the community members. These are highlighted as a few

examples and not inclusive of all of their leader responsibilities or what needed to be

accomplished before the start of the next day.

On one recent Friday, one of the assistant principals after having met with me, attended meetings with the principal and some of her colleagues to discuss important and pending issues from the week. On the following day Saturday, a regional debate competition with 2,000 student participants was scheduled to be held at SHS. Although not specifically mentioned, I observed how all of the team leaders remained on campus, past the regular school day and as expressed by the leadership team members, late into the evening to catch up on their assistant principal responsibilities.

The intern principal concurred with his colleagues on how the appropriation of resources moves students farther academically and which requires an incredible amount of time commitment and effort. Towards the end of the interview the intern principal reflected on how there is no magic formula for their success; it is about the hard work and dedication that they have invested as school leaders. "We do more to move or students on all levels….when you talk about the time you spend doing it, then you understand how it translates to the results we have". He finished his thoughts on the dedication to his role as leader: "I'm here at 6:30 in the morning. At 6:00 p.m. I'm getting warmed up on most days….the kids don't leave until five o'clock. Then I deal with what is required….we find a way".

The principal at SHS expressed her motivation and dedication to her position as a leader by always putting the students first: "the students have to know that I think they're the most important, the teachers and the adults will figure it out that they're important too, but the kids come first". With respect to her interactions with the students, and her responsibilities as a school leader, the principal with a calm but serious tone spoke openly about difficulties that are inherent in the position of school leader and how being aware

of one's own disposition is important. She concurred with the rest of her team on

leadership interactions that appear unending, like the master schedule, which is very

difficult to complete within a prescribed period of time:

> This is why I can't do this job in a normal day. But I can't do it any other way.
>
> We're still doing the master schedule, tweaking, hiring new people and I can't be
>
> done until it's as perfect as possible, which is crazy because I will burn out
>
> because of it, but I don't know how to do it any other way. You sit with thousands
>
> of schedules trying to place the kids with the right teachers. A lot of people don't
>
> do that and they're healthier and they're not angry all the time.

She concluded the interview by reflecting on leadership and how she has gained

confidence in her own leadership style after teachers have begun to understand the

"madness" behind her approach. This excerpt from the principal demonstrates the

passion and devotion that forms her role as principal. Not only is there passion but in

addition a sense of total dedication to the role and position in making sure that students as

this excerpt shows, receive schedules that are individually crafted to accommodate their

academic needs with a hand-selected or best teacher for that particular student.

Case Study: North High School (NHS)

Background

North High School (NHS) is located in the northeastern sector of Broward County

serving students from the city of Oakland Park, Fort Lauderdale and North Lauderdale.

NHS opened its doors in 1961 and had its first graduating class in 1965. The school lies

in what appears to be a typical Florida neighborhood of small row houses not yet touched

by real estate developers. A medical center once popular in meeting the needs of local

residents sits abandoned on the corner which precisely signals the turn onto North High

School.

An important benchmark for all schools on the first day of school is to obtain and

accurate count of the number of students who are present in class. This count provides

principals with a close estimate of what the school's enrollment will be for the year, and

accurate reporting of the number of students present in school is deemed a very important

administrative function. Student enrollment numbers are then reported to the central

offices of the school district so that a total district enrollment count may be generated.

Table 13 illustrates the first day enrollment count for North High School by grade level

for the current school year 2015-2016, and for the 2009-2010 school year which marked

the first year of the timeframe of the study.

Table 13

*North High School (NHS) First Day Student Enrollment by Grade Level-Current School
Year vs. Study's First Year Mark*

	2015-16 (n)	2015-16 (%)	2009-10 (n)	2009-10 (%)
9th Grade	491	26	588	27
10th Grade	447	24	563	26
11th Grade	472	26	574	26
12th Grade	448	24	461	21
Total	1,858	100	2,186	100

Note. Table adapted from http://www.browardschools.com.

While the first day enrollment count provides a reliable estimated count of the number of students that will attend school, the official Benchmark Day enrollment provides a more detailed breakdown of students attending each school in the district. The Benchmark Day enrollment for North High School for 2015-16, usually reported on the Monday after the Labor Day holiday or the 15th day of the school year, illustrates the racial and ethnic breakdown of the student population as follows: White 49.0%; Black/African American 40.8%; Hispanic 36.1%; Multi-Racial 4.0%; Asian 1.4%; Native American and Pacific Islander 4.7%. There are 952 males or 51.0% and 915 females or 49.0% for a total enrollment of 1,867 students. Table 14 displays the enrollment percentages for North High School for the 2015-16 school year as well as for the 2009-10 school year which as noted previously marked the first year of the timeframe of the study.

Table 14

North High School (NHS) Benchmark Enrollment by Diversity Categories-Current
School Year vs. Study's First Year Mark

	2015-16 (n)	2015-16 (%)	2009-10 (n)	2009-10 (%)
Male	952	51.0	1,223	54.1
Female	915	49.0	1036	49.5
White	915	49.0	783	34.7
Black	762	40.8	717	31.7
Hispanic	(674)	(36.1)	(673)	(29.8)
Asian	26	1.4	38	1.7
Native American	88	4.7	3	0.1
Multi-Racial	74	4.0	45	2.0
Total	1,867	100	2,259	100

Note. Table adapted from http://www.broward.k12.us./dsa/enrollmentcounts.shtml.
Ethnically Hispanic students are included within each of the diversity categories, if
applicable.

NHS has a student population of 1,867 students. Each administrator is in charge of one grade level, and they remain in that level while students move onto the next grade the following year. In dividing the total number of enrolled students by each grade level, each administrator and counselor is responsible for assisting approximately 465 students in reaching their academic goals. In the guidance department, counselors are also responsible for one grade level and in order to share the load of the senior class, the 12th grade is divided alphabetically among all counselors. The splitting of the 12th-grade class reduces the pressure of the graduating class on just one professional counselor.

Each assistant principal served as the leader for a specific grade level and worked closely with same grade level counselor, and guidance director. Likewise the guidance director works closely with the leadership team and with her guidance staff to ensure that students are on the correct path towards graduation. In addition, the magnet coordinator manages the curricular and placement needs of students in each of the three magnet programs offered at NHS. If students are enrolled in special programs such as English Language Learners (ELL) or ESE they count on additional support professionals such as ELL Coordinators or ESE Specialists, who work closely with the leadership team in assessing academic achievement standards and student needs.

NHS which appears to be approximately 50 years old and in line to be remodeled soon sits on a quiet residential street. The building structure and façade is typical of schools from the 1960's where the entire front of the school stretches close to the entire length of the block. Two parallel pathways lead up to the main school doors, for access into the school. As soon as one enters the school, the main office is immediately to the right. A small office with limited seating, this is the first point of entry where parents and

visitors, present identifying documentation and are provided with adhesive badges to wear before they are directed to the appropriate school departments.

The principal's office may be accessed through the office manager's office or through a narrow hallway, where all of the faculty and staff mailboxes are located. The principal's office is of a normal size, and furnished tastefully with a large desk, chairs and a conference table where the leadership team meets for their weekly meetings. Two of the assistant principals have offices in this area while the other two assistant principals have offices in the Student Services office which connects to the main office through a series of back hallways. Outside the Student Services office, students were observed midweek during after-school activities, practicing cheers and flag twirling in a large open area used for travel to and from classes.

Magnet Programs

NHS is a triple Magnet school offering specialized curriculum in Industrial Biotechnology, Alternative Energy and the Latin Academy. All of the Magnet programs are college preparatory and promote strong academic achievement and intellectual curiosity. The Industrial Biotechnology program prepares students for careers in the popular and growing field of Biotechnology by offering a rigorous curriculum of core academic courses and technology-oriented design electives. Dual enrollment courses in this program allow students to earn college credit while pursuing a high school diploma.

The second Magnet program is the Alternative Energy Program which provides students with a series of courses focused on the emerging alternative energy industry, solar energy safety and environmental principles. Laboratory-based activities are a major

part of the program. New classrooms were designed as labs to accommodate students'

academic needs for the program.

Students enrolled in the third Magnet program the Latin Academy take a variety

of courses which point to a liberal arts concentration. Courses in the arts, science,

literature, and technology conform in meeting the requirements of the program

(www.browardschools.com). In addition students are encouraged to participate in

Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses where they may develop additional

academic skills.

The Magnet program which consists of three different curriculum programs has a

combined enrollment of approximately 600 students. Students who attend North High

School's Magnet programs reside in all areas of the county. They generally board school

buses at 5:45 a.m. allowing enough time for an early arrival for breakfast, followed by the

start of classes at approximately 7:15 a.m.

Participants

At North High School the participants of this study consisted of one principal

(male), four assistant principals (two females, two males), and one teacher leader

(female). In this case study and as recommended by the principal, an aspiring

administrator was interviewed as the teacher leader participant. Aspiring administrators

are teacher leaders interested in pursuing an assistant principal position in the school

district, and fulfill administrative responsibilities at their school site such as that of SAC

chair or serving as a liaison between teachers and administration. Professional and career

experience among the members of the leadership team was 91 years. Years of experience

as leaders at NHS was 34 years. Table 15 provides a view of the participants'

demographics and years of professional experience.

Table 15

North High School (NHS) Participants' Demographics, Years of Professional Experience

	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Years of Experience Current School
Principal	M	W	12	<1
Intern Principal 1	F	W	27	3
Assistant Principal 2	M	W	21	8
Assistant Principal 3	F	W	12	7
Assistant Principal 4	M	B	11	10
Teacher Leader 1	F	B	8	6

Note. Table adapted from interview data.

Findings: NHS

Two findings were identified in this case study. They are (1) These school

leaders use data as guiding variables in making decisions regarding at-risk student

achievement and success and (2) These school leaders develop and foster positive

relationships with students and teachers. Finding one addresses RQ 1 and SQs 1 and 2.

Finding two addresses RQ 1and SQ 3.

These school leaders use data as guiding variables in making decisions regarding

at-risk student achievement and success. The importance of multiple types of data and

how they are used by the leadership team emerged as a theme during data analysis. This

data piece, as expressed by the leadership team and teacher leader is crucial in mapping

out next steps to take when reviewing and trying to increase student success including for those students that are considered at-risk. At-risk students were defined as students who scored a Level 1 or a Level 2 on the reading portion of the eighth grade Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

Data-based decisions. All members of the leadership team consider data seeking, data application, data reporting, and data evaluation, necessary for developing and initiating academic programs that will promote graduation for students in ninth through 12th grade. Data which are important to the leadership team in assessing students' current level of academic performance include: data related to testing, Grade Point Averages (GPA's), credits, and student withdrawal coding.

Testing data. All members of the leadership team stated that by closely monitoring every number that affects a student, whether it was a test score or a student's grade average, administrators are moving closer or focusing in on what needs to occur in order for the student to graduate. The principal indicated that this year being his first at NHS, he was on a "big data push" with the leadership team and the faculty. He explained, that it is crucial to not only seek the data for the school, programs and students at the leader level, but that it is equally important to achieve the buy-in from the teachers, especially on why data needs to guide instruction at the classroom level. In his 12 years of experience as an assistant principal at a former high school, his leadership responsibilities included working with seniors and assessing what barrier(s) were preventing students from graduating. He elaborated on how scoring in the passing range for at-risk students is a hurdle for them and how important it is for his teachers to understand the data regarding their students. He commented: "it definitely falls on the

teachers and knowing their data, we can remove some of the barriers but you have to own the data, making it your own". As expressed by the principal, this is an example of the use of tools, in this case student data, to guide instruction at the classroom level.

In the interview the principal expressed that the company which scores the Florida Standard Assessment (FSA), the new state assessment which requires a passing score in order for students to graduate, had problems in providing test score data to all of the state's high schools in time for the start of the 2015-16 school year. All schools were unable to plan for courses in areas such as reading or language arts as these scores were not available for school leaders to review. As a result student schedules were incomplete and students who may have passed the FSA were placed in reading classes regardless. In essence, after the start of the school year, leadership teams were only able to estimate what reading course a student would need for the year. Frustration regarding the timeliness of this data was repeated by members of the leadership team. The principal expressed his thoughts in the next passage:

> We finally received notice today on the FSA *that it's valid*, [emphasis added] so we're getting some T- scores and we'll be able to know if we've placed the kids properly. There's no way that any school can plan with getting the data back so late. It's a huge issue.

Data from mini-assessments (school/district developed tests) which started to be administered during the second week of classes are important in determining the action plan for student improvement. Coupled with this data, is the data on the standards that teachers need to understand, so that in evaluating assessments teachers can adjust their lesson plans by re-teaching or reviewing the standards. Assistant principal 2 made an

interesting point regarding how the leadership team views this assessment data and how teachers need to understand their subject standards so that teaching can be more effective. He explained the following during the interview:

> Leadership can't be messy; it has to be defined as something everyone has to see….we've broken down the standards (for the teachers) into quarters and made professional study days (PSD) into assessment days for the students…you'll have buy-in with that….that's not necessarily something we did with fidelity in these three years, but each year I think we get better at it.

Grade point average data. Excitement and a sense of pride were evident when assistant principal 2 spoke of his 10th-grade group. Reaching for his own high school transcript and a former student's high school planner meeting with me in his office, he began to explain the importance of one of the most famous three letter acronyms in high school: GPA. Using metaphors and real life examples, to explain the "student's academic worth", this leader provided examples of real-life situations to his students in order for them to understand the value and importance that course grades deserve. He explained that during the first week of school when he held the traditional yearly assembly for his 10th-grade class, 33% of the students had GPA's that were below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. This equates to a below "C" average. He continued by stating that this class was very similar to his 10th-grade classes from previous years and that this percentage is representative of 10th-grade classes in the school district as well. He summarized his thoughts in the following manner:

> It's not until they sit in my office in 10th grade and look back and go my gosh, I didn't believe anything of what you guys said, this is real. I tell the kids all the

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time while looking at the TERMS screens… you just got tattooed with a GPA

below a 2.0….and I also have a presentation for the bottom 35% on top of the

main presentation because this is the year they need to make changes…and my

motto is survive with a 2.5, if you can go through ninth grade with a 2.5 you will

graduate, it's a no brainer.

Credits. Intern principal 1 remarked during her interview how keeping a close

watch on the number of credits that students earn is always an important function for

counselors who then share this information with the leadership team. Just as she was

about to continue with her next comment, a female student announced over the intercom

system that credit recovery classes were available and that students needed to sign up

quickly to ensure their spot in the course needed. The credit recovery announcement was

made at an opportunistic time and noted on the observation log.

All members of the leadership team and the teacher leader indicated in their

responses the need to be vigilant with credit hours. At different times of the year, when

master schedule changes are made that affect entire classes, it is necessary for counselors

to go back to each student whose class was replaced with another, and ensure that credit

requirements for graduation are still being met. Open, frequent and concise,

communication between the administration and the guidance department is essential.

In reference to credits and how important it is to closely monitor this type of data,

intern principal 1referred to the following: "last year we shared data with teacher leaders

on 12th-graders that were struggling with their grades and credits…we met every week

and teacher leaders started mentoring even if just one student showed up for help".

The principal also spoke about how crucial it is for everyone to closely monitor student credits in a serious tone:

We had a student who was a pretty smart kid…not much motivation and fell behind. The student withdrew from our school, attended credit recovery came back but was still behind 10 credits….and he clawed and scratched and fought his way back, but at some point was given the wrong information. I don't know if it was our school or his previous school but he still needed to make up a half-credit and this was May 1st ….but he pushed and pushed and pushed and was able to meet the requirements…making him complete one and a half years in one year and not giving up… it's a pretty good story.

Student withdrawal coding. The coding of students when they withdraw from a school is an important leadership function that needs to be closely monitored and reported to the state. Any student that withdraws from a school at any time of the year receives a code on his electronic record on the TERMS database. This type of data involves various codes and knowing and understanding which codes to use at the time of withdrawal is important. The "dropout codes" negatively impact a school's graduating class and the "diploma codes" are favorable towards a school's graduating class. Accurate coding of students at the time of withdrawal is strongly recommended as it ensures that a student's transfer to another school in the district, in the state, or out of the state is reported correctly to the state.

At the time that a student is recommended for credit recovery, a systematic follow- through of the student should start from the moment the student and parent sign the withdrawal form at the school site. If the student decides at some point afterward that

he does not wish to attend a credit recovery program or any alternative program for that matter, the original school is still the owner of the student record and the student must be coded as a dropout. Several times a year, schools are not aware that the student is not attending the intended school until months later, when the student's name surfaces on a report from the state that identifies the student as a potential dropout. If however, the student decides to attend a credit recovery program at an alternative high school, a charter school or another high school in the district, then the student's record is now assigned to the new receiving school and the exiting school assigns him a transfer student code. The designation or assignment of a withdrawal code to a student upon leaving is an important operational function in high schools. The total number of withdrawal codes is further evaluated by each high school at various times during the school year and close attention is given to students who transfer to other schools, other states or other countries. Table 16 lists withdrawal codes, definitions, graduate designations, and number of diplomas awarded for the state of Florida from 2009-2012.

Table 16

State of Florida Student Withdrawal Codes, Definitions, Graduate Designations, Number of Diplomas

Codes/Definitions	Graduates (G) Or Non- Graduates (NG)	2009-10 (n)	2010-11 (n)	2011-12 (n)
W06-Graduated and met all requirements of standard diploma.	Standard Diploma (G)	132,783	133,766	132,333
W6A-Graduated and met all requirements of standard diploma based on the 18-credit college prep option.	Standard Diploma (G)	89	15	32
W6B-Graduated and met all requirements of standard diploma based on the 18-credit career prep option.	Standard Diploma (G)	27	6	14
WFT-Graduated and met all requirements of standard diploma and satisfied the graduation test requirement through an alternate assessment.	Standard Diploma (G)	10,458	5,865	6,716

(continued)

Table 16

State of Florida Student Withdrawal Codes, Definitions, Graduate Designations, Number of Diplomas (continued)

Codes/Definitions	Graduates(G) Or Non- Graduates (NG)	2009-10 (n)	2010-11 (n)	2011-12 (n)
WFW- Graduated with a standard diploma and an FCAT waiver.	Standard Diploma (G)	2,700	3,447	2,681
W07- Graduated with a special diploma based on mastery of standards.	Special Diploma (NG)	3,750	3,408	2,661
W27- Graduated with a special diploma based on mastery of employment competencies.	Special Diploma (NG)	401	217	161
W08- Received a Certificate of Completion.	Certif. of Completion (NG)	—	—	—

Note. Table adapted from http://www.browardschools.com. Ethnically Hispanic students are included within the each of the diversity characteristics. A partial list of withdrawal codes is included in this table. — = data not available.

The principal of NHS was very clear on his role regarding coding and the graduates at his school. He expressed his thoughts regarding coding in the following passage:

Unfortunately some kids have done little work, have two to three credits and have a point something GPA; I think the alternative schools are the way to go…a lot of these schools in the 70th or 80th percentiles were able to do this and monitor students closely and follow the kids…*Now we know* [emphasis added] that if a kid doesn't go to that school and sign up you still own them….two to three years ago you couldn't even track them on TERMS, now you get a report.

Assistant principal 4 expressed his concern regarding the difference in the ninth grade enrollment data when compared to the number of students who successfully reach 12th grade. His summary includes the following:

I look at the ninth grade orientation and we have grade level assemblies and I walk in and see 625 kids and we graduate 400 kids; I know our grad rate. Yes, well some of them transferred, it's all about the coding…. I think we're all caught up now and I don't think this will happen anymore and I think what's going to happen is that there's no more of this coding business.

There is a sense of passion and at the same time concern in noting the difference in enrollment rates between ninth and 12th grade. As students reach 11th or 12th grade they are faced with tough decisions regarding the credit recovery options and while some are successful in their pursuit others are not. Many times students are not able to navigate the demands of a program that not only requires high motivation, but an ability to work independently with little or no teacher support. As weeks and months elapse,

students who do not make adequate progress find that the program does not suit their learning style, and they drop out, or try to enroll in another program that advertises student success but is very similar to the previous one that was never a match for the student's academic needs.

Finding two revealed that: These school leaders develop and foster positive relationships with students and teachers. A recurring theme of developing connections, with students and teachers was evident in the data analysis for this case study. Themes regarding relationships and reaching out to students especially the ones that may have deviated from an academic track were frequently discussed. In referring to teachers, themes of passion for education and sharing best practices as they further their relationships with their students were noted (Smith & Andrews, 1989). Examples of these themes included lasting relationships, addressing basic student needs first, and continuing to be a role model for the student even after graduation.

Assistant principal 4 and teacher leader 1 felt that developing relationships is important from ninth grade on. As young teenagers coming in to a large high school, there are many pressures including peer and academic pressures that students are subjected to, many times in the first few months of school. Some students can handle the academic and social pressures well, while others do not, and end up visiting an administrator usually for discipline issues. Some students arrive in the first week with real-life issues that need immediate attention. Knowing who the students are and being supportive of them is a preliminary first step. Academic reports on entering ninth grade students are available on the various databases including TERMS, Virtual Counselor and BASIS. School leaders make it a priority to review these reports as early as the

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preceding spring semester and during the summer before the start of classes. Some of the comments relevant to this finding were expressed as follows:

When you look at your at-risk students you have to think about your basic needs for survival, food, shelter….forget about the test scores….and that GPA says a lot, it's not always a choice because there's a lot of aggravating factors….we have to make sure that things are suitable for them to even peek over the fence of maybe going to school and doing well and letting them know that there's a couple of people they can turn to and are in their corner. With at-risk kids it's not so much all about the data, but finding out what is the singular or maybe those couple of things that are deterring from the data.

When the principal was asked about his role in improving graduation rates, he quickly answered referring to his teachers with a focused yet thoughtful stare:

That's my main purpose for being here. I don't think at this time the bar is set very high here. Graduation rates improvement is building a relationship. I'm always in awe of teachers and students that are there after school, during lunch. What makes that teacher tick? Every school has those teachers at the high end or low and its knowing how to make relationships either caring or compassionate and learning what makes them special.

Assistant principal 2 summarized his routines and interventions with his students by emphasizing how relationships have influenced his own personal and professional development. In his life there have been individuals that were seriously interested in his academic success and well-being. He reflects on these experiences when he meets with

his 10th-grade class and shares many of his personal encounters with powerful messages as illustrated in the following passage:

> With interventions I show them two things, my high school transcripts, which were not very good and I show them a planner from a kid in 2005 who totally turned his life around…. I knew in high school I was going to survive and get C's, that's all I wanted to do. Then I moved into college and got my Bachelor's with a 3.0 and my Master's with a 4.0…. The only difference in those three transcripts wasn't intellectual awakening or reasoning, it was motivation. So the intervention piece comes from that motivation piece which brings up all of us. This is the "bring you up stage" and this kid wasn't doing horrible he was fluttering through high school; he was going to be another *me* [emphasis added].

The experiences shared by assistant principal 2 were probably some of the most powerful exchanges I've witnessed regarding the passion and dedication that many of the leaders in the study feel towards helping students reach their academic goals especially in relation to graduation. This leader sees himself in many students' lives and knows what steps he needs to take in order to be the student's best advocate, and to develop relationships with his students even as he fulfills his role of assistant principal and disciplinarian in certain cases.

He added his final thoughts on special people at NHS, by making reference to mentors that make a difference in students' lives, and how significant educational lessons both for the professional and the student alike, are important in fostering relationships for years to come. Close to the end of the interview he remarked:

Every person has that mentor, that person that changed them. I'm not trying to do

it thousands of times a year, but at least five or 10. As educators you want to look

back and say: 'how many weddings were you invited to, how many times did a

kid come back to invite you to dinner, how many e-mails do you get from kids

that are so long gone that you don't even remember their names. So if you can

find that in education, slowly but surely just look at the data… we're going to

increase the graduation rate.

The conclusion of the interview followed shortly after this exchange. These

school leaders place a high value on building relationships with their students as well as

with their teachers as the findings show for NHS.

A cross-case analysis of each one of the case studies will follow. The chapter will

conclude with a summary, before presenting in Chapter 5 a discussion of the findings,

conclusions of the study and recommendations.

Cross-Case Analysis

In this qualitative study, three high schools were studied to understand the leadership practice of principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders in improving graduation rates. The data collection methods involved participant interviews, observations of leadership team meetings and review of documents. In the cross-case analysis I will be presenting the research question and each of the three sub-questions by answering each one based on the findings. The similarities and differences for each one of the three case studies will be discussed. In describing similarities, the findings will be compared to each one of the case studies, to identify themes, constructs or patterns which were similar among the three cases. In citing differences among the case studies, outlier data or data which was relevant in only one case study or as reflected by one participant will be discussed.

This analysis will include a table of the different enrichment programs at each of the school sites, the Magnet programs available in two of the case studies, and the types of credit recovery options available to students at each of the school sites. This discussion will be followed by Table 18 which will highlight the graduation rates for each school site and will include the graduation rates of the tri-county area of Broward, Miami Dade and Palm Beach from 2009-2012.

Research Questions and Findings

RQ1: In schools that demonstrate an increase in graduations rates, what types of leadership practices are evidenced in principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders?

The leadership practices evidenced in the three case studies experiencing an increase in graduation rates included: establishing a clear vision of high expectations;

developing student achievement processes, programs and support initiatives; using data as an important determinant regarding at-risk student achievement; and developing valuable relationships with students and teachers. These leaders reflected on their leadership practice by describing, developing and initiating student achievement programs which are accepted by school members and can be measured through student success in meeting high school graduation standards.

While Central High School's vision of high expectations resulted in the highest number of school-based enrichment programs, similarly South High School's leadership team presented themselves as innovators in creating specific programs for its students. Likewise, North High School described their leadership practice by highlighting the importance of data in making program decisions that guided various student-centered programs with a focus on graduating students. Forming relationships among teachers, students and the leadership team was a high priority for NHS, and as evidenced in CHS and SHS, the "buy in" of which their leadership team spoke, reflected the importance of collaborative professional development and the forging of relationships with teachers. These teachers go the "extra-mile" to assist students in and out of the classroom in being successful academically. Table 17 follows and provides a summary of the academic support programs offered at each of the high school sites in the study.

Table 17

Academic Enrichment Programs-Student Support Initiatives by School Site

Programs	Central High School (CHS)	South High School (SHS)	North High School (NHS)	Before (B) During (D) After (A) School
Credit Recovery	BVS, FLVS, APEX, EDMENTUM	BVS, FLVS, Blended EDMENTUM	BVS, FLVS, EDMENTUM	B, D, A
Pull Out Labs/ Workshops	Test Prep ACT, SAT	Test Prep ACT, SAT	Test Prep ACT, SAT	B, D, A
Graduation-Centered Group Assemblies	Yes	Yes	Yes	D
Senior Student Mentoring	Yes	Yes	Yes	B, D, A
Saturday Academy	Yes	No	No	A
Funding of ACT/SAT	Yes	Yes	No	D, A
Reading, Language Arts, Math Remediation	Yes	Yes	No	D

Table 17

Academic Enrichment Programs-Student Support Initiatives by School Site (continued)

Programs	Central High School (CHS)	South High School (SHS)	North High School (NHS)	Before (B) During (D) After (A) School
Tutoring Program	Yes	Yes (STAR)	Yes	A
Student-Centered Counseling	Yes	Yes	Yes	B, D, A
Magnet Programs	No	Yes (2)	Yes (3)	D
Supper Program	No	Yes	No	A

Note. BVS = Broward Virtual School. FLVS = Florida Virtual School. APEX and EDMENTUM are software programs used in credit recovery. Table adapted from interview data and document analysis.

SQ 1: What are the actions, interactions, tools and routines that principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders use as part of their leadership practice when seeking to improve high school graduation rates?

The actions, interactions, and tools and routines that the leadership team employs as part of their leadership practice to improve high school graduation rates include: implementation and evaluation of academic enrichment programs; interactions with leaders, faculty and students where motivation and dedication to their role as leaders is

evident and the use of reports and data for improving overall school and student performance. All of the schools had similar interactions, tools and routines when seeking to improve student performance in the form of higher graduation rates. Interactions as defined in Chapter 1 include forms of communication among members of the leadership team and with faculty and students, interpersonal skills, and collaborative behaviors of the administration and faculty. Examples of interactions noted in the findings include student interventions such as the development of academic programs to bridge achievement gaps, graduation strategies assemblies, personal and academic, individual and group counseling sessions, promoting parental involvement, and monitoring student testing results and outcomes. Similar routines among the leaders in the three school sites included the practice of addressing students' needs within their grade level *before* the student reaches the 12th grade. Likewise, a second leader routine evident in the three school sites was the close monitoring of students who withdraw from school to ensure accurate coding.

Also relevant among all leaders, was the monitoring of forgiveness grades to improve grade averages, which as stated by the principal of NHS is an important routine: "looking at all students not just the struggling ones may improve a student's chance of getting into a more competitive university". A routine revealed by all team members of NHS which was different from CHS and SHS was that the senior class was divided among all the counselors in the department, for more effective time management, student attention, and deeper monitoring of 12th-grade student progress. In addition, assistant principals do not follow their students to the following grade level but rather remain as administrators in the same grade level. In essence this allows each of the leaders to

become experts in one grade level, by understanding the requirements, functions, processes and academic needs of students in that grade.

Tools discussed by all members of the leadership teams include the use of TERMS, Virtual Counselor, Data Warehouse and BASIS databases for evaluation of student profiles, student data, and student graduation projections. In addition the principal of NHS as noted during one observation, encouraged his staff to log on more often to the Office of School Accountability (OSPA) database, which provides additional information on student academic profiles and interventions used with the 12th-grade class specifically.

SQ 2: How do high school principals and assistant principals manage the accountability of changing standards in graduation rates and graduation requirements?

High school principals and assistant principals manage the accountability of changing standards in graduation rates and requirements by keeping abreast of legislative changes in K-12 education which directly affects graduation standards and students meeting graduation requirements. Each one of the schools studied, maintain accountability standards by instituting programs in their schools which allows students to fulfill and for some to excel in meeting academic requirements from ninth through 12th grade.

The findings for each school indicate that developing logistics and processes that support student needs, providing academic enrichment programs and support initiatives, using data effectively to evaluate at-risk student achievement, and the implementation and evaluation of academic enrichment programs are important measures when referring to accountability. Through a systematic process of monitoring and follow-thru, leaders

help to ensure that accountability standards are met by maintaining attention on students'

academic progression standards and on meeting graduation requirements in a four-year

timeframe.

Table 18, displays the NGA and Federal graduation rates, from 2009-2012 for

each school, for Broward County as well as the rates for each one of the neighboring

counties, Miami Dade and Palm Beach and for the state of Florida.

Table 18

High School Graduation Rates by School, District, and State

	2009-2010 NGA Rate	2010-2011 NGA/Federal Rates	2011-2012 Federal Rate
Central High School (CHS)	92.1%	95.2%/91.6%	94.9%
# of Graduates	383	550	522
School Grade	A	A	A
South High School (SHS)	82.6%	84.7%/76.4%	85.2%
# of Graduates	308	385	328
School Grade	B	B	A
North High School (NHS)	78.8%	89.4%/81.0%	92.9%
# of Graduates	461	424	394
School Grade	C	B	C
Tri-County Rate			
BCPS	77.7%	76.5%/71.6%	76.4%
M-DPS	72.1%	77.7%/71.3%	76.0%
PBPS	81.9%	79.1%/74.3%	77.0%
State of Florida Rate	79.0%	80.1%/70.6%	74.5%

Note. Adapted from data retrieved from http://www.browardschools.com.
M-DPS= Miami Dade Public Schools. PBPS= Palm Beach Public Schools.

Data from Table 18 indicates that Central High School (CHS) had the highest graduation rates among all schools from 2009-2012, while North High School (NHS) experienced the highest gain in graduation rates from 78.8 % in 2009-2010 to 89.4 % in 2010-11, under the NGA rate. Likewise under the Federal rate, NHS experienced an increase in their rates from 81.0 % in 2010-2011to 92.9 % in 2011-2012.

With respect to high school graduates, CHS had the highest increase in the number of graduates from 383 to 550 students between 2009-10 and 2010-11. SHS and NHS did not register such a significant enrollment increase during the same period of time: SHS increased its enrollment by 77 students between 2009-10 and 2010-11 while student enrollment at NHS maintained a downward trend. The increase for SHS is attributable mainly to changing demographic trends in the surrounding areas of the school and for CHS the higher number may be due to an increase in the number of students who are awarded a seat based on the lottery system at the school.

Each school's grade is represented by two scores: (1) the assessment components in the areas of performance, learning gains for all students and for students who fall in lowest 25 % of the cohort and (2) and high school components which include the high school graduation rate (the focus of this study) the percentage of participation and performance in accelerated courses and the percentage of students deemed college-ready in reading and math.   While CHS and SHS maintained school grades of A's and B's from 2009-2012, it is relevant to point out that NHS had a graduation rate of nearly 93% for the 2011-12 school year, yet the grade earned by the school was a "C". This is attributable in part to the points for assessment components and for high school

components which dropped for NHS, resulting in the lower school grade when compared to the previous year (FLDOE, 2011b)

SQ 3: What interactions of principals and assistant principals are observed relevant to improving high school graduation rates?

In the study this question seeks the perspective of the teacher leader in terms of what interactions are seen in the leadership practice of principals and assistant principals. Findings for each of the schools indicate that creating, communicating and maintaining a clear school vision that focuses on student achievement; a leadership team that understands the functions of their position and is passionate about their role as leader; and investing in relationship building with teachers and students are important interactions of principals and assistant principals.

The teacher leader who is the guidance director at CHS has 14 years of experience in education eight of which are at the current school. During an observation of the weekly leadership team meeting, he led the meeting of ten members of the faculty consisting of academic coaches, testing coordinator, office manager and the administration by providing an update of where the senior class stands in October (of this academic year) with respect to graduation. The data that he shared with the group indicated that CHS "is in a good place" with respect to the senior class. He reported that three out of the five seniors who needed to pass the math testing component had been successful and had met the requirement. This teacher leader's perspective of what leader interactions are important in improving high school graduation rates included: setting the example of high expectations on campus, being visible as leaders on campus at all times,

being a role model and setting an example of compassion and leadership for faculty, students and staff.

The teacher leader who is also the guidance director at SHS has 20 years of experience in education, four of which are at the current school. It was clear during our interview that this teacher leader fulfills the duties of his position with fervent enthusiasm and passion as he detailed the "love" that he feels for his students and their academic progress. He stated "leadership is love" and considers it highly important that leaders need to be empathetic of a student's journey in reaching graduation. This interaction he says emanates from the principal as she sets the standard for the care and compassion that should come first with students. In his characteristic euphoric tone he expressed the following regarding the principal: "a leader like that I would go above and beyond for because one— she cares about what she does, she cares about the kids and guess what— she cares about me".

The teacher leader who is an aspiring administrator at NHS has eight years of experience in education, four years of which have been in the capacity of teacher leader at the current school. She is the ninth-grade academy coordinator, serves as the school-wide initiatives liaison for the school and also serves as the School Advisory Council Chairperson. Interactions that she says are important in leaders at her school include: following the vision and direction of administration, students needing to meet their academic goals, and developing relationships early in their high school careers so as to help in meeting these goals. She stated that "think graduation" is the framework that they promote with the ninth-grade class, as they guide students towards graduation. Creating a mindset early in high school channels students into thinking about the multiple steps

and academic requirements that must be met before they are "official" seniors. She indicated during our interview: "our goal of providing tools to help increase graduation potential for students while still in ninth grade is the end product".

Teacher leadership is important to recognize at NHS, especially for a teacher professional who is assuming the role of assistant principal (as an aspiring administrator) in certain capacities while also serving as a teacher leader. Her position in the school is a balance of her role as a teacher leader, and serving as a resource for teachers and students, while gaining experience and learning about her responsibilities for a future position as administrator.

Years of experience among the leaders in the three case studies varied both in years of experience as administrators and in years of experience in education. At NHS assistant principal 1 has been the 12th-grade administrator for three years, assistant principal 2 has been the 10th-grade administrator for eight years, assistant principal 3 has been the 11th-grade administrator for seven years, assistant principal 4 has been the ninth grade administrator for 10 years and teacher leader 1 has served in a leadership position for six years. This is equivalent to 34 years of experience at the same school and in the same grade level. The total number of years of experience in education for the NHS leadership team is 91.

Unlike NHS, both leadership teams at CHS and SHS follow their students to their next grade level and loop back around to ninth grade when their class graduates. The total number of years of experience as leaders at CHS is 42, and the total number of years of experience in education is 114. The total number of years of experience as leaders at SHS is 22, while the total number of years in education is 89. CHS has the most

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experienced leadership team both in years of experience at the current school and in years of experience in education when compared to NHS and SHS. By looking at the years of experience, school grades and graduation rates at CHS one can see a pattern, that years of experience in leadership practice in high school are a strong determinant in the overall success of the school and its students when referring to graduation rates.

Chapter Summary

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore the leadership practice of principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders in three high school sites. The high schools that met criteria of increasing graduation rates from 2009-2012 were Central High School, South High School and North High School. Table 19 which follows provides a summary of all the findings of the study.

Table 19

Summary of Findings of Study

	Findings	Theme relevant in all three schools
Central High School (CHS)	School leaders establish a clear vision, mission or goal to increase graduation rates. (RQ 1, SQ 3)	Yes
	Identification, management and evaluation of academic enrichment programs are necessary interventions for student success (SQ 1, 2)	Yes
South High School (SHS)	School leaders build a culture of student learning and achievement through a system of processes, programs and support initiatives. (RQ 1, SQ 2)	Yes
	The leadership team is knowledgeable, strongly motivated and devoted to their role as leaders in serving all students. (SQ 1, 3)	Yes
North High School (NHS)	School leaders use data as guiding variables in making decisions regarding at-risk student achievement and success. ((RQ 1, SQ 1, 2)	Yes
	School leaders develop and foster positive relationships with students and teachers (RQ 1, SQ 3)	Yes

Note. Table adapted from data analysis of findings.

Based on the analysis of the data, six findings, two findings per school emerged in this study. The first two findings for Central High School outline how school leaders establish a clear vision, mission or goal to increase graduation rates and describe how the identification, management and evaluation of academic enrichment programs are necessary interventions for student success. The next set of findings for the second case study South High School discusses how school leaders build a culture of student learning and achievement through a system of processes, programs and support initiatives; and describes how the leadership team is knowledgeable, strongly motivated, and devoted to their role as leaders in serving all students. The third set of findings for North High School outlines how school leaders use data as guiding variables in making decisions regarding at-risk student achievement and success and discusses how school leaders develop and foster positive relationships with students and teachers. Chapter 5 will follow with a discussion of the findings, conclusions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This researcher conducted a multi-site case study to understand the leadership practice of principals and assistant principals and teacher leaders in schools that had experienced an increase in graduation rates from 2009-2012. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the leadership practice of high school principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders by determining what their role is with respect to increasing high school graduation rates. Specifically, schools that sustained and increase in changing graduation rates were studied to gain a better understanding of what leadership practices are evidenced or may have any relevance in improving graduation rates.

In the study there was one overarching research question that addressed the leadership practice of principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders. The central focus of this study was based on this question:

In schools that demonstrate an increase in graduations rates, what types of leadership practices are evidenced in principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders?

Three sub-questions were developed to elicit responses regarding actions, interactions, tools and routines that form part of this leadership practice, accountability measures taken when referring to graduation rates and requirements, and interactions of the leadership team as observed by teacher leaders. Sub-questions of the study included:

1. What are the actions, interactions, tools and routines that principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders use as part of their leadership practice when seeking to improve high school graduation rates?

2. How do high school principals and assistant principals manage the accountability of changing standards in graduation rates and graduation requirements?

3. What interactions of principals and assistant principals are observed relevant to improving high school graduation rates?

This chapter will present a discussion of the findings by case study, it will provide conclusions of the study and it will provide recommendations for leaders of school districts, high school principals and policy leaders on topics related to graduation standards, requirements and rates and will make suggestions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in this study provide a descriptive picture of what leadership practice looks like in three high schools in relation to improving high school graduation rates. The discussion of the findings will provide a synthesis and interpretation of how interactions, tools and routines are used by leadership team members and teacher leaders. The discussion will also include steps taken to improve leaders' accountability with respect to graduation rates. Each case study will be discussed independently followed by a discussion across the three schools. Lastly, a model of leadership practice and the role of each participant in improving student graduation rates will also be discussed.

Central High School (CHS)

Central High School located in central Fort Lauderdale follows a traditional high school college prep curriculum and is the one school in the sample that does not follow a Magnet program curriculum. A large number of academic enrichment programs are developed and monitored by leadership staff to improve student performance as it relates to meeting graduation standards. Data from Table 17 and Table 18 in Chapter 4, demonstrate that there are a minimum of 10 programs which support student needs towards this goal, on a year-round basis.

Finding one in CHS described how school leaders establish a clear vision, mission or goal to increase graduation rates. The leaders included in their description of leadership practice the importance of having a vision to run an organization such as a high school. Every leadership team member and teacher leader spoke of the importance of having a vision to run the school. All of the assistant principals and teacher leaders spoke repeatedly of the vision which the principal sets and is followed. Vision is communicated in various forms at Central High School. The school marquee and the main entry doors display a vision of high expectations for teachers and students: "At Central High School we do it right all the time". Through faculty meetings and professional development opportunities, the leadership team transmits a vision of high expectations of a rigorous curriculum program conducive to higher learning. In the principal's own words he is the captain of this ship, and he gets the buy in from his leadership team and faculty regarding his vision. The vision is about having accountability and high expectations for teachers and students in meeting the academic achievement of his students through a high number of enrichment programs. This

description supports some of the principles of instructional leadership: there is a clear vision to reach goals, resources are allocated for instruction, there is monitoring of curriculum and there is evaluation of teachers (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

Another finding, the identification, management and evaluation of academic enrichment programs as necessary interventions for student success also includes principles of instructional leadership. One of the leadership team meetings observed was considered highly structured and involved ample planning and organization. Attended by 10 members of the leadership team including the principal, those present included the leadership team, the academic coaches (reading and math), the guidance director, the testing coordinator, and the office manager. Eight different handouts some several pages long that were circulated included: a general agenda, guidance, math and literacy updates, a testing calendar for the month of December and a school activities calendar. These weekly meetings are directed by the principal with input from every member present. These meetings serve as the forum for making decisions regarding the wide variety of academic enrichment programs that are offered to students at CHS. This description supports Hallinger's (2005) position where the principal is deeply involved and committed to the school's instructional program.

An important routine regarding the effective management of resources at CHS, involves the hiring of substitute teachers as math instructors in the enrichment labs. In keeping with high teacher standards only substitute teachers who are certified or have a strong background or experience in teaching in math are hired. At the leadership team meeting it was discussed that at this time of the school year there is a shortage of math teachers in the school district and a higher shortage of substitute teachers that have a

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background in math, but CHS leaders were able to schedule several interviews with substitute teachers with math backgrounds for the following day. This example describes the priority that leaders place on the instructional program and highlights the effective management of resources by recruiting and hiring teachers that will contribute effectively to student learning and achievement.

South High School (SHS)

South High School stands as a proud accomplishment of the teachers, students, leadership team, alumni and the community at large who recently witnessed the celebratory events of becoming the oldest functioning high school in the Broward County Public School district. As the school nears completion of its multiple construction projects, one in particular is highly anticipated by the student body. A recent observation revealed that the new senior student parking lot which will be visible from Flying L's Drive is nearing completion, and it is expected it will alleviate the parking and traffic congestion that usually affects schools that experience a growth in student enrollment.

One finding at SHS, describes how school leaders build a culture of learning and achievement through a system of processes, programs and support initiatives and addresses leadership practice and accountability of changing standards in graduation practices. Leaders at SHS were perceived as the "entrepreneurs" in forging innovation in programs and processes as part of their leadership practice. Their motto of always putting students first is implicit in their role as leaders when advising students on success strategies for graduation. A focused emphasis on programs and academic strategies directed at the youngest group on campus, the ninth graders was evident. While programs for ninth graders were evident in the other two case studies, South High School

concentrated much of their leadership on processes by creating, monitoring, and evaluating these programs. Their drive to find and develop their own home-grown programs demonstrated that focusing on their ninth graders was a priority and served as an early intervention, and as a measure towards improved student achievement.

Early interventions are important as they afford more opportunities for students to recover from course failures as well as providing an early start with high school courses during the summer prior to the ninth grade year. Providing students with timely information regarding graduation requirements and informing them of steps that need to be taken to reach this goal was streamlined throughout all grade levels. This is an important finding because it provides an explanation of how ninth graders, as the youngest group on campus, are affected by the transition from middle school to high school which may not be positive for some students. Ninth graders are more vulnerable to pitfalls in social, personal and academic situations as they try to become first year members of a large high school of more than two-thousand students. This vision of making student learning a priority is demonstrative of learning leadership, whereby leadership and learning are integrally connected and student-focused, and involves teachers, students and counselors, in the learning process (Macbeath, 2002).

Another finding presents the leadership team as knowledgeable, strongly motivated, and devoted to their role as leaders in serving all students. The most ethnically diverse group of leaders among the three case studies, the leadership team commences each day with fervor in knowing that they are there to provide every opportunity for every student to get closer to graduation. Both Black male leadership team members, expressed their satisfaction in understanding the personal and social

backgrounds and challenges that their students face from the moment they enter through the school doors. They are able to relate well with students, and through time have become role models for the student body, especially African-American males. Likewise, among other members of the leadership team, best practices are shared with their colleagues who may benefit by the depth of information provided to effectively advise or counsel students. Other members of the leadership team are equally successful with students assigned to them through collaboration and sharing of best practices with teachers, teacher leaders and members of their leadership team. With recent events such as the celebration of its 100th graduating class, the quality of its multiple academic programs, and a newly designed school, SHS has won the respect and admiration of an entire community.

North High School (NHS)

North High School in northeast Fort Lauderdale is located in a section of the city that is undergoing cultural and community growth. Although an abandoned medical facility nearby still reminds visitors of a recent economic stagnation, NHS will soon appear "rejuvenated" as funds from a recent bond vote decision have been allocated to the school. The first finding from NHS reveals how school leaders use data as guiding variables in making decisions regarding at-risk student achievement and success.

The tapping into many types of data all relevant to student progression and outcomes, provided this leadership team the tools to make constructive academic decisions regarding the at-risk student population. Data related to testing, grade averages and credits are important to monitor and evaluate for all students, but for the at-risk student, the data are generally lower than that of the regular student population, and

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closer attention is essential in maintaining average student performance, a positive

balance between attempted and earned credits, and passing scores on state assessments all

required for graduation. This finding also reveals a strong managerial component as

close attention is paid to the operational functions needed to run a school. NHS

demonstrated a strong background in using and "owning" the data as a tool for improving

student performance and for understanding the importance of accountability of the data

for all students including those at-risk.

The next finding reveals how school leaders develop and foster positive relationships

with students and teachers. The leadership team expressed that special connections

among the students, teachers, academic program coordinators, counselors and leaders

themselves are essential in developing trust as a starting point. Some of the most

powerful messages regarding student needs and relationship building arose from the

words of the NHS leadership team. All members of the leadership team, believed and

made a priority the development of relationships regardless of where and how they start

whether in a principal's office a teacher's classroom or in a counselor's office. Macbeath

(2008), cites the importance of paying attention to particular characteristics of schools

such as relationship and learning and their connection to student performance. Key

phrases from the NHS leadership team echo some of these principles of learning

leadership.

Finally it is relevant to note that high schools by nature of their structure as an

organization composed of departments share many of its concepts with distributed

leadership principles. For example leadership events are seen as interactions, and tools

may be used to improve leadership practice. This supports in part the concept that

distributed leadership results from multiple interactions at different levels in the organization (Spillane 2006).

Conclusions

This study concludes that based on the interviews of three principals, 12 assistant principals and three teacher leaders, and a review of 12 documents and 45 hours of observations, leadership practice in schools that demonstrate an increase in graduation rates is approached methodically with a student-centered focus. While one high school principal may prioritize a school vision which focuses on student achievement as more important than critical analysis of data or building relationships, there is evidence of all of these interactions and leadership practice as they seek to improve graduation rates. These interactions involve a common goal: the academic success of their students. Secondly, this study concludes that leaders are passionate about their role as leaders and advocates in helping students reach their academic goals of high school graduation.

Finally, leadership in high schools involves a high degree of collaborative actions, interactions, tools and routines in their approach towards helping students become successful in meeting graduation standards. Although direction may emanate from the principal, assistant principals and teacher leaders, need to become experts in promoting student success. Within each grade level, leaders need to work both intra and inter-departmentally in improving student performance, with an end goal of improving high school graduation rates.

Comprehensive Leadership Model of Graduation Potential (CLSGP)

The Integrated Leadership Model (ILM) discussed in Chapter 1, presented an interrelated view of the actions, interactions, tools and routines that may be relevant in understanding the leadership practice of principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders when seeking to improve graduation rates. In this original model of six hexagonal figures, the four leadership theories represented, instructional, transformational, distributed and learning leadership that form the basis of RQ 1. Important principles and tenets of each one of the leadership theories guided this study.

The central hexagon is composed of leader strategies that may be relevant in student improvement, specifically in the form of higher graduation rates. Two-way arrows maintain the synergy among the leadership theories. The intention is to understand that there are characteristics within each one of the theories which are transparent and common among all the theories. The fifth hexagon, high school graduation rates improvement, presents a hypothesis that through the integration of the principles of the leadership theories, there may be a greater level of understanding of how to improve student performance and increase high school graduation rates.

The Comprehensive Leadership Model of Graduation Potential (CLSGP), evolved as the offspring of the ILM model initially proposed. The CLSGP model presents some of the same characteristics and components of the ILM, but is more detailed in identifying what this leadership practice looks like in terms of the actions, interactions, tools and routines in addition to roles and communication as evidenced in the findings. In this model, the CLSGP model appears as a circular figure. The circle and its inner spheres, highlight the findings of the study, and the leadership practice of the school's

leadership team which are bound by a common tie. Each school leader holds a common tie to the inner-most circle demonstrated by improved graduation rates. The circle and its inner spheres are whole, yet not totally connected to allow for arrows or forces which push towards the inner circles and are represented by the actions, interactions, tools and routines found in leadership practice of these schools. An example and a common theme found would be the continuous push by each one of the school leaders towards students accomplishing graduation objectives. This creates an integrated and collaborative effort towards student improvement represented by improving graduation rates.

The outer sphere considers important the individuals involved in leadership practice. Mutual interactions of leaders towards accomplishing schools goals represent some of the principles of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006). Roles and responsibilities that each educator assumes are re-arranged within a school in distributed leadership (Harris, 2008). In this level it is important that members of a leadership team interact and communicate with other members of the school team, in the planning, development, execution, decision-making and evaluation of strategies and programs for student improvement. School leaders such as principals and assistant principals provide the direction and communicate with other school members such as teachers, or department chairs a clearly defined vision of the expectations for student success. For the schools in this study, these school leaders also count on many years of leadership experience which complements initiatives intended to increase student achievement.

In this outer circle are the members of each one of the school's leadership team who work on their own, or hand in hand with each other for successfully improving graduation rates. In this study, the participants included the members of the leadership

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team: principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders such as guidance directors, and aspiring leaders. In addition to this team of leaders, there are other school members who play a significant role individually and collectively in students' lives in terms of promoting and supporting students in reaching academic goals, specifically high school graduation. They include Magnet Coordinators who are curriculum specialists in their Magnet program area, aspiring leaders, school counselors, mentors, reading coaches, department chairs, testing coordinators and classroom teachers, specifically teachers of 12th grade students.

The next circle in the model answers the question: 'what programs are considered effective by school leaders and leadership team members in helping students meet all graduation standards and graduate within a four-year time frame?' The response encompasses the actions, interactions, tools and routines that principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders use to assist the students reach the graduation goal and which aligns with an instructional leadership framework.   In this stage, instructional leadership is evidenced by the directive leadership in each school that is focused on curriculum and instruction (Hallinger, 2005).   In this study the instructional component is demonstrated by the development and execution of multiple school programs which have a focus of improving graduation standards. The programs, strategies, and processes relevant in the findings would appear on this level.

One program evident in all three schools includes the credit recovery program. While credit recovery options vary for students and by school, it is important for members of the leadership team to know which types of programs are most beneficial for their students. In one example, a student who is an independent learner successfully

registers for an online class, submits three to four assignments weekly, completes one credit in an academic year or less and receives a "B" as a final grade. A different example of a student in the same school who may struggle in a classroom setting where there is minimal structure, also takes an online course for the same amount of credits, but experiences difficulty from the start on multiple issues such as navigating through the virtual site, understanding the class syllabus, making contact with a virtual teacher, understanding assignment rubrics or successfully submitting assignments electronically. Completing and receiving credit for the course now appears complicated and at times a remote goal for the student, many times prompting eventual withdrawal from the course.

It is important that leadership team members, and specially guidance directors and counselors recognize and recommend students who are more independent learners and stronger in technology use for online classes. The less tech-savvy students who in many instances lack the equipment at home, would be better candidates for online programs that are blended, both online and teacher-based. Programs that are based on subject unit packets or paper versions of the curriculum are also good alternates. In knowing which programs best fulfill the needs of each student, leaders are recognizing the learning needs of their students and taking the appropriate steps to ensure that they are successful in meeting credit recovery goals.

Tutoring as a routine is an important instructional strategy in high schools as an instructional strategy for supplementing and enriching instruction. Regardless of the grade level of the student and the academic program in which enrolled, students benefit from tutoring across subject areas to complement what was taught in during regular class time, or to complete complex lesson during tutoring sessions. At South High School for

example, it is mandatory for students to be enrolled in after-school tutoring four times a week, from the end of the school day until five o'clock when buses depart from campus for the day. Leadership team members and teachers alike recommend and stress the importance of tutoring for students and "sell" the program as a requirement to excel especially in higher level courses such as those in the Cambridge curriculum where performance scores contribute to the student's final grade in the course.

The next level in the CLSGP model demonstrates how leaders engage, promote, and monitor the collaborative push for programs and interventions which help students to reach their graduation goals. This level is also representative of the interactions, tools and routines that form their leadership practice through a special focus on student learning. There is a formal connection between student learning and leadership practice (Macbeath, 2008).

This level in the circle develops in some instances from the numerous meetings held throughout the year and through the use of various forms of communication between the leadership team and the students as well with the stakeholders who have a role in supporting students. For example in "graduation-centered student assemblies" students meet in large groups with leadership team members and they are advised of their requirements, upcoming assessments needed for graduation, or are simply warned about pending deadlines for meeting service hours requirements. This is accomplished after a careful review of the data to determine which topics are the most relevant with respect to graduation for a particular group of students. Once students are identified, the decision is made as to which topics to address and discuss with the students. Meeting in large groups such as in this example, allows school leaders to address important topics with

respect to meeting graduation requirements, where all students present in this type of forum benefit from the receiving the information.

The findings also revealed that high schools need to be creative and all-inclusive in program development and in their approach to helping students complete all graduation requirements, especially in areas of reading and math where passing scores on state assessments are factored into a student's final course grade. The "graduate-centered counseling" provides an example to highlight this point. A typical student in this level of the circle is receiving counseling services that are focused on strategies and programs that help to improve his/her performance each time getting closer to graduation. The student is more than likely an upperclassman, and is an academically average student who has met all of the graduation requirements except for passing scores on state assessments. Data for this student is *more closely* monitored from the start of 12th grade, and in many instances the student has already taken the state assessments approximately five times since 10th grade, each time improving his score but not yet achieving a "graduation standards" score. The counseling services are provided by the leadership team, the guidance directors and counselors, the senior teachers who have the student in class and any other stakeholder that is involved with the student at school and is aware of the student's progress towards graduation. The arrows or the forces that are coming from the outer and different levels of the circle, highlight the push and drive of the leadership team in providing the support that is expected will improve graduation rates.

The importance of identifying the best approach for the student is a strategic one, because as a school leader or interested stakeholder in the student's success, the decision to pursue the most beneficial program to meet graduation requirements must be timely.

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In this case the graduation-centered counseling would not include recommendations to pursue a credit recovery program or even a mentoring program, unless the programs and resources have as a goal, test-taking strategies or content that will prepare the student for a passing score on the state assessment. At times, as the academic year draws to an end, school leaders are able to identify students who despite the best interactions, tools routines and strategies used to promote high school graduation, still will not meet requirements.

Students who were not able to graduate in June with their cohort still have one last opportunity to graduate within a four-year time period. While the mechanism for students to complete requirements (during the summer semester) is coordinated before the end of the school year by the leadership and counselor teams, it is up to the student to harbor the initiative and motivation to maintain an active status in courses or test-taking strategy workshops that will help the student to graduate at the end of the summer session. Constant and supportive communication between the student and the school relevant to meeting requirements is important for both parties: for the student because he or she will have achieved the goal of graduation and for the school as well because it is one more student that is added to the pool of graduates, thereby increasing graduation rates one student at a time. Graduation ceremonies on a smaller scale are usually held in August to accommodate the new graduates that meet requirements after the end of the regular school year.

The fourth level in the CLSGP model also reveals an important finding which places the student and the school leaders the closest to the central sphere: increasing student graduation rates. This level encompasses the personal, emotional, and social

dimension of every student *and* the leadership team. The building of relationships among

the members of the leadership team and their student body is coupled with the leadership

team's passion for their role and devotion to their leadership practice. This level is

evidenced by Transformational Leadership, where the good of the group and organization

is highly regarded, versus focusing on self-interests. Some of the qualities within

transformational leadership include charismatic and inspirational leadership, intellectual

stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1987; 1993; Bennis &

Nanus, 1985).

Leadership team members build relationships with teachers and teacher leaders

through communication mediums which include departmental and faculty meetings,

professional learning communities, effective educator conferences, and through extra-

curricular and sports events sponsored by the school. Other types of communication exist

but the most important component in this relationship is the sharing of a mutual best

interest: the student. Once leadership team members and classroom teachers especially

teachers of seniors, converge in their conception of the importance of maintaining

positive relationships with their students, the sphere "expands" symbolically as it adds an

affective dimension to this level. These are the opportunities of relationship building that

leadership team members appreciate usually because they surface from difficult,

challenging, or sad student circumstances. The fighting spirit is born at all levels and the

school comes together such as in this concentric figure where the best interests of the

students by advocating, nurturing and supporting them in meeting graduation standards is

accomplished. Figure 2 presents the findings of the study in relation to the actions,

interactions, tools and routines used by school leaders as part of their leadership practice.

Figure 2. A Comprehensive Leadership Model of Graduation Potential (CLSGP): A Relationship of Leadership Practice and High School Graduation Rates
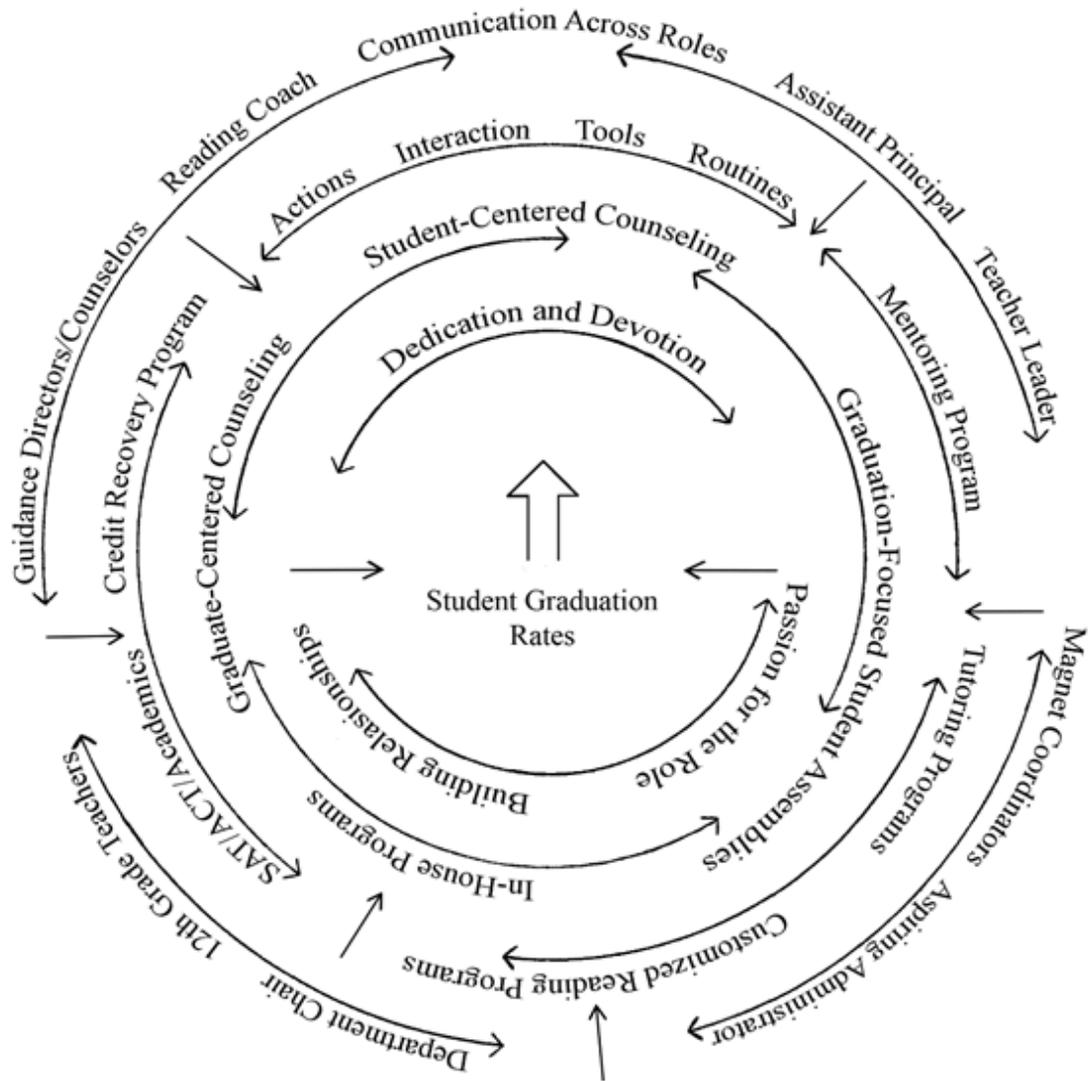
Recommendations

An analysis of the data for this study produced findings and conclusions that were discussed in this chapter. Recommendations for school and district leaders, policy makers and for future research proposals will follow.

Recommendations for School Leaders

1. Consideration should be given by school and district leaders, parents and the community to restructure grade levels by considering the possibility of including the ninth grade in a middle school setting. First, there are many examples in high schools where the difference in age between ninth-graders and 12th-graders exceeds four years. Many of the programs that are specifically designed for ninth-graders, such as ninth-grade academies, keep students isolated and distant from interacting with other grade levels including upper classmen while in high school. Frequently, these students are scheduled for lunch at an earlier time than the rest of the school, and there is limited interaction as it is. Some ninth-graders arrive on large high school campuses, lacking direction and knowledge of the high expectations required in the first year of high school and grades plummet in that first year. At times it becomes very difficult for the student to realize and understand the steps that need to be taken in order to recover from negative academic experiences.

2. Schools should continue tracking at-risk students formerly identified as Level 1 or Level 2 while in middle school as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was phased out in 2013. While the schools in the sample track students who score deficiently, the qualifier of Level 1 and Level 2 associated with the

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outgoing state assessment, will not be used to measure students who are at-risk. It

appears that there will no longer be a Level 1 and Level 2 designation to identify

the at-risk cohort. Schools should continue tracking students who score

deficiently on state assessment and perhaps add important measures such as

below average GPA's or insufficient credits to expand the definition of at-risk

students. With the new state assessment, the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA)

which became a graduation requirement in 2014, schools will need to more

closely monitor the academic progress of students and expand the definition of the

"at-risk student".

3. High Schools should continue the use of the Office of Student Performance and

Accountability (OSPA) website for additional tracking of 12th-grade students in

meeting graduation standards. High school leaders should use this database

widely as a tool and expand its use by granting access to other members of the

leadership team. During times of the school year when an entering student can

only audit a high school course, it is especially important to remain vigilant with

grades, credits and with students meeting requirements. In addition, interventions

completed by members of the leadership team are tracked with more accuracy.

4. School districts should gradually decrease the amount of local and state testing for

our high school students. As recently announced by the Federal Government,

school district and state leaders need to streamline the amount of testing currently

taking place in schools and reduce the number of tests currently administered to

students. Magnet Schools and their programs need to comply with certification

guidelines and mandatory examinations and must test students to comply with the

requirements of the program. However local or district developed tests which require a high level of technology infrastructure should be reduced or eliminated. As related by one of the assistant principals, "students are always testing in this school".

5. Credit recovery options for students include taking courses online to satisfy the credit requirement. In addition, one graduation requirement includes taking one course in a virtual setting. Many students enroll to take online classes without the level of skill that is required to navigate through a course which requires motivation and independence to succeed. Students, especially those at-risk, struggle with online courses and simply give up and do not complete the course. The structure and interaction provided by a regular class, including the students, the teacher, face-to-face contact, is not present in an online setting, and at times the student ends the course in frustration. Students are encouraged to enroll in online classes which they need and are approved by leaders, yet should also be aware of the right time to withdraw from a class so as not to obtain a low or failing grade.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

1. The passage of SB 1076 enacted changes to graduation requirements, by eliminating the requirement of passing scores on the geometry and the biology End of Course Exams (EOC's). By eliminating this requirement, students no longer need to pass the EOC in these subject areas in order to earn a credit. While the student community which consists of this year's 12th-graders is relieved that this requirement is no longer in effect, many school leaders and district officials

are concerned that this will have the effect of lowering academic standards to meet the needs of a particular cohort of students. In addition, the number of graduates will more than likely be inflated with the removal of this requirement for the 2015-16 school year. Discussions with state leaders addressing the passage of any new legislation which directly impacts graduates either favorably or unfavorably must be addressed, to plan for the effects that such decisions may have on the education community and its students.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. This study can be improved by adding students and teachers of 12th-grade students as part of the sample. By including students and teachers, researchers will obtain a first-hand account of the interventions and programs that students may have participated in and best practices from the perspective of the teacher. While leadership teams use interventions and tools to improve graduation standards, students as participants would provide information relevant to which programs worked the best for them in their estimation. Identification of barriers which interfere with graduation can be valuable in developing programs that support students academically, socially, and personally.

<div align="center">

Role of District and State

</div>

In April 2013, the approval of an amendment regarding the grading of schools was made by the State Board of Education who specifies the grading criteria and point system used for school grades. The amendment to the Implementation of Florida's System of School Improvement and Accountability revised the definition of graduates for the five-year calculation rate. The definition of graduates for the five-year graduation

rate which is not within the scope of this study will include only standard diploma recipients as graduates. Special diploma recipients, who were counted as graduates in the previous year 2012, will not be considered graduates in the five-year graduation rate any longer. Special diploma students are not counted as graduates in the federal four-year rate either. School grade points for the graduation rate is thus based on the two graduation rate calculations: the four-year adjusted cohort rate using criteria from the Federal Uniform Graduation Rate and a five-year adjusted Federal Uniform Cohort Graduation Rate.

Fifty percent or 800 possible points of the school grade for high schools is based on the high school graduation rates discussed above in addition to other components such as participation and performance in advanced classes such as Advanced Placement, Cambridge advanced classes, International Baccalaureate and others. The total possible points awarded for the combined graduation rate component is 200 points: 100 possible points awarded for the four-year Federal Uniform Graduation Rate and 100 points for the five-year Federal Uniform Graduation Rate. In addition, there are 100 additional points for the at-risk graduation rate which encompasses students who scored at a Level 2 or below in the eighth grade Reading and Math components of the FCAT.

These changes and amendments to the various graduation rates contributed to a drop in some of the school grades awarded throughout the state of Florida. A hypothetical example highlighting the difference in five-year graduation rates in 2012 and counting only standard diploma recipients in the graduation rates calculation, shows that rates dropped from 82% to 80% resulting in a decrease of 2%. In essence, this example illustrates that hypothetically it was very probable that the graduation rates

would drop the following year in 2013 as they did. The decrease in graduation rates in 2013 is noted in protocol question number seven which was developed as a question to elicit potential changing trends in leadership practice noting the drop in graduation rates in the school district.   During the timeframe of the study, from 2009-2012, the three schools in the sample maintained increasing graduation rates, but in 2013 two out of the three schools experienced a drop in their rates.

A review of the school grades formula using this same example shows that school grades also would have experienced a drop by not counting special diploma recipients as graduates. In comparing actual high school grades during 2012 to what would have been high school grades where special diploma students were not counted as graduates, the example produced 12 schools that had lower grades. Three high schools went from A's to B's, and nine high schools dropped from B's to C's statewide. In the study and in response to question seven, the focus on leadership practice as related by the participants remained intact.

Participants explained that while every year there were new efforts to always improve academic enrichment programs or add new programs that benefited the student body as a whole, such as the supper program or reading enrichment for students in a reading elective, it was very difficult for the school not only to accommodate all of the curricular or programmatic needs of the special student population, but also to enact changes quickly enough with reliable effectiveness. Making changes to instructional curriculum or programs that are specially designed for these students requires time in order for students to demonstrate comprehension, learning gains and academic achievement. Trying to accomplish this task within a one-year timeframe was simply

inadequate and insufficient and schools were not able to recover from not including these

students in their graduation counts. The reality of not including such students in the

graduation rate calculations was too great to absorb in a one-year time period from 2012

to 2013, leading to a decrease in the rates.

For the next two years graduation rates calculations and components for awarding

a school's grade followed the formula from the State Board of Education referenced

above. In 2014-15, Florida transitioned to the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA),

assessments developed to measure mastery of the Florida Standards. In the last quarter of

2015, FLDOE made a proposal to the State Board of Education to change the school

accountability rules to include new changes to the graduation rates and the awarding of

school grades. In this new proposal, one major change included eliminating the at-risk

student graduation rate and the five-year graduation rate. Senate Bill 1642 (SB 1642)

from the 2014 Legislative Session, was passed unanimously by the Senate and by a wide

margin in the House and was signed into law in May 2014. The bill provided a

framework for an updated school accountability system by simplifying and re-focusing

the school grading system on student outcomes. It also provided a baseline calculation

without consequences in 2014-15 for schools to work towards improved performance in

future years (FL § section 1008.34). The new model refocused the school grading

formula on student success measures such as achievement, learning gains, graduation and

the earning of college credit and industry certifications while students are still in high

school (SB 1642). For purposes of the study, and as explained previously, the area of

focus is the graduation rate component.

In high schools, in addition to other factors that are included in the calculation of a school's grade, the five-year and at-risk graduation rates used in previous years were eliminated from the model. The school's grade will now be determined by the sum of the total points of components each worth 100 points. For example, in the new High School Grades Model a maximum of 10 components are used and graduation rates as one of the components will count for a maximum of 100 points towards the overall school grade. Provisions that would raise or lower a school's grade beyond what the percentage of points would indicate will be eliminated, such as additional requirements or additional weights and bonuses previously used in the calculations.

It is understood that many of the changes enacted by the Board of Education are proposed with the best intentions for meeting state, national and global expectations of high quality and rigor in education for all students. What tends to occur when there are so many policy changes that directly impact educational institutions at all levels, is that school leaders and teachers but especially students get lost in the ever-present shuffling of rules and policies that affect them directly, and in many instances the turn-around time frame required in new rules or policy changes, does not allow a student enough time to recuperate from the change. In the most recent High School Grades Model this point is evident in the designation of a point system and use of percentages for the components used to calculate the school grade.

Graduation rates will now count towards a maximum of 100 points based on the percentage of students that graduate in a four-year period. In previous years a maximum of 300 points in the graduation rates component could be used towards the overall calculation of the school grade. It is noted that while more emphasis will be placed on

statewide achievement results, learning gains of the regular student population and learning gains of the lowest 25% of students, graduation rates must remain an important measure of the overall performance of students in completing high school requirements and preparing them for their next educational goal. Rule workshops on the school accountability measure took place in late October of 2015. It is expected that the draft of the rule on the new school grades and school improvement rating calculations will be presented to the State Board of Education for action in January 2016.

Chapter Summary

This study focused on the leadership practice of principals and assistant principals in high schools that had experienced an increase in graduation rates. A discussion of the findings for each of the school sites studied was presented in addition to the conclusions and recommendations of the study. This study has implications for other high schools that wish to learn about interactions among school leaders, and explore programs that support student learning and achievement especially as they relate to improving high school graduation rates. It is hoped that the Comprehensive Leadership Model of Graduation Potential (CLSGP) introduced, will encourage school leaders to implement it in their practice and that they too will develop and innovate programs which best serve the needs of all students.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Interviewee/Participant Protocol-Principal

Name _____   **Date**_____

Introduction:
Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I know this is a busy time of year and I appreciate your help in answering the following questions. Please know that all your responses will remain confidential and I will send you a copy of your responses for your approval. Your school was selected to be studied because over a period of three years, your graduation rate increased from year to year. We want to understand how your leadership and the leadership of others in your school may have contributed to this increase. The following questions were developed to better understand your role in increasing graduation rates.

1. How do you define school leadership? How does your definition translate into

practices to improve graduation rates?

Probe: What are keywords, variables or descriptors you associate with leadership

practice and with improving high school graduation rates? What does this practice look

like?

   1a. Who do you consider the leader(s) in your school? Do all of these leaders make

   graduation rates a school wide focus?

Probe: Which teachers and staff take a leadership role in your school when it comes to

increasing graduation rates?

2. Which faculty member(s) or staff in your school do you work collaboratively with

when evaluating data related to graduation rates?

Probe: When thinking about graduation rates who do you work most closely with?   Who

do you consider a resource or expert within your school when referring to graduation

rates?   What makes one choose this individual over others?

2a. How did this person become involved with themes surrounding graduation and graduation rates?

3. As the principal of your school describe your role in improving high school graduation rates.

Probe: When answering this question, think about your school's grade and about the increase in graduation rates that your school experienced from 2009-2012.

4. When you evaluate the data of the "regular student population", and see students who may not graduate, what tools do you use to help increase their graduation potential? Are there routines you establish and follow when evaluating student data? What kinds of data do you evaluate? How? When?

Probe: What are some interventions you practice with the regular student population when evaluating their graduation potential. How are these interventions managed or monitored? What kinds of leadership initiatives would you implement when looking at increasing a student's graduation potential?

5. Talk to me specifically about the "at risk student population" data. Do you have specific strategies or tools to help increase their graduation potential? Are there routines you establish and follow when evaluating student data? What kinds of data do you evaluate with this group? How? When?

Probe: What are some interventions you practice with the at risk student population when evaluating their graduation potential. How are these interventions managed or monitored? What kinds of leadership initiatives would you implement when looking at increasing a student's graduation potential?

6. Can you provide me with some real-life-examples of interventions, that you've established with respect to increasing graduation rates? What actions have you taken or what interactions have you had with other members of the leadership team that may relate to increasing graduation rates?

   Probe: How are these interventions managed or monitored? Are any of these interventions new or are they ongoing? Are there any interventions you are no longer implementing?

7. In 2012 all high schools in Florida had to report graduates using the Federal Rate vs. the NGA rate that had been previously used. In 2013, your graduation rates did not maintain the momentum of the past four years. What changes if any have you made in leadership practice, to accommodate this drop in rates? In your view what explains this decline in the Federal graduation rate data in 2013?

   Probe: Can you recall any changes which may have had a bearing on this drop? What changes occurred in the leadership of the school? How have these changes impacted how you handle the accountability of maintaining an increase in graduation rates from year to year? What kinds of conversations do you have with your leadership team and staff that allows them to understand that increasing graduation rates is a group effort that entails active participation in planning and process development?

Closing:

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to provide additional feedback or comments. Once recorded information from the interview is transcribed, the researcher will present you with a transcript of the interview for your review.

Thanks again.

Appendix B. Interviewee/Participant Protocol-Assistant Principal

Name _____   **Date _____**

Introduction:
Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I know this is a busy time of year and I appreciate your help in answering the following questions. Please know that all your responses will remain confidential and I will send you a copy of your responses for your approval. Your school was selected to be studied because over a period of three years, your graduation rate increased from year to year. We want to understand how your leadership and the leadership of others in your school may have contributed to this increase. The following questions were developed to better understand your role in increasing graduation rates.

1. How do you define school leadership? How does your definition translate into practices to improve graduation rates?

Probe: What are keywords, variables or descriptors you associate with leadership practice and with improving high school graduation rates? What does this practice look like?

   1a. Who do you consider the leader(s) in your school? Do all of these leaders make graduation rates a school wide focus?

Probe: Which teachers and staff take a leadership role in your school when it comes to increasing graduation rates?

2. Which faculty member(s) or staff in your school do you work collaboratively with when evaluating data related to graduation rates?

Probe: When thinking about graduation rates who do you work most closely with?   Who do you consider a resource or expert within your school when referring to graduation rates?   What makes one choose this individual over others?

   2a. How did this person become involved with themes surrounding graduation and graduation rates?

3. As the assistant principal of your school describe your role in improving high school graduation rates.

Probe: When answering this question, think about your school's grade and about the increase in graduation rates that your school experienced from 2009-2012.

4.   When you evaluate the data of the "regular student population", and see students who may not graduate, what tools do you use to help increase their graduation potential? Are there routines you establish and follow when evaluating student data? What kinds of data do you evaluate? How? When?

Probe: What are some interventions you practice with the regular student population when evaluating their graduation potential. How are these interventions managed or monitored? What kinds of leadership initiatives would you implement when looking at increasing a student's graduation potential?

5. Talk to me specifically about the "at risk student population" data. Do you have specific strategies or tools to help increase their graduation potential? Are there routines you establish and follow when evaluating student data? What kinds of data do you evaluate with this group? How? When?

Probe: What are some interventions you practice with the at risk student population when evaluating their graduation potential. How are these interventions managed or monitored? What kinds of leadership initiatives would you implement when looking at increasing a student's graduation potential?

6. Can you provide me with some real-life-examples of interventions, that you've established with respect to increasing graduation rates? What actions have you taken or

what interactions have you had with other members of the leadership team that may relate to increasing graduation rates?

Probe: How are these interventions managed or monitored? Are any of these interventions new or are they ongoing? Are there any interventions you are no longer implementing?

7. In 2012 all high schools in Florida had to report graduates using the Federal Rate vs. the NGA rate that had been previously used. In 2013, your graduation rates did not maintain the momentum of the past four years. What changes if any have you made in leadership practice, to accommodate this drop in rates? In your view what explains this decline in the Federal graduation rate data?

Probe: Can you recall any changes which may have had a bearing on this drop? What changes occurred in the leadership of the school? How have these changes impacted how you handle the accountability of maintaining an increase in graduation rates from year to year? What kinds of conversations do you have with your leadership team and staff that allows them to understand that increasing graduation rates is a group effort that entails active participation in planning and processes development?

Closing:

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to provide additional feedback or comments. Once recorded information from the interview is transcribed, the researcher will present you with a transcript of the interview for your review.

Thanks again.

Appendix C. Interviewee/Participant Protocol-Teacher Leader

Name _____   Date _____

Introduction:
Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I know this is a busy time of year and I appreciate your help in answering the following questions. Please know that all your responses will remain confidential and I will send you a copy of your responses for your approval. Your school was selected to be studied because over a period of three years, your graduation rate increased from year to year. We want to understand how your leadership and the leadership of others in your school may have contributed to this increase. The following questions were developed to better understand your role in increasing graduation rates.

1. How do you define school leadership? How does your definition translate into practices to improve graduation rates?

Probe: What are keywords, variables or descriptors you associate with leadership practice and with improving high school graduation rates? What does this practice look like?

    1a. Who do you consider the leader(s) in your school? Do all of these leaders make graduation rates a school wide focus?

Probe: Which teachers and staff take a leadership role in your school when it comes to increasing graduation rates?

2. Which faculty member(s) or staff in your school do you work collaboratively with when evaluating data related to graduation rates?

Probe: When thinking about graduation rates who do you work most closely with? Who do you consider a resource or expert within your school when referring to graduation rates? What makes one choose this individual over others?

    2a. How did this person become involved with themes surrounding graduation and graduation rates?

3.   As the teacher leader of your school describe your role in improving high school graduation rates.

Probe: When answering this question, think about your school's grade and about the increase in graduation rates that your school experienced from 2009-2012.

4.   When you evaluate the data of the "regular student population", and see students who may not graduate, what tools do you use to help increase their graduation potential? Are there routines you establish and follow when evaluating student data? What kinds of data do you evaluate? How? When?

Probe: What are some interventions you practice with the regular student population when evaluating their graduation potential. How are these interventions managed or monitored? What kinds of leadership initiatives would you implement when looking at increasing a student's graduation potential?

5.   Talk to me specifically about the "at risk student population" data.   Do you have specific strategies or tools to help increase their graduation potential? Are there routines you establish and follow when evaluating student data? What kinds of data do you evaluate with this group? How? When?

Probe: What are some interventions you practice with the at risk student population when evaluating their graduation potential. How are these interventions managed or monitored? What kinds of leadership initiatives would you implement when looking at increasing a student's graduation potential?

6.   Can you provide me with some real-life examples of interventions that you've established with respect to increasing graduation rates? What actions have you taken or

what interactions have you had with other members of the leadership team that may relate to increasing graduation rates?

Probe: How are these interventions managed or monitored? Are any of these interventions new or are they ongoing? Are there any interventions you are no longer implementing?

7. In 2012 all high schools in Florida had to report graduates using the Federal Rate vs. the NGA rate that had been previously used. In 2013, your graduation rates did not maintain the momentum of the past four years. What changes if any have you made in leadership practice, to accommodate this drop in rates? In your view what explains this decline in the Federal graduation rate data?

Probe: Can you recall any changes which may have had a bearing on this drop? What changes occurred in the leadership of the school? How have these changes impacted how you handle the accountability of maintaining an increase in graduation rates from year to year? What kinds of conversations do you have with your leadership team and staff that allows them to understand that increasing graduation rates is a group effort that entails active participation in planning and processes development?

Closing:

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to provide additional feedback or comments. Once recorded information from the interview is transcribed, the researcher will present you with a transcript of the interview for your review.

Thanks again.

Appendix D. Observation Guide

Describe meeting interactions: • Working relationship, of principal and assistant principals • Principal and assistant principals actions/interactions Working relation-ship, of principal, assistant principal and teacher leader	
Describe school campus: • School marquee graduation announcements • Presence of bulletin boards with information for graduates • Presence of banners, flyers, announcing graduation events or activities. • Information around school announcing academic responsibilities of students regarding graduation	
Describe offices: • Principal • Assistant principal • Teacher leader	
Other observations	

Appendix E. Documents List

1. School Board Policy 6000.1, Pupil Progression
2. Memos from the State of Florida addressing graduation rates
3. Memos from the SBBC district addressing graduation rates
4. Memos from the State of Florida which address a high school's grade relevant to graduation rates
5. Memos from the SBBC district which address a high school's grade relevant to graduation rates
6. Meeting agendas for principals and assistant principals
7. Virtual Counselor and BASIS student databases
8. Data Warehouse and TERMS databases
9. School Customer Survey (2009-2012)
10. School Improvement Plan

Appendix F. Document Summary Form

Document	Significance/Use/Analysis
School Board Policy 6000.1	District policy which delineates standards for quality instruction, criteria for promotion and description of graduation requirements.
State/district memos addressing graduation rates	Information rich memos from the state to district explaining graduation rates and how each of the schools fared compared to state graduation rates.
State/district memos addressing school grade relevant to graduation rates	Memos from the state to the district on how graduation rates for each individual high school accounts for part of school grade.
Principal and assistant principal meeting agendas	Agendas showing topics for discussion regarding graduation rates, graduation events, analysis of regular student graduates and at-risk students. Informs who will be speaking or delivering information at meetings.
Virtual Counselor, BASIS, Data Warehouse and TERMS databases	Databases which include all types of student data, and identifies factors which may affect graduation for at-risk and regular students.
School Customer Survey (2009-2012)	Annual school survey for students, parents, teachers and staff on the day-to-day operations of the school.
High School at Risk Cohort Indicator Report	A school report of students by grade level which includes various cohort indicators such as at-risk student status, state and local grade point averages, state assessments passed, among others.

Appendix G. IRB Adult Consent Form

1) <u>Title of Research Study:</u> An Assessment of Leadership Practice in High Schools: Improving Graduation Rates

2) <u>Investigator(s):</u> Principal Investigator: Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, Professor Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, Florida Atlantic University; Co-Investigator: Dr. Ira Bogotch, Professor Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, Florida Atlantic University; Student: Maria Eugenia (Genie) Osorio.

3) <u>Purpose:</u> The purpose of this research study is to better understand the leadership practice of principals and assistant principals in three high schools by determining what their role is with respect to improving high school graduation rates. Specifically, schools that sustained an increase in different /changing graduation rates will be analyzed to gain a better understanding of what leadership practices may have any relevance in improving graduation rates. Leadership practice will be generally defined as a) product of the joint interactions of school leaders, (principals and assistant principals) which may be related to increasing graduation rates and, b) aspects of their situation such as tool and routines which may be connected or related to increasing graduation rates and c) leader actions.

4) <u>Procedures:</u> Today you will be participating in a face to face interview at your school site, which will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. It is expected that this interview will be completed in one sitting during one school visit. You will be asked to answer questions about your views regarding leadership practice and graduation best practices. With your permission, your responses will be audio taped, transcribed and later shared with you to check for accuracy. Your participation is voluntary and there are no rewards, class credit or compensation for participating in the study. If you do not wish to participate you may stop at any time.

5) <u>Risks:</u>
There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. The principal investigator will ensure that your recorded responses will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and that confidentiality will be maintained.

6) <u>Benefits:</u>
We do not know if you will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, this research will contribute to a greater understanding of leadership practice at the secondary level, specifically in high school settings. This study may offer a greater understanding of what actions, interactions, tools and routines are practiced by principals and assistant principals and their role in improving high school graduation rates.

7) <u>Data Collection and Storage:</u>
Any information collected about you will be kept confidential and secure and only the people working with the study will see your data, unless required by law. The data will

Initials_____

be kept for five years in a password-protected computer in the investigator's locked office. After five years, paper copies will be destroyed by shredding and electronic data will be deleted. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name/identity unless you give us permission.

8) Contact Information:
If you have questions about the study, you should call or email the principal investigator(s), Pat Maslin-Ostrowski and Ira Bogotch at (561) 297-3550 or the main investigator, Maria Eugenia (Genie) Osorio at (954) 328-2180.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research at (561) 297-0777 or send an email to fau.research@fau.edu.

9) Consent Statement:
I have read or had read to me the preceding information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ be audiotaped.

Signature of Participant: _____Date: _____

Printed Name of Participant: First Name _____Last Name _____

Signature of Investigator: _____Date: _____

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