Spring 2002

The manifestation of leadership in three high-flying New Hampshire elementary schools

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THE MANIFESTATION OF LEADERSHIP
IN THREE HIGH-FLYING NEW HAMPSHIRE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

BY

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B.S. Plymouth State College, 1983
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Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Education

May, 2002
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4/29/02
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with mixed feelings that I acknowledge an end to this chapter of my educational journey. However, as the song by the group Semi-Sonic goes, "Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." As I end one leg of the trip, I embark upon the next.

I know that it is impossible to separate my educational journey from my personal journey of discovery and change. The two are deeply intertwined. Though my formal doctoral work has come to an end the insights, knowledge and understandings I have gained have deeply affected me and will provide the fuel and impetus for me as I set off in new directions...directions that will lead to continued personal and professional growth and self-discovery.

Clearly, the road to my Ph.D. has been long, winding and filled with unforeseen obstacles and opportunities. I am not the same person I was at the beginning of the journey. That is as it should be. I now view myself, my job, my world, and those around me through different eyes. My work has affirmed in me the belief that I can make a difference in the lives of others. This is a powerful revelation that will keep the desire and enthusiasm alive within me.
I would like to acknowledge several people who helped make my educational journey possible. First and foremost, I would like to thank my biggest supporter: my wife, Marcy. Without Marcy’s unwavering patience, understanding, and belief in me, and without her constant support and words of encouragement, none of my work would have been possible. She single-handedly created the conditions that allowed me to pursue my dreams and goals. For this, I am deeply grateful and appreciative. She was the glue that held our family together when I was writing yet another paper or engrossed in yet another article or book.

I would also like to thank several people at the University of New Hampshire who helped keep the journey alive and who helped provide the spark to keep me moving in a positive direction. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Barbara Krysiak. I thank Barbara for her inspiration, assistance, and support. Barbara’s courses ignited within me a new resolve and passion for education and leadership. Her words and message made me proud to be a principal and this translated directly to my work. She modeled the way and helped me see that one must never stop dreaming, believing, and advocating for children. I am deeply indebted to Barbara for her guidance throughout my dissertation. She is truly a champion for children and a role model for all of us.
I would also like to acknowledge two other professors who had a profound effect on me while at the University of New Hampshire. Dr. Thomas Schram helped me to understand and appreciate the power of qualitative research. Through Tom, I learned about ways of learning and understanding that were harmonious with my own personality and philosophy. Tom was an extremely valuable resource to me as I formulated my study and as I dealt with obstacles along the way. I appreciate his many words of encouragement and support and the positive and collegial guidance that he offered.

I would also like to thank Dr. Todd DeMitchell, who first inspired me to discover my passion in education and transform this passion into a doctoral study. Through conversations with Todd, I discovered that my passion focused on school culture and leadership. Once this became clear to me, it paved the way for the work that followed. I appreciate Todd's interest in me as a student-educator and for his help in clarifying my thoughts and ideas.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Scott AndersEn, my superintendent, who also served on my dissertation committee. Dr. AndersEn embodies the many traits and characteristics found in great leaders. He is a transformational leader who continually walks the walk and models outstanding leadership to
those around him. I have learned much from Dr. AndersEn and appreciate his support all along the way.

Last but not least, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the parents and staff who participated in my study, specifically those at Gilford Elementary School, Plymouth Elementary School, and Rye Elementary School. All three schools graciously opened themselves up to my visits and questions. I appreciate the staff members who volunteered to participate in my interviews and am grateful for their candor and honesty. If it were not for the parents and staff at these schools, this study would not have been possible. I applaud these three outstanding schools for the work they do on behalf of children. I learned much from their success and hope to share this knowledge with others. They should indeed, be proud of what they have accomplished. These schools serve as beacons of light in the field of elementary education.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................. iv

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................. x

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................... xi

CHAPTER PAGE

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE ......................................................... 1

  Definition of Key Terms .......................................................... 2
  Proposed Research .................................................................. 9
  Significance of the Study ....................................................... 12
  Limitations of the Study ....................................................... 14

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ................................................... 21

  Element #1 - School Culture .................................................... 22
  Element #2 - Leadership: Its History and Changing Profile .......................................................... 29
  Element #3 - Defining Effective Schools .............................. 41
  Conclusions/Synthesis of Literature Review ...................... 56

III. METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 59

  Methods of Data Collection .................................................. 59
  Plymouth Elementary School: Summary of Staff and Parent Interviews ...................................... 66
  Rye Elementary School: Synopsis of Staff and Parent Interviews .................................................. 81
  Gilford Elementary School: Synopsis of Staff and Parent Interviews ............................................ 97

viii

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV. ANALYSES</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth Elementary School</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye Elementary School</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilford Elementary School</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Analysis of the Three Research Sites</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Themes and Characteristics among Three High-Flying Elementary Schools</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanticipated Discoveries</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Further Study</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: Structured Interview Questions</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: School Demographic Comparison Charts</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: IRB Approval Letters</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Research Methodology Matrix
ABSTRACT

THE MANIFESTATION OF LEADERSHIP IN THREE HIGH FLYING NEW HAMPSHIRE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Steven T. Kelley

University of New Hampshire, May, 2002

Perhaps the most dominant feature marking today's educational landscape is the presence and growth of "reform efforts" occurring in schools everywhere. Educational institutions across the U.S. struggle to reform and improve the teaching and learning that occurs within their walls. The public demands higher standards, has greater expectations, and demands academic excellence. State testing has pointed out strengths and weaknesses present in our schools and in some cases, prompted state governments to intervene in an attempt to "rescue" schools that are not demonstrating adequate progress.

Over the past fifty years, school administrators and educational researchers have been captivated by the question of what makes a great school. Describing the profile of an outstanding school is not as easy as one might think. While there are some common traits that all great schools seem to share, perhaps one of the most widely agreed upon is the role of leadership.
in the school. The purpose of this study was to understand the dynamic relationship between three outstanding New Hampshire elementary schools' success and how leadership was manifested and experienced by parents and staff associated with these schools.

In order to understand how leadership was manifested in these outstanding schools, the researcher conducted a qualitative study in order to answer the following research question: How is leadership given shape and substance in these schools and how is it experienced by those working within these schools?

Three outstanding New Hampshire elementary schools were chosen using three different criteria including a school with an excellent word-of-mouth reputation, a National Blue Ribbon recipient, and a top scoring school as measured by the New Hampshire State Testing Program (NHEIAP). Participant observation conducted in these schools along with stakeholder interviews provided primary data sources. Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and coded in order to discover themes and evolving concepts.

This knowledge contributes to the efforts of others as they seek to improve their own schools from within. There are lessons that can be learned from those schools who are realizing high degrees of success—schools that are flying high and achieving great things.
CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

I have seen it with my own eyes. I have heard it from parents, teachers, and community members. I have read about it in journals, books, and newspapers. I know that they exist...there are outstanding elementary and secondary schools in our midst. There are schools that are achieving great things and reaching new heights. There are schools that are known for academic excellence and there are schools that are recognized as models and exemplars, beacons of light in the world of public education. There are schools that are floundering and schools that are flying high.

For the past fifteen years, I have worked as an elementary school administrator. I have always been captivated by the question of what makes a great school. Certainly, any principal wants his or her school to be great...to be viewed as exemplary. Describing the profile of an outstanding school is not as easy as one might think. The definition is elusive and complex and gets more complicated the closer one looks. In The Good High School, Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) defines good schools as “whole, changing, and imperfect.” She found that what makes one school great may not be the same as what makes another school great. In her profile of six different “good schools” Lightfoot found a number of attributes which contributed to the goodness of schools. One of the most important traits in good schools is a consciousness of their
imperfections and a willingness to admit them and search for their roots. Schools that are able to do this understand that problems are not something to be feared, but rather, opportunities for growth and improvement.

It is important to understand that what makes one school great in one situation may or may not make another school great in a different situation. Communities and stakeholders have a major impact on the judging of a school's success or failure. There are, however, some widely agreed upon traits of great schools including: high academic and social expectations, a rigorous and stimulating curriculum, a clear vision and ideology which guides decision-making, motivated students and staff, involved parents, and strong leadership—leadership that, in many cases, is multi-dimensional but that almost always involves a strong and effective principal. Leadership has a direct impact on the success of a school. I believe that effective leadership and excellence exist side by side in outstanding schools.

It is important to note that the term leadership does not apply exclusively to the principal and/or superintendent. For the purposes of this study, the term "leadership" applies to those administrators, faculty, students, parents, and community members, which play an active and integral role in the change process occurring with a school system.

Definition of Key Terms

ACE – An acronym for a leader who acknowledges, creates, and empowers. An ACE is a transformational leader who is capable of creating the energy and synergy needed for a school to grow and flourish in positive ways.
Authentic Leaders - Leaders who are followed not because their technical skills are effective, but rather, because of their personal integrity and savvy.

Blue Ribbon Award Program - The U.S. Department of Education's program designed to designate and honor schools that are widely held to be schools of excellence. Established by the Secretary of Education in 1982 its purpose is: (1) to identify and give public recognition to outstanding public and private schools across the United States; (2) to make available a comprehensive framework of key criteria for school effectiveness that can serve as a basis for participatory self-assessment and planning in schools; and (3) to facilitate communication and sharing of best practices within and among schools based on a common understanding of criteria related to success (Blue Ribbon School Program, 1982).

COP - An acronym for a leader who controls, orders, and predicts. This is the type of leader who will eventually be ineffective because s/he relies solely on the ability to keep everyone in line, to enforce rules, and to coerce results.

Correlate - either of two issues or actions so related that one directly implies or is complementary to the other. An action that accompanies another action (such as behavior), and is related in some way to it.

Culture - The deeply rooted set of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have evolved and developed over time (Deal & Peterson, 1990).
Climate - In educational research, this refers to an intangible feeling that has often been associated with such concepts as *ethos, environment, character*, and especially *culture* (Deal, 1993). It refers to the overall "feel" of a school and the overt and implicit behaviors and beliefs that underlie the actions and behaviors of a school organization. Climate is the manifestation of culture in a school.

Contingency Leadership Approach – A leadership theory which attempts to "specify the conditions or situational variables that moderate the relationship between leader traits or behaviors and performance criteria" (Hoy & Miskel, 1987).

Good/Effective Schools - These terms can be used interchangeably to represent a school that has achieved a recognized level of excellence. Some widely agreed upon traits of great schools include high academic and social expectations; a rigorous and stimulating curriculum; a clear vision and ideology which guides decision-making; motivated students and staff; involved parents; and strong leadership (Lightfoot, 1983).

HOT School - HOT stands for *Higher Order Thinking*. The goal of a HOT School is to create an environment where students can apply, synthesize and evaluate their learning as it relates to the world around them. The HOT School model requires staff training and a school-wide adoption of a philosophy that involves three essential components: (1) *Academics* (the acquisition of strong basic skills is the route to personal empowerment).
(2) Arts (the arts provide an integrative, motivating vehicle for students to communicate their empowerment). (3) Democracy (a strong student government which validates their role within the school, providing a route to environmental empowerment). A HOT School nurtures both culture and community. Regularly scheduled "Showcases" bring the entire school together in an assembly to celebrate a variety of student work.

Initiating Structures/Consideration Structures - Two types of leadership behaviors. Initiating structures demonstrate a concern for organizational tasks. Consideration structures demonstrate a concern for individuals and interpersonal relations within an organization.

Member Checks - going back to individuals and checking out conclusions and to corroborate what has been observed.

Observation – Direct firsthand eyewitness accounts of everyday social action. For the purposes of qualitative research, observation as a method is characterized by the following traits: (1) events, actions, meanings, and norms are viewed from the perspective of people being studied; (2) a premium is placed on attention to detail; (3) events and actions can be understood only when they are set within a particular social and historical context; (4) social action is regarded as processual and dynamic; (5) efforts are made to avoid premature imposition of theoretical notions on participants' perspectives (Schwandt, 1997).

Participant Observation – A procedure for generating understanding the ways of life of others. It requires that the researcher engage in some relatively
prolonged period of participation in a community or group and take some part in the daily activities of the people among whom he or she is studying (Schwandt, 1997).

Peer Debriefing - Exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner similar to that of an analytic session, to explore aspects that may be implicit in the researcher's mind.

Prolonged Engagement - Investing sufficient time to learn about the culture to be studied, detecting and minimizing distortions that may slowly shape the data, and building trust with the respondents (Schwandt, 1997).

Referential Adequacy - Using mechanically recorded data such as tape recorders, videotapes, and photographs (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Servant Leadership - This term refers to a leadership philosophy in which the leader of an organization leads by serving those around him/her and by inviting others to share in the burden of leadership. Servant leadership is the means by which leaders receive the legitimacy they need to lead. A servant leader works to fulfill the needs of others, providing them with the material, emotional, and technical support they need to do their jobs. A servant leader leads by example and gives to others in order to get back respect, authority, and trust.

Showcases - Regularly scheduled assemblies held at Gilford Elementary School. These Showcases bring the entire school together in an assembly to celebrate a variety of student work. (academic, art, poetry, drama, etc.). The
Showcase is part of the HOT School philosophy and helps create a sense of community with the school.

Situational Leadership - A leadership theory which takes into account the "distinctive characteristics of the setting to which the leader's success could be attributed" (Hoy & Miskel, 1987; Hencley, 1973). This theory maintains that leadership is determined not so much by the characters of the individuals as by the requirements of social situation.

Structured Interview – An interview format that involves predetermined questions that will be asked to each subject. These questions are developed with language that is open-ended in order to avoid leading or biasing a subject's responses. Structured interviews provide consistency of questioning, thus, improving the quality and quantity of data derived from the interview.

Stuck and Moving Schools - Stuck schools possess cultures that do not seek and process ideas from the outside whereas moving schools have developed internal cultures that do seek and process ideas.

Team Leader – A person designated to lead a specific groups of teachers. Teams of teachers are typically organized by grade levels, disciplines/subject matter, or physical location (i.e. wings or halls) within buildings. The team leader serves in a quasi-administrative role, assisting with projects such as inventory, budget, meeting scheduling, etc. This may or may not be a paid or stipend position depending on the particular school. Team leaders are often seen as educational leaders by their team colleagues.
Thick description - The careful, detailed description of social interaction which is said to be the foundation of ethnography and qualitative inquiry (Schwandt, 1997).

Traits Leadership Model – A leadership theory that considers leaders as individuals endowed with certain personality traits, which constitute their abilities to lead. Individual traits such as intelligence, birth order, socioeconomic status, and child-rearing practices were looked at carefully in this theory (Bass, 1960; Bird, 1940; Stogdill, 1948, 1974).

Transactional Leaders – Described by Burns (1978) as leaders who motivate by appealing to followers' self-interests. Burns (1978) describes transactors as “managers” who concern themselves with the procurement, coordination, and distribution of human and material resources needed by an organization.

Transformational Leaders - Burns (1978) first introduced the concept of transformational leadership, describing it as not a set of specific behaviors but rather a process by which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. He stated that transformational leaders are individuals that appeal to higher ideals and moral values such as justice and equality. Transformational leaders (transformers) facilitate the identification of organizational goals and initiate the development of a vision of what their organization is about.
Proposed Research

Statement of Purpose

It is important to explore the nature and substance of leadership in schools of excellence. The purpose of this study is to understand the dynamic relationship between an outstanding school's success and how its leadership is manifested and maintained.

Research Goals

This research is focused on learning about elements that are at work in schools that have achieved a recognized level of excellence. The nature and substance of leadership in these schools will be explored first-hand. Discoveries made will be useful to other educators who are seeking to improve their own schools. The qualitative nature of this research, which strives to understand the meaning of action to the participants, can offer improvement of arguments for practice and have greater effect on practice (Fenstermacher, 1986).

Schools are organizations driven by and for individuals and the study of educational issues is often made difficult because of the ever-present human factors that exist. Schools cannot be studied in a laboratory setting devoid of mitigating circumstances and confounding variables. The essence of what makes a school great is difficult to capture in a quantitative manner. This research will take into account the contextual elements that make schools what they are. Using qualitative research methods to study three high-flying elementary schools in the State of New Hampshire, the researcher hopes to
understand how leadership exists and how it is experienced by those within the schools. Ultimately, the researcher hopes to learn more about the relationship between leadership, culture, and a school's ultimate success.

**Research Question**

The following question has been developed to guide this study of leadership in excellent schools: *How is leadership given shape and substance in outstanding schools and how is it experienced by those working within the school? How do the elements of school culture and leadership exist in three high-flying New Hampshire elementary schools?*

**Research Sites**

For the purposes of this study, three New Hampshire Elementary Schools have been chosen, all of which are recognized as excellent or highly effective schools.

1. **Plymouth Elementary School**, located in Plymouth, NH. Plymouth Elementary School is a recent (1998-99) Blue Ribbon Award winner for elementary schools. This is a national award presented each year by the U.S. Department of Education to only the top schools in the country; schools that must meet a rigorous standards-based criteria.

2. **Rye Elementary School**, located in Rye, New Hampshire. Based on the 1999-2000 NHEIAP (*New Hampshire Educational Improvement and Assessment Program*) results, Rye Elementary School has among the highest three-year cumulative average of any elementary school in the state, in the areas of mathematics and language arts. From a state-
testing standpoint, Rye Elementary School has consistently shown a high level of academic excellence through its performance on the state-mandated test.

(3) **Gilford Elementary School** is a school widely recognized as outstanding in the central New Hampshire region. This school is also recognized as excellent by the State Principals' Association and the New Hampshire Department of Education. Gilford Elementary School has won numerous awards due to the accomplishments of its staff, students, and its outstanding programs. For the purposes of this study, Gilford Elementary School was chosen as an outstanding school based on its "word of mouth" reputation. As one of a number of elementary schools in New Hampshire with an excellent reputation, Gilford was also chosen, in part due to its geographical proximity to the researcher's own home area.

This study will search for common themes that may emerge in the study of these three outstanding elementary schools. It will attempt to better understand what common characteristics may lie within their walls and how these common characteristics impact leadership and culture are manifested in these schools.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Qualitative research methods have been selected for this study because the researcher does not have a clear picture of what will be discovered in these schools and because the context of these schools is critical to types of data that
will be generated. School participant observation, staff interviews, and parent interviews will serve as primary data sources.

Within all three of these schools, the researcher will attend general staff meetings and any other functions/activities deemed appropriate in order to experience on a first-hand basis, the culture and leadership that exist. The researcher will amass field notes, write analytic memos, and maintain a contact summary following interactions with individuals and groups within the schools. In order to bring consistency to this inquiry, structured interview questions will be used for conducting interviews with parents and staff. These questions will be developed in such a way as to allow for a wide range of responses without forcing respondents to answer in ways that might bias or influence their responses or the study. Parents and staff chosen for interviews will be randomly selected from a pool of volunteer participants. Only staff and parents who volunteer to be interviewed will become part of the potential interviewee pool.

Significance of Study

So why study excellent schools and the leadership that drives these schools? The answer is simple. If we believe that there are truly great schools in our midst, then knowing why these schools are so successful becomes invaluable. As educators, if we know what separates the mediocre from the great, we can try to capture the essence of greatness and cultivate it in our own schools.
Every school aspires to be great but very few achieve this goal. Great many of our schools are currently stuck in layers of established practice that promote and repeat mediocrity at many different levels. From a sociological/historical perspective, many of these schools seem to reflect the philosophy and notions that are reflective of major eras in our past. Our schools reflect a bureaucratic age culture that acts in terms of time and procedures. We use an industrial age delivery system that operates like an assembly line with students and teachers moving from segment to segment through curriculum at a uniform rate for the prescribed amount of time. On top of this, we employ an agrarian age calendar, with many school systems running from September to June, around which everything is defined. In addition to all of this, we hold onto a feudal age agenda that involves sorting and selecting the faster from the slower under the assumption that only some children can achieve certain things (Schwahn & Spady, 1998).

Times have changed and we are now in the midst of the information age—a time when technology and new knowledge are growing at a pace we cannot hope to match in our schools. Our public schools must continually be revived and renewed to cope with these challenges of the new millennium. Simply put, schools must change. But schools are complex and dynamic interrelated systems; therefore, transforming them into schools of excellence will require outstanding leadership and the commitment of parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members. An important question must be posed, “Who will lead the great schools and how will they be led?”
Limitations of Study

In undertaking a qualitative study of leadership this research will take place inside the walls of three excellent (high-flying) elementary schools in the State of New Hampshire. A wide range of data about the nature and substance of leadership in these schools will be collected and analyzed. The role of the researcher will be one of "participant observer." The researcher will be working on familiar yet unfamiliar ground. The study will be familiar in the sense that I will be spending time emerged in elementary school cultures. I have spent the last seventeen years of my life as an elementary school educator. The students (kids are kids wherever you go), the curriculum (elementary school focused), the materials, and the pedagogy will be very familiar to me. Many of the issues facing the teachers in these schools may be some of the same issues my teachers and I continue to face.

At the same time, the contexts and settings of my study will be very unfamiliar. I will be spending time in schools and communities that are unfamiliar to me. I will not immediately be aware of local school, community, and political issues. I have little or no understanding of the history of the schools and the issues that have shaped their development. I will not understand the formal and informal communication networks or the overt and hidden agendas that may shape my experiences. There is much I will not know and will seek to discover.
Validity Issues

In this study, it will be critical to demonstrate validity in both the description and analysis. Maxwell (1996) discusses bias as a specific threat to validity with which a researcher must contend. As a researcher studying leadership in elementary schools, it is important to be sensitive to what people are saying. Researchers need to develop the ability to recognize when their own biases, or those of the participants, are intruding into their analysis. Working to “bracket” beliefs and perspectives toward data is easier said than done. People really can never be truly free of their biases because so many biases are unconscious and part of their human fabric and cultural development. As a researcher, rather than focus on trying to eliminate what can not be eliminated, it is important to look for ways to break through, bracket, or move beyond personal biases. Keeping a journal of the research experience may be a useful way to keep track of thought processes during data gathering and analysis, sort of a forced meta-cognitive approach to self-analysis and reflection.

Researcher bias deals with two inherent threats: (1) the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory or preconceptions; and (2) the selection of data that “stand out” to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994, Shweder, 1980). It is impossible to deal with these potential problems by eliminating one’s own theories, preconceptions, or values. I will rely on my committee to help me accurately and fully reflect what biases might be at work within me as I prepare to enter the research field.
One of the pitfalls to this research may well be the researcher's own familiarity with the school setting. Wolcott (1984, in Jaeger, 1997 p. 338) referred to the danger of "becoming our own key informant in school research" and used the term "ethnography-minus-one." This phrase warns us that in school-related studies, it is often the researcher who is telling us what everything means (and perhaps even how things should be) rather than trying to grasp the subjects' points of view. It is essential to guard against this by constantly keeping in touch with thought processes and by consciously monitoring reflections and interpretations.

The researcher's status, as an elementary school principal, conducting a study of leadership within three unfamiliar schools will pose some challenging issues. The researcher's status as a privileged insider, due to familiarity and understanding of elementary school life, will assist in the study, yet the authority ascribed to the researcher by the people in these settings may become a hindrance. Teachers may feel threatened or intimidated by virtue of the researcher's status as a principal. The researcher's trustworthiness as a participant observer, along with perceived biases, may be called into question.

**Trustworthiness**

The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness focuses on the following question: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking
account of? There are several approaches that can be undertaken in order to increase trustworthiness in qualitative studies:

(1) *Having a thick description of the research process and how the investigator reaches the conclusions.* Thick description, which is the careful, detailed description of social interaction is said to be the foundation of ethnography and qualitative inquiry (Schwandt, 1997). Thick description involves more than amassing relevant detail. To thickly describe something is to actually begin to interpret it by recording the circumstances, meaning, intentions, strategies, and motivations that characterize a particular episode (Schwandt, 1997). This interpretative characteristic is what makes the description "thick." Engaging in "thick description" will be an element of this study. Thick description is important because it is the basis for more abstract interpretations of data and theory development. As the research unfolds, it will require continual monitoring to assure that important elements are being taken into consideration.

(2) *Prolonged engagement - investing sufficient time to learn about the culture to be studied, detecting and minimizing distortions that may slowly shape the data, and building trust with the respondents.* Spending an adequate amount of time in the field is an important element of qualitative research. A researcher needs to find the ground on which he/she will stand as either an active participant, a privileged active observer, or at best a passive observer. Wolcot (1982) states that
most field-workers in schools are privileged observers rather than active participants. Initially, the researcher's role in the schools being studied will be that of an "observer." Creswell (1998) recommends starting as an outsider followed by becoming an insider over time. Time will be an issue that must be taken into account. Rist (1980) cautions against blitzkrieg ethnography, which involves a rapid surface observation in a particular setting. In this research, it is important to seek depth, not breadth of information.

(3) **Persistent observation - identifying characteristics and elements relevant to the research.** In attempting to conduct persistent observation this research will employ a variety of methods and techniques designed to gather data. Log books, interviewing, tape recorders, reflection journals, and actual artifacts from the schools will help keep the researcher focused on the most relevant and important characteristics of the study. As noted above, this will include both descriptive and reflective notes. Creswell (1998) recommends taking few notes and doing lots of observing in the beginning of a study.

(4) **Peer debriefing - exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner similar to that of an analytic session, to explore aspects that may be implicit in the researcher's mind.** Qualitative research is often done alone or in small groups. It is rare for large groups of people to engage in fieldwork as a group. The somewhat solitary nature of qualitative research makes it important to consider frequent "grounding" with a
mentor or ally. The researcher will rely on members of the dissertation committee to help keep him in check, to ask tough question, and to reflect back the things being reported and said by the researcher. The researcher will ask those who are working with and supporting him to listen carefully to what is being said and how it is being said. Are there biases showing? Is the researcher being impartial and objective or are personal experiences, philosophy, and personal value systems impacting and coloring the work?

(5) Referential adequacy - using mechanically recorded data such as tape recorders, videotapes, and photographs. Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss the use of referential tools, which can be used for a variety of purposes. These tools can be used as primary data and are used best as supplemental to interviews and observations.

(6) Member checks or cross-examination - going back to individuals and checking out conclusions and to corroborate what has been observed. It is not the researcher's perception or perspective that matters but rather, how the research participants see events or happenings. Using member checks helps create a comparative base against which s/he can measure the range of meanings given by others and a beginning list of properties and dimensions that s/he can use to gain greater understanding of their explanations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher will need to carefully listen to and monitor individuals interacted with in the field. There are some respondents who will tell
the researcher what they think he wants (or expects) to hear and those who will be willing to question interpretations. Cross-checking with other members in the field is one way to avoid this issue. In doing this, the researcher will share with respondents what is emerging from the data and ask them whether or not these interpretations match their experiences with a particular phenomenon.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When discussing the issues of school effectiveness and the manifestation of leadership, it was important to develop a framework within which to operate. In this section, I will show how my research fits existing research and theory and how it make a contribution to the overall understanding of forms of leadership and effective schools. I will also seek to explain the theoretical framework that informs my study.

My study looks at the manifestation of leadership in three excellent elementary schools, but leadership cannot be studied in a vacuum. There are other factors that impact leadership and on which leadership has a profound impact. School culture, leadership, and school effectiveness are three interrelated concepts that must be studied together. Outstanding schools must have strong and healthy cultures in order to make change and reform. Change and reform are necessary for schools to become outstanding. In order for a school to have a strong and healthy culture, there must be strong and effective leadership emanating from different areas within the educational community.

The following pages will address these three important elements: school culture, leadership, and school effectiveness indicators. Understanding
these ideas and their relationship provides the necessary framework for understanding and relating to the research.

Element #1 - School Culture

It is common for people to speak of outstanding schools as having a particular "feel" or climate. Stakeholders in a school district, including parents, teachers, and students often sense something special and undefined about the schools they attend. Ask anyone associated with an outstanding school and they will talk about this "feeling." In educational research, this intangible feeling has often been associated with such concepts as ethos, environment, character, and especially culture (Deal, 1993). Although it is hard to quantify and difficult to see, culture is an extremely powerful force. Culture is often overlooked or ignored but it is actually one of the most significant features of any educational institution. Culture influences everything that occurs in schools: how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, instructional methodology, and the emphasis given student and staff learning (Deal & Peterson, 1994; Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Newmann & Associates, 1996).

What is school culture and who shapes it? Culture is the deeply rooted set of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have evolved and developed over time (Deal & Peterson, 1990). Heckman (1993) reminds us that school culture lies in the commonly held beliefs of teachers, students, and principals. Culture is developed as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. School culture shapes how people think, feel, and act. It
is a powerful web of influence that binds the school together and makes it special. It is up to school leaders—principals, teachers, and parents—to help identify, shape, and maintain strong, positive, student-focused cultures. Without these supportive cultures, reforms will not successfully occur, staff morale and commitment will wither, and student learning will be stunted (Peterson & Deal, 1998).

The elements that make up school climate and culture are complex, ranging from the quality of interactions in the staff lounge to the noise levels in hallways and cafeterias, from the physical structure of the building to the physical comfort levels of the individuals and how safe they feel. Even the size of the school and the opportunities for students and teachers to interact in small groups, both formally and informally, add to or detract from the health of a learning environment. The support staff, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, custodians, and office staff all add to the multiple dimensions of culture.

In his study of school culture, Jerome Freiberg (1998) discussed the importance of recognizing that school culture can be a positive influence on the health of the learning environment or a significant barrier to learning. How important is culture? Edgar Schein, an organizational psychologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Sloan School of Management, pioneered in the study of organizational culture and leadership. He says that it may well be that the only important thing that leaders do is construct culture (Schein, 1985). This is a strong statement that links and highlights the important relationship between leadership and culture and ultimately to a
school’s ability to grow and achieve greater things. According to Schein (1992) a primary embedding mechanism for transmitting organizational culture is created by what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control.

School culture is important because healthy school cultures correlate with increased student achievement and motivation and with teacher productivity and satisfaction. Leslie Fyans and Martin Maehr (1990) looked at the effects of five dimensions of school culture: academic challenges, comparative achievement, recognition for achievement, school community, and perception of school goals. They found that students were more motivated to learn in schools with strong cultures.

In a project directed at improving elementary school test scores, Thacker and McInerney (1992) looked at the effects of school culture on student achievement. The project they studied focused on creating a new mission statement, goals based on outcomes for students, curriculum alignment corresponding to the goals, staff development, and building level decision making. The results were significant. The number of students who failed an annual statewide test dropped by as much as ten percent.

School culture also correlates with teachers’ attitudes toward their work. In a study that profiled effective and ineffective organizational cultures, Cheng (1993) found stronger school cultures had better-motivated teachers.

The importance and influence of school culture is demonstrated in both research and practice. The culture of an organization can influence productivity, the commitment to improve, professional development, and the
underlying ways that teachers and administrators organize and coordinate complex activities in highly diverse settings including classrooms (Bolman & Deal, 1992). School cultures valuing change and reform support risk taking and change, not through formal procedures or structures, but through unstated norms and shared understandings about what is valued and important. In schools where educators share values and beliefs about education and teaching, coordination occurs implicitly through shared beliefs and unstated ways of acting. It does not occur through job descriptions, contractual obligations, or administrative oversight. While leadership must focus on the technical quality of curriculum and instruction, leaders must also focus on shaping the underlying culture of the school (Sashkin, 1987). Effective leadership must be both administrative and cultural in its scope (Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Schein, 1985; Wilson & Firestone, 1987).

Cultures can be strong or weak, dynamic or dysfunctional, and can wield either a positive or negative influence on organizational life (Kilmann, Saxton, & Serpa, 1985).

Schein (1985) discusses culture in terms of levels of increasing depth. The deepest level, "level three" involves "basic underlying assumptions," which are deeply rooted and almost automatic. They have become so taken for granted that one finds little variation within the school. Basic assumptions are usually non-debatable and deeply held beliefs that form the very foundation of the school's organization. An effective school's culture deeply holds learning, instruction, respect, dignity, self-worth, and other core values.
When the notion of a school’s culture is being discussed, the term “community” is often used. A sense of community is the presence among most individuals of a sense of belonging to the school. Community is a manifestation of culture. In a healthy culture, teachers believe that others accept them as members of the school faculty and high levels of trust and mutual respect exist. Individuals feel as though they contribute to the school in some significant way. Building community, according to Sergiovanni (1994) requires the development of a “community mind” represented in shared values, conceptions, and ideas about schooling and human nature. Sergiovanni stresses the importance of shifting the focus away from schools as organizations based on contracts and rewards to schools as communities bound by moral commitment, trust, and a sense of purpose.

Central to the idea of a community is the notion of personal and professional self-worth. Within a healthy school culture, teachers hold the belief that they are respected by their colleagues, treated as equals among their colleagues, consulted before decisions are made or actions taken, and are safe (both physically and psychically) in the school environment. A healthy school culture includes caring, celebration, humor, and tradition. These are tangible and intangible elements that can be seen and felt within the school. Leadership plays a major role in the development of this type of culture, not only the principal’s leadership but the leadership of other faculty throughout the building.
At this point, one might ask the question, "Why is it important to be considering school culture within the context of my proposed research?" I view school culture, leadership, and the change process as a triad of interrelatedness. I believe deeply in the concept of continual-self and school improvement. I also believe that it is critical that schools continue to grow and evolve to meet the needs of students, communities and society as a whole. For a school to grow and improve, the culture must be ripe and supportive for change.

Rosenholtz's (1989) depiction of "stuck" and "moving" schools in her sample of 78 elementary schools is clear about the difference between non-learning and learning schools (schools possessing cultures that do not seek and process ideas from the outside versus schools whose cultures do). Rosenholz found that in the thirteen "moving" schools in her study, teachers learned from each other and from the outside. Most teachers acknowledged that teaching was difficult and sometimes they needed help. Giving and receiving help did not, therefore, imply incompetence. It was part of the common quest for excellence. Having their colleagues show support and communicating more with them about what they did led these teachers to have more confidence, more certainty about what they were trying to achieve and how well they were achieving it. This culture of support and collaboration could not exist without the right cultural conditions existing in the schools. Clearly, the thirteen "moving" schools had cultures that fostered conditions for growth, improvement, and change.
There is a connection here between effective schools, change/reform, and culture. As Goodlad (1992) said, “healthy nations have healthy schools, not the other way around.” Healthy schools have the capacity to make change, but in order to have a healthy school one must first, and foremost, have a positive and healthy school culture.

Change and school culture, indeed, go hand in hand. In his book, Change Forces, Michael Fullan (1993) draws several conclusions about the failure of schools to reform and change. Among these conclusions, Fullan includes: “Change in teaching for more effective learning requires major transformation in the culture of the school, and in the relationship of the school to other agencies--an incredibly complex undertaking.” In this statement, Fullan is speaking to the importance of the right conditions for change to occur. The existence of a healthy and effective school culture is a prerequisite to change. The closer one looks, the closer the connection between culture and change becomes. In order for schools (and the people working within them) to make the types of change necessary in today’s dynamic world, the conditions must be right. The culture must be one that rewards and values collaboration, joint problem solving, risk-taking, communication, teamwork, and core values such as honesty, integrity, respect, and care. A healthy school culture contributes to effective teaching and learning. Culture can be a positive influence on the health of the learning environment or a significant barrier to learning.
Element #2 - Leadership: Its History and Changing Profile

In the preceding section, school culture and its connection with leadership was discussed. This section will focus on the idea of leadership, its evolution over time, its definition and attributes, and how it connects to the notion of high-flying elementary schools in this study.

In looking at research aimed at identifying outstanding schools, there are some widely agreed upon traits of great schools. One trait, almost universally agreed upon, involves leadership. Strong leadership from within a school is perhaps one of the greatest contributors to a school's success. In reviewing literature centered on leadership, it becomes apparent that leadership can no longer be viewed as something provided solely by one person (Barnes & Kriger, 1986; Slater & Doig, 1988). Leadership must include the teaching staff, central office, administration, parents, students and the community. When these sources cooperate and collaborate around common goals and a common mission, great things are possible in a school and schools begin to thrive.

A review of the leadership literature from the past 100 years reveals that effective leadership in an organization is critical. Early examinations of leaders reported the differences between leaders and followers. Later studies differentiated effective from non-effective leaders. The comparison of effective and non-effective leaders led to the identification of two dimensions, initiating structures and consideration, and revealed that effective leaders were high performers in both. Leadership was recognized as a complex
concept, and as recent studies assert, vision and collaboration are important characteristics of effective leadership. The personal strengths of specific leaders have taken on importance in recent research. Evans (2000) describes "authentic leaders" as leaders who are followed. It is not their technical skills that make them effective, but rather, their personal integrity and savvy that set them apart and make others want to follow them.

Over time, researchers have examined leadership skills from a variety of perspectives. Early analyses of leadership, from the 1900s to the 1950s, differentiated between leader and follower characteristics. Finding that no single trait or combination of traits fully explained leaders' abilities, researchers then began to examine the influence of the situation on leaders' skills and behaviors.

In later years, the focus of research shifted as leadership studies attempted to distinguish effective from non-effective leaders. These studies attempted to determine which leadership behaviors effective leaders exemplified. To understand what contributed to making leaders effective, researchers examined the connection between personal traits, situational variables, and leader effectiveness.

Leadership studies of the 1970s and 1980s once again focused on the individual characteristics of leaders that influence their effectiveness and the success of their organizations. A number of different models began to evolve in leadership theory; the most important of which are summarized below.
**Traits Model of Leadership: Leaders versus Followers**

Initial investigations of leadership considered leaders as individuals endowed with certain personality traits which constituted their abilities to lead. The studies investigated individual traits such as intelligence, birth order, socioeconomic status, and child-rearing practices (Bass, 1960; Bird, 1940; Stogdill, 1948, 1974). Stogdill (1974) identifies six categories of personal factors associated with leadership: capacity, achievement, responsibility, participation, status, and situation, but concludes that such a narrow characterization of leadership traits is insufficient. He believes that a person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits. These attempts to isolate specific individual traits led to the conclusion that no single characteristic can distinguish leaders from non-leaders.

**Situational Leadership: Impact of the Setting on Leaders**

The "trait" investigations were then followed by examinations of the "situation" as the determinant of leadership abilities, leading to the concept of situational leadership. Studies attempted to identify "distinctive characteristics of the setting to which the leader's success could be attributed" (Hoy & Miskel, 1987). Henley (1973) reviewed leadership theories and noted that the situation approach maintains that leadership is determined not so much by the characters of the individuals as by the requirements of social situation. According to this research focus, a person could be a follower or a leader depending upon circumstances.
Attempts were made to identify specific characteristics of a situation that affected leaders' performance. Hoy and Miskel (1987) list four areas of situational leadership: structural properties of the organization, organizational climate, role characteristics, and subordinate characteristics. These studies reveal that leadership is a very complex concept, but the notion of situational leadership proved to be insufficient because the theories could not predict which leadership skills would be more effective in certain situations.

**Effective Leaders: Two Dimensions**

As the body of leadership research grew, other attempts to examine leadership yielded information about the types of behaviors that leaders exhibited in order to determine what makes effective leaders effective. These behaviors have been categorized along two common dimensions: initiating structures (concern for organizational tasks) and consideration (concern for individuals and interpersonal relations). Other researchers conceptualized these two dimensions as goal achievement and group maintenance (Cartwright & Zander, 1960), instrumental and expressive needs (Etzioni, 1961), and system- or person-oriented behaviors (Stogdill, 1963). In its place among leadership research, the situation approach to leadership supported the notion that effective leaders are able to address both the tasks and human aspects of their organizations.

**Contingency Models: More than the Situation**

In search of a better model that spoke to all aspects of leadership, researchers focused on the fit between personality characteristics, leaders'
behaviors, and situational variables. The situational leadership approach contains an underlying assumption that different situations require different types of leadership, while the contingency approach attempts to "specify the conditions or situational variables that moderate the relationship between leader traits or behaviors and performance criteria" (Hoy & Miskel, 1987).

Fiedler (1967), differentiating between leadership styles and behaviors, concludes that leadership styles indicate leaders' motivational system and that leadership behaviors are leaders' specific actions. He believes that group effectiveness is a result of the leaders' style and the situation's favorableness. The contingency models furthered the understanding of leadership but did not completely clarify what combination of personality characteristics, leaders' behaviors, and situational variables are most effective.

**Non-leader Leadership: Many Leaders**

Similar to the contingency explanation of leadership is the notion of organizational leadership. Barnes and Kriger (1986) suggest that previous theories of leadership are insufficient because they deal more with the single leader and multi-follower concept than with organizational leadership in a pluralistic sense. They contend that leadership is not found in one individual's traits or skills but is a characteristic of the entire organization, in which leader roles overlap, complement each other, and shift from time to time and from person to person, thus implying a more inclusive concept of leadership.
An extension of organizational leadership is the concept of shared leadership. Slater and Doig (1988) object to the assumption that leadership is a possession of one individual. They assert that such a notion ignores the possibility that leadership may also be exercised by a team of individuals (Slater & Doig, 1988). This research began to lead educators away from the idea of the single leader and toward a more holistic and broader understanding of leadership.

**Current Leadership Research**

The leadership literature of the 1980s and 1990s, with its focus on effective leaders, revisited personal traits as a main factor in determining leadership abilities. This research contributed to understanding the impact of personal characteristics and individual behaviors of effective leaders and their role in making organizations successful. The studies differentiated between leaders and managers and introduced a new leadership characteristic called "vision" and explored its importance. Along with having vision, effective leaders are said to facilitate the development of a shared vision and value the human resources of their organizations. In addition to these insights on leadership, a new theory emerged—transformational leadership.

**Transformational Leadership**

Burns (1978) first introduced the concept of transformational leadership, describing it as not a set of specific behaviors but rather a process by which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. He states that transformational leaders are individuals that
appeal to higher ideals and moral values such as justice and equality and can be found at various levels of an organization. Burns contrasts transformational leaders with transactional leaders, which he describes as leaders who are motivated by appealing to followers' self-interest. Working with Burns' definition of transformational leadership, Bass (1985) asserts that these leaders motivate followers by appealing to strong emotions regardless of the ultimate effects on the followers and do not necessarily attend to positive moral values. Other researchers have described transformational leadership as going beyond individual needs, focusing on a common purpose, addressing intrinsic rewards and higher psychological needs such as self-actualization, and developing commitment with and in the followers (Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Coleman & La Roque, 1990; Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992; Leithwood, 1992; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1989; 1990).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) draw a clear distinction between those who lead and those who simply manage organizations (the concept of “leaders versus managers”). They defined managers as people who do things right and leaders as people who do the right thing. Burns (1978) describes managers as transactors and leaders as transformers. Managers (transactors) concern themselves with the procurement, coordination, and distribution of human and material resources needed by an organization (Ubben & Hughes, 1987). Leaders (transformers) facilitate the identification of organizational goals and initiate the development of a vision of what their organization is about.
According to Bennis and Nanus (1985) management controls, arranges, does things right; leadership unleashes energy and sets the vision so people do the right thing.

Transformational leadership has been identified as the kind of educational leadership necessary to take schools forward into the 21st Century (Schlechty, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1990; Fullan, 1991). Transformational leadership bonds leaders and followers within a collaborative change process that impacts on the performance of the whole organization, resulting in a responsive and innovative environment.

In their book, Reinventing Leadership, Bennis and Townsend (1995) suggest two new paradigms of leadership: a leader who controls, orders, and predicts, a COP; and the leader who acknowledges, creates, and empowers, an ACE. The COP is a hierarchical and bureaucratic leader who will eventually be ineffective because s/he relies solely on the ability to keep everyone in line, to enforce rules, and to coerce results. An ACE is a transformational leader who is capable of creating the energy and synergy needed for a school to take off and achieve great things.

All of this research points educators toward some specific notions that are very important in understanding leadership. The central theme of leadership research is that those who find themselves supervising people in an organization should be both good managers and good leaders. The research shows that in addition to being accomplished administrators who develop and implement sound policies, procedures, and practices, effective administrators
are also leaders who shape the school's culture by creating and articulating a vision, winning support for it, and inspiring others to attain it (Duttweiler & Hord, 1987).

We know that schools are complex and dynamic interrelated systems. Today's schools must become self-sustaining, self-improving communities of learning. This will require the leadership and commitment of many people. History has shown us that school leadership cannot continue to exist in the vertical hierarchy of yesterday. Leadership is no longer embodied in a single person: the principal, or superintendent...it lives in the hearts and minds of all stakeholders including administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members. Leadership is more than just some quantifiable human quality. Leadership is a concept, a skill, an art, a process; it is wisdom and expertise, knowledge and experience, interdependence and relationships. Effective leadership in today's schools is a shared role that involves a number of different dimensions.

_Leadership is contextual_ – different leaders are needed for different problems and projects, for different responsibilities and goals. Wheatley (1994) suggests that there are several different roles for leaders: leader as manager, as expert, as facilitator, or as coach. Leadership in this dimension takes into account all of the current situational and contextual factors that are present. While a principal might be a natural leader when facilitating a discussion of the mission or goals of a school, a teacher might be a better leader when planning for the annual science fair. Then again, a wellness week theme
might be best led by a health or physical education teacher. The context often will help determine the best leader for a given situation.

*Leadership is teaching and learning* – leaders must ensure continuous progress for the individual, group, and organization. It is important for leaders in today's schools to be life-long learners, demonstrating and modeling active learning to all (Senge, 1990). As learners, as role models, and as teachers, today's leaders cultivate a school culture that is conducive to learning—they create a community of learners. The principal who continually engages in professional development or who is involved in coursework leads by example and demonstrates the value of lifelong learning. This sends a powerful message to the staff.

*Leadership is being a change agent* – self-sustaining schools are always changing, always improving, and always adjusting to meet the needs of students. Their leaders must be change agents who cultivate insight and ideas, risk-taking and self-reflection. School leaders must look at (and help others see) change as a journey that is undertaken as a part of growth and improvement. They view problems as opportunities to question and creatively improve the school system. The principal who reacts in an angry or frustrated way when faced with a problem sends a negative and counterproductive message and, by example, shows others "this is the way we act around here." Viewing problems as opportunities rather than a threats is what being a change agent is all about. Leaders must encourage risk-taking and support staff who are willing to try new things. They must embrace
proactive and creative individuals and work to support them rather than squelch the energy and enthusiasm these people possess. Positive energy is what keeps the change process alive.

*Leadership is energy exchange* – The view that today’s school leadership is energy exchange, in which leaders recognize that focusing and developing the energy of core values and synergetic relationships is essential for school improvement is promoted by Garmston and Wellman (1995). Good leaders know that they need to harness the energy of those around them. They understand the collective power of people and that the energy created is the energy that keeps an organization alive and moving forward. The effective leader understands that communication, honesty, and human interactions are at the heart of positive energy exchange. They do all they can to foster a culture that builds relationships and collective group energy.

*Leadership is spirituality* – Bolman & Deal (1995) suggests that the essence of leadership is spirit—“leading with soul.” The spiritual side of leadership involves caring, loving, giving, nurturing, and engagement. People are drawn to leaders and are more apt to follow them when they feel a human connection with them. Human connections that are strong, healthy, and positive are built through emotional attachments between people. Making decisions with the heart, as well as with the head is something that is done by a leader who recognizes and embraces the spiritual aspect of leadership.
Leadership is community building – today's schools need leaders that know how to create a community of learners. Effective leadership is a relationship rooted in community. Successful leaders embody their group's most precious values and beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 1995). Leaders who are community builders help create a collaborative and cooperative environment in which group discussion and group participation are the norm.

Communities of learning involve everyone. While a hierarchy may exist by virtue of job assignments or areas of responsibility, this hierarchy does not impede the collaborative efforts of the group. The leader in a learning community makes sure that the right conditions exist for people to feel honored, respected, important and empowered. When people feel empowered, the community comes together for the common good of students.

Thomas Sergiovanni (1994, 2000) asserts the notion that schools are united by ideas and not by a hierarchy of control. Leaders lead by serving and by inviting others to share in the burden of leadership. He states that servant leadership is the means by which leaders receive the legitimacy they need to lead. When all stakeholders share a common understanding and responsibility for the leadership of the organization, a community of leaders evolves.

Coombs (1999) stresses the importance of people skills, using words such as facilitators, aides, and assistors. His portrayal of leadership is in concert with the Bennis and Townsend notion of an ACE leader. Similarly, Wheatley
(1999) uses metaphorical terms such as "gardeners, stewards, facilitators, and servants" to describe the role and functions of leadership in today's world. Again, this is closely aligned with the notion of an ACE. In her book, *Leadership and the New Science*, Wheatley (1999) talks about organizations that are preoccupied with the creation of control mechanisms that severely limit the creativity and effectiveness of employees. This is a dangerous trend and one that will drive schools further inward, afraid and unable to reform and make the type of substantive changes needed for improvement. It is the leader's role to protect people from over-control so that they feel empowered, safe, and connected with the overall goals and purpose of the school.

The bottom line is that leadership from many different people helps make or break the culture of a school. Leadership that is vision-oriented, people focused, and strong in both transformational and transactional processes leads to the growth and development of a healthy and thriving school culture. This culture then provides the foundation on which change, reform, and success are built.

At this point, it is important to discuss the third and final element in the school effectiveness/culture/leadership triad: School Effectiveness.

**Element #3 - Defining Effective Schools**

For the purposes of this section, the term "good school" and "effective school" can be used interchangeably to represent a school that has achieved a recognized level of excellence. To be recognized as excellent,
acknowledgement usually begins at a local level but may extend to State or even National levels, as in the case of Blue Ribbon Schools. Much of the early research that examined highly effective schools identified five to seven characteristics or “correlates” thought to distinguish these schools from less effective schools. Probably the best known correlates were identified by Brookover, Edmonds, Lezotte, and Fredericksen (1979). These correlates were identified as: (1) emphasis on student acquisition of basic skills; (2) high expectations for students; (3) strong administrative leadership; (4) frequent monitoring of student progress; and (5) an orderly climate conducive to learning. In the mid-1980’s, Gauthier, Shoemaker, and Villanova added several other correlates including positive home-school relations; student time on task; and a clear school mission.

Supporting these correlates, research by Bamburg and Andrews (1987) found that Seattle elementary schools which registered high on gains in math achievement had higher scores on positive learning culture, strong leadership, high expectations, and frequent monitoring than did elementary schools with smaller gains.

Selection criteria for classifying a school as effective or ineffective have been a topic of considerable debate and research. Describing the profile of an excellent school is not as easy as one might think. It is elusive and complex and gets more complicated the closer one looks. Whenever we talk about an effective school or an excellent school, we need to be prepared to ask and
answer two very basic questions. Effective or excellent at what and effective and excellent for whom?

In *The Good High School*, Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) defines good schools as whole, changing, and imperfect. She found that what makes one school great may not be the same as what makes another school great. In her profile of six different “good schools” Lightfoot found a number of attributes which contributed to the “goodness of schools.” One of the most important traits in good schools was a consciousness of their imperfections and a willingness to admit them and search for their roots. Schools that are able to do this understand that problems are not something to be feared, but rather, an opportunity for growth and improvement. In her book, Lightfoot discusses the issue of identifying a school as great as follows: “It is important to understand that what makes one school great in one situation may not make another school great in a different situation. Communities and stakeholders have a major impact on the judging of a school’s success or failure. There are, however, some widely agreed upon traits of great schools including: high academic and social expectations, a rigorous and stimulating curriculum, a clear vision and ideology which guides decision-making, motivated students and staff, involved parents, and strong leadership—leadership that, in many cases, is multi-dimensional but that almost always involves a strong and effective principal (Lightfoot, 1983).
Defining Good Schools: A Historical Perspective

During the 1980's a number of commissions and special reports stated that education, as it existed in the United States, was in need of significant reform (Duke, 1987). What emerged from these reports was a consensus for change. This consensus for change, highlighted in *A Nation at Risk*, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, centered around the need for more active involvement of students in learning and higher expectations for teachers and students. These recommendations were significant in that they began to support the extensive school effectiveness research that was being done.

While the effective schools research indicated what constituted effective schools, it was not clear how schools become effective. Additionally, the traditional basis for judging school effectiveness, student performance on standardized achievement tests, was seen as extremely narrow. Researchers criticized the narrow definition of school effectiveness and argued for a more expansive and multi-dimensional definition (Duke, 1987; Lightfoot, 1983; Lipsitz, 1984; Rowan, Dwyer, & Bossert, 1983; Sergiovanni, 1987).

Common Traits Shared by Good Schools

Good schools share several common characteristics; one of the most important of which is the quality of leadership. The principal of a good school is a person who leads rather than manages. The principal is a person of vision who keeps up to date with regard to innovative ideas that will improve teaching and learning. This person does not conduct business as usual nor
respond to educational fads. Instead, the principal prioritizes needs and problems and progressively introduces new and more effective ways of doing things. This is done through collaboration with all constituencies including central office administrators, school board members, teachers, faculty, parents, and students. The principal is interested in balancing change with stability.

Good schools also reflect shared decision-making through teacher empowerment. Teachers are trusted to work together to examine curriculum and school policies and to make recommendations that will benefit the majority of students. Teachers work much harder when they have a voice in what affects them because there is more ownership in the process.

Good schools do not arbitrarily assign students to grade levels by age or on the basis of entrance tests. Nor do they place students in classes by ability, disability, or achievement levels. Good schools get ready for children rather than have children get ready for them. These schools are inclusive. Good schools project a sense of community. The people in them celebrate individual, cultural, ethnic, and religious differences not only of people within our own country but also those of other countries. They also teach about the importance of our environment and how we are all members of larger society.

Good schools have high levels of parental/community involvement and provide for ongoing parenting education from the time a child enters school until s/he leaves it. Good schools have personnel who believe that parents are critical members of the team and are needed for raising a "whole
child." Haberman (1991, pp. 290–294) asserts that the learning environments in good schools share several elements that are common including:

(1) The locus of learning is in the learner and the goal of learning is the construction of meaning by the student.

(2) Learning focuses less on low level basic skills and isolated facts and more on enabling students to construct meaning, solve complex problems, and develop and learn content or cognitive processes, strategies, and skills.


(4) Instruction emphasizes depth of learning rather than breadth of learning.

(5) Students review their own work, and rework it to improve it, polish it, and refine it.

(6) Students use values such as fairness, equity, and justice in their classroom. These values are evident in the school's mission and the way it does business each day.

(7) Good schools have the philosophy that good education is individualized and that learning takes place in a social context. This is why good schools keep class sizes small in the early grades, when children are still in the transition between play and work—concrete and abstract.
Good schools are happy and positive places where students, faculty, staff, and visitors feel welcome. The climate of a good school can be felt immediately upon coming through the front doors. The hallways and rooms are decorated with the work of all students. Mutual respect, courtesy, and cooperation are clearly exhibited in these schools. These are schools where both the teachers and the children like to remain in the building after school hours, and take work home.

Good schools operate on the assumption that the self-esteem and self-worth of everyone is important from pre-schoolers up to high schoolers. This even includes teachers and parents, because they too need to feel worthy. The teachers in these schools understand that motivation, discipline, moral development, and productivity are strongly associated with self-esteem.

Increasingly, educators are paying serious attention to the quality of relationships that exist among staff members and students within our best schools. The National Association of Secondary Principal’s publication, "Breaking Ranks" highlights "personalization" of the school as a key challenge to reform. Similarly, Ernest Boyer (1995) argued in "The Basic School" that fostering community in elementary schools is essential for effective schooling in the early grades. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that a strong sense of community in schools has benefits for both staff and students and provides the necessary foundation for growth, improvement, and overall success.
In a research study by Liontos (1992, pp. 60-66) eight schools were studied within the state of Oregon. The schools were chosen based on their "track records" and were all chosen because they were widely viewed by many people to be "good" schools. Ten common elements that contributed to success in these schools were discovered. The ten elements included:

(1) **Leadership** – All schools had a principal who is considered by the staff to be at least partly responsible for the success of the school and who was recognized as a transformational leader.

(2) **Community and parent involvement** – In all cases, the successful schools were connected to and responsive to their communities. All schools made efforts to communicate frequently with parents and to find different ways to involve parents in the school.

(3) **Committed staff** – These schools were known as having "top notch" staff that was seen as caring and dedicated. There was low staff turnover and teachers reported a positive working relationship with their colleagues that led to job satisfaction.

(4) **Innovative curriculum** – These successful schools took a global approach to education and stressed multi-cultural education and tolerance for others. Cooperative and interdisciplinary learning had replaced competitive, non-related curriculum. Technology was also used to enhance the curriculum. These school worked hard to fit the curriculum to the child...not the child to the curriculum.
(5) **Educating the “whole child”** – The successful schools shared the characteristic of emphasizing the emotional and social development of students as much as cognitive achievement. Students learned in programs that stressed social behavior, cooperation, respect, and tolerance. Extracurricular activities played an important role in these schools.

(6) **Discipline** – Positive recognition and a focus on building self-esteem had replaced the old punitive forms of discipline. Building self-esteem was often mentioned as a particularly important goal.

(7) **Evaluation** – Teachers in all schools were engaged in a search for new and more relevant ways to assess student mastery of skill and performance. Portfolios were a part of the assessment efforts that were seeking more developmentally appropriate ways to measure student growth and progress.

(8) **Overcoming disadvantages of size** – Several of the schools in Lontos’s study were large but compensated by implementing programs or using techniques that ensured that each and every student was monitored and accounted for at all times. “Schools within schools” were created along with other programs that helped students maintain contact with the same teachers and classmates during the year.

(9) **Programs for at-risk students** – Tied in with the emphasis on individual attention were special programs used in these schools to assist disadvantaged students (i.e., alternative programs, work/study
programs, academic assistance, staff or mentor tutoring, and extracurricular activities).

(10) **Social services** – These successful schools had school-based health and counseling services available for students. They worked hard to access community services and assist parents and students in many different ways.

Other research has supported many of the common elements seen in the best schools. Even the federal government has become involved in focusing on effectiveness indicators. The United States Department of Education has a program designed to designate and honor schools that are widely held to be schools of excellence. *The Blue Ribbon Schools Program* was established by the Secretary of Education in 1982. Its purpose is: (1) to identify and give public recognition to outstanding public and private schools across the United States; (2) to make available a comprehensive framework of key criteria for school effectiveness that can serve as a basis for participatory self-assessment and planning in schools; and (3) to facilitate communication and sharing of best practices within and among schools based on a common understanding of criteria related to success (Blue Ribbon School Program, 1982, pp. 18-20).

Blue Ribbon Schools model *excellence* and *equity*. They exhibit a strong commitment to educational excellence for all students. The school's success in furthering the intellectual, social, moral, and physical growth of all its students is a basic consideration underlying the recognition criteria. The quality of each...
school is judged in the context of how effectively it has defined and is meeting its own goals and how well it serves students, their families, and the local community. Additionally, for a school to be judged worthy of national recognition, it must show significant progress in meeting State and/or national education goals.

The overall framework of criteria used in the Blue Ribbon Schools Program includes the following eight categories:

A. Student Focus and Support
B. School Organization and Culture
C. Challenging Standards and Curriculum
D. Active Teaching and Learning
E. Professional Community
F. Leadership and Educational Vitality
G. School, Family, and Community Partnerships
H. Indicators of Success

These categories are derived from the body of educational research on school effectiveness and are viewed as essential for school excellence. Schools competing for the Blue Ribbon Award must clearly demonstrate and articulate how each of these categories is addressed in the educational fabric of the school.

Research Focusing on Leadership, Culture, and School Achievement

Research on effective schools over the last three decades has resulted in the development of theories about school factors that influence students' academic achievement. Some studies have found a relationship between principal leadership and student achievement (Andrews, Soder, & Jacoby, 1986; Eberts & Stone, 1988; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990). Although researchers have established correlations between principal instructional
leadership behaviors and school effectiveness, including student achievement, few studies have found a causal link between instructional leadership and school outcomes (Larsen, 1987; Leitner, 1994). Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1990) analyzed data from the Tennessee School Improvement Project to see if a causal relationship could be found between principal leadership and effective schools. They found two key variables— instructional climate and instructional organization—that were directly related to student achievement and influenced by principals and other leaders. Heck, Larson, and Marcoulides (1990) found that three instructional leadership variables (school governance, instructional organization, and school culture) affected student achievement.

There have been a number of studies linking principal leadership or school culture variables to student achievement. The results of this research do not draw any clear-cut conclusions as the results have been mixed. Andrews (1986) studied 33 elementary schools. Using California Achievement Test reading and math score gains as measures of student achievement, this study found that schools characterized as “strong-leader” schools had significantly higher achievement gains than schools characterized as average- and weak-leader schools. Kimball (1985) found similar results in a survey of 94 schools; higher-achieving schools had significantly higher teacher ratings on school culture and principal leadership behaviors than lower-achieving schools.

Conversely, Leitner (1994), in a study of principals and teachers in 27 elementary schools, found no significant relationship between increased
student learning and the principal’s instructional management. This reflected similar findings to Krug’s study (1992) of principals and teachers in 56 Illinois schools. Krug’s research found no significant relationships between teacher ratings of instructional leadership and student achievement. This same study did however, find a positive correlation between principals’ self-ratings of instructional leadership and student achievement. Principals who viewed their leadership as positive and effective tended to work in schools with higher achievement scores. Conversely, Hallinger (1990) conducted a three-year study involving 87 Tennessee schools. The results indicated no direct effect of principal leadership on student learning.

It should be noted that these investigations focused separately on the relationships between leadership and school culture, school culture and achievement, and leadership and achievement. Very little research has been done which is directed toward the influence of leadership on school culture and in turn, student achievement.

On one hand, the relationship between leadership style and student achievement is inconsistent. Valesky et al. (1992) found that a democratic leadership style produced a healthier school culture than an authoritarian or laissez-faire leadership style. Cey (1993) found a strong, positive relationship between the principal’s leadership style and organizational culture. Heymon (1990) found a positive relationship between school culture and leadership style.
On the other hand, the research of Decker (1993) found no relationship between leadership style and school culture in eighty elementary schools in Iowa. Concurrently, Anderson (1993) found no relationship between leadership style and school culture in a sample of 57 schools in New Jersey.

As can be seen, the relationship between leadership styles and school culture is inconclusive. Likewise, common findings in the studies of the relationship between school culture and student achievement are few and fragile. Nevertheless, there is some agreement that does exist: culture does affect many student outcomes, including cognitive behavior of students (Barker, 1963; Brookover et al., 1978; Duke & Perry, 1978; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991).

Some researchers have found a relationship between various school culture factors and student achievement. Brookover et al. (1979) found that school culture accounts for a significant amount of the variance in student achievement, with race and socio-economic status controlled. The Phi Delta Kappa study (1980), Weber (1971), Klitgaard and Hall (1973), and Wynne (1980) reported similar findings. Linzy (1990) and Bulach et al. (1992) also found a significant relationship between culture and achievement.

With respect to the relationship between leadership and student achievement, the findings are inconsistent. Wesner (1993) in investigating a middle school improvement project, found that principal leadership as mediated by school culture corresponded to an improvement in student achievement. Secumski-Kiligian (1993) found no relationship between
leadership style and student achievement. Hardie (1993) and Willard (1993) reported similar results.

In an attempt to study the influence of the principal's leadership style on school culture and student achievement, Bulach, Lenenburg, and McCallon conducted research in twenty elementary schools in Tennessee. The Leadership Behavioral Matrix, the Tennessee School Climate Inventory, and the Group Openness and Trust Scale were administered to principals and teachers in these schools. School achievement scores were obtained from the results of the California Test of Basic Skills in grades three and five. Using analysis of variance procedures, comparisons between school culture and leadership style revealed a statistically significant difference between leadership style and the "involvement" subscale of school culture instruments. The involvement subscale showed a strong tendency for certain principals to use a promoter style of leadership, which is very collaborative and transformational in style. The schools with the highest achievement scores had transformational "promoter" type leaders along with higher levels of student, parent, and community involvement.

As can be seen, there are number of common elements attributed to "good schools" and agreed upon by researchers and experts. Duke (1987) speaks to the number of studies, which emphasize the importance of leadership. Kroeze (1984), Shoemaker and Fraser (1981), and Sweeney (1982) also support the characteristics of assertive, achievement-oriented leadership, coordination of instructional programs, and monitoring of student progress;
and an orderly, purposeful school environment. As can be seen, leadership and school culture are widely viewed as critical components of good schools that produce life-long learners.

Conclusions/Synthesis of Literature Review

It is important to synthesize the research in order to clearly understand what we know about the connection between leadership, school culture, and school effectiveness. As has been shown, there is much research in all three areas spanning many decades. The research is fairly clear concerning leadership and culture. Research on effective schools is a bit more confusing due the nature of trying to define what “effective” truly means. As has been shown, understanding what makes a school effective is not clear-cut.

At the same time, studies that have attempted to understand the relationship among leadership, school culture, and effective schools have had varied results. Drawing hard and fast conclusions about the interrelationship among these three elements is difficult at best.

So what do we know? To start, we know that schools are very complex organizations. Schools are more complex than most other organizations because of the multiple expectations laid upon them by multiple and because of the critical place they hold in our society. Schools struggle to balance many competing forces from many different directions (both inside and outside the school).

We also know that being a leader in a school is challenging due to the accelerated rate of change in the world and the demands and pressures that
schools are facing from the public. Research has shown that that strong leaders help create strong schools and that weak leaders create weak schools. Research has also shown that when strong leadership is evident in a school, it can be felt in many ways. Strong leadership gives energy to the learning community and empowers the staff within the building. Empowerment makes people feel significant, makes people feel like they are part of the team, and makes work stimulating and exciting. Stimulating and exciting work attracts people and energizes them, leading to increased productivity, pride, and commitment. All of this leads an organization down a path toward excellence. Research has demonstrated that effective schools are those that are best equipped to deal with change in a positive and proactive manner. People in these schools view problems as opportunities rather than threats.

We also know that a school's culture is one of the most powerful determinants in whether a school will rise to challenges and realize success or whether a school will drown in a sea of confusion. A strong and positive culture manifests itself in the way people talk, walk, think, and act. Schools with healthy and positive cultures have the ability to handle the financial, demographic, and societal changes that constantly apply their pressure. These schools respond with flexibility, creativity, and innovation. The leadership in these schools creates a culture of growth and opportunity for people; a culture in which each person want to carry his/her own share; a culture in which people are constantly striving to grow and improve and where the mission is
clear. The central mission is not the vision of one person, but rather, the collective vision shared by all.

Finally, the research is clear that highly effective schools are schools that are not afraid to look critically at themselves. They are schools that have strong cultures that support and encourage change. In most cases, these schools have been found to share a common element that is critical for creating the conditions for a positive and healthy culture: strong leadership. Simply put, strong leadership leads to a strong culture and strong culture results in effective schools.

In summary, leadership theory and research has taught us that today’s leadership must avoid, at all costs, the outmoded authoritarian, hierarchical approach to administering schools. Transformational leadership has been identified as the kind of educational leadership necessary to take schools forward into the 21st Century (Schlechty, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1990; Fullan, 1991). Transformational leadership bonds leaders and followers within a collaborative change process that impacts the performance of the whole organization, resulting in a responsive and innovative culture. Indeed, the leaders of today’s schools must be transformational in nature; people who lead by example and who, above all, lead openly and honestly with their hearts and heads. In the end, it is the human factor that makes or breaks successful leadership in today’s schools.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology used to gather and analyze information from all three research sites in an attempt to answer the research question: *How is leadership given shape and substance in outstanding schools and how is it experienced by those working within the school? How do the elements of school culture and leadership exist in three high-flying New Hampshire elementary schools?*

**Methods of Data Collection**

Qualitative research methods were selected for this study because the researcher did not have a clear picture of what would be discovered in these schools and because the context of these schools was critical to types of data generated. School participant observation, staff interviews, and parent interviews served as primary data sources.

Within all three of these schools, the researcher attended general staff meetings, amassed field notes, wrote analytic memos, and maintained a contact summary of interactions with individuals and groups within the schools.

In order to bring consistency to this inquiry, structured interview questions were used for conducting interviews with parents and staff (see Appendix A). These questions were developed in such a way as to allow for a
wide range of responses without forcing respondents to answer in ways that might bias or influence their responses or the study.

Parents and staff chosen for interviews were randomly selected from a pool of volunteer participants. At an initial staff meeting, the researcher spoke and described the study. Volunteers were requested for interviewing purposes. Only staff members who volunteered became part of the interviewee pool. In order not to exceed seven (7) staff members, which was deemed an appropriate sample size by the researcher, names were randomly drawn to select actual interviewees.

Potential parent volunteers were identified by the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) President in each school. The researcher then contacted these parents to explain the research project and ask if they would be willing to be entered into a pool of potential volunteers. At each school, five (5) parents were randomly chosen from the pool to participate in the interview process. The researcher deemed this sample size appropriate for the purposes of providing a cross-section of parents and obtaining broad representation of parent viewpoints.

Limitations of Study

The researcher in this study served in the role of "participant observer." The researcher was working on familiar yet unfamiliar ground. The study was familiar in the sense that researcher spent time immersed in elementary school cultures. This was a very familiar setting given the researcher's
background and experience as an elementary school teacher and administrator for the past seventeen years.

At the same time, the contexts and settings were unfamiliar relative to schools and communities. The researcher was not aware of local school, community, and political issues and had little or no understanding of the history of the schools and the issues that have shaped their development.

**Validity Issues**

In this study, it was critical to demonstrate validity in both the description and analysis. Maxwell (1996) discusses bias as a specific threat to validity with which a researcher must contend. As a researcher studying leadership in elementary schools, it was important to be sensitive to what people were saying. It was important to recognize when the researcher's and/or other people's own biases were intruding into the analysis.

The researcher focused on bracketing personal biases and kept a journal of the research experience as a method of tracking thought processes during data gathering and analysis. This served as a forced meta-cognitive approach to self-analysis and reflection.

The researcher recognized that one of the pitfalls to the research may be the researcher's own familiarity with elementary school settings. Wolcott (1984, in Jaeger, 1997 p. 338) referred to the danger of "becoming our own key informant in school research" and used the term "ethnography-minus-one." This phrase warns that it is often the researcher who is ascribing meaning (and perhaps even how things should be) rather than trying to grasp the subjects'
points of view. Throughout this study, it was essential to guard against this by constantly keeping in touch with thought processes and by consciously monitoring reflections and interpretations.

The researcher’s status, as an elementary school principal, conducting a study of leadership within three unfamiliar schools was also seen as a potential threat to validity. The researcher’s status as a “privileged insider,” due to familiarity and understanding of elementary school life, assisted in the research yet the authority ascribed to the researcher by the people in these settings was somewhat of a concern. The researcher was concerned that participants might feel threatened or intimidated by virtue of the researcher’s status as a principal. The researcher’s trustworthiness as a participant observer, along with perceived biases may be called into question. This threat was guarded against by using an informed consent document that outlined protections guaranteed to all participants and the promise of anonymity. A level of trust between researcher and participants was important in this study.

Trustworthiness

The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness focused on the question: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? There were several approaches that were used in order to increase trustworthiness in this study:

• A thick description of the research process and how the investigator reached conclusions was maintained.
• Sufficient time was spent in the schools to learn about their cultures, build trust with the respondents, and to help minimize distortions that may have shaped the data.

• Persistent observation (identifying characteristics and elements relevant to the research) occurred by utilizing a variety of methods and techniques to gather data. Log books, tape-recorded interviews, reflection journals, and actual artifacts from the schools were collected and maintained in order to keep the researcher focused on the most relevant and important characteristics of the study.

• Referential adequacy was addressed through the use tape-recorded interviews with parents and staff.

• Member checks and cross-examination (going back to individuals, checking out conclusions and corroborating what was observed) occurred throughout the research. Using member checks helped create a comparative base against which the researcher measured the range of meanings given by others and helped the researcher gain a greater understanding of their explanations. Cross-checking with other staff and parents helped the researcher better understand emerging themes and provided a method in which interpretations were matched with actual experiences had by others.

The following pages (Table 1) summarize the transcribed interviews conducted at all three schools. These tape recorded interviews served as the
Table 1

Research Methodology Matrix

**Research Question**: How is leadership given shape and substance in outstanding schools and how is it experienced by those working within the school? How do the elements of school culture and leadership exist in three high-flying New Hampshire elementary schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What were my topical questions?</th>
<th>Why did I need to know this?</th>
<th>How did I answer the questions?</th>
<th>What other methods were used?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do I develop an understanding of the culture in each of the three schools? Why is studying school culture important? How are culture and leadership connected in these schools?</td>
<td>Culture is important because it helps create the conditions that allow schools to grow and achieve great things. I needed to know if strong and healthy cultures existed in these three outstanding schools, three schools chosen using three different effectiveness criteria.</td>
<td>During the spring of 2001 I spent four days at each of three schools. During this time, I interviewed seven staff members and five parents in each school. Each interview was about 45 minutes in length. I developed and used interview questions that focused on the cultural aspect of the school. While visiting these schools, I made informal observations and reviewed a variety of materials that reflected the cultural profile of each school.</td>
<td>An extensive review of literature related to leadership and school culture was conducted. I also conducted informal observations of staff, parent, and student interactions. I maintained log books and transcribed, coded, and analyzed the staff and parent interviews. I collected and analyzed demographic information and artifacts. I debriefed and shared insights with a colleague and cross-checked information and perceptions with other staff in the schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What were my topical questions?</th>
<th>Why did I need to know this?</th>
<th>How did I answer the questions?</th>
<th>What other methods were used?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. How do I develop and understanding of how leadership is manifested in each school? What is the connection between leadership, culture, and school effectiveness?</td>
<td>In reviewing the literature, there appeared to be a link between leadership and school culture and school effectiveness. Strong leadership appeared to be an important factor in the overall success of a school. One of my goals was to better understand how leadership was manifested in three outstanding schools.</td>
<td>Staff and parents were interviewed as described above. Specific interview questions were written that dealt with how parents viewed their school's leadership and how staff experienced this leadership.</td>
<td>The principal in each school responded to questions designed to better understand his/her personal leadership philosophy and style. I analyzed and compared the principal's responses to the parent and staff interviews. I observed a staff meeting and made anecdotal notes. I also reviewed other data sources including handbooks and other school artifacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do I develop an understanding of the relationship between school effectiveness and leadership in each of the schools? Does an effective school automatically correlate with effective leadership?</td>
<td>Understanding what makes a school effective is essential for any school seeking to improve itself. In my research, I sought to understand what makes a great school great and learn about the connection between culture, leadership and school effectiveness.</td>
<td>I sought to answer this question by reviewing research and literature. Based on my findings, I chose three criteria for choosing three effective schools for my research: 1. consistently high test scores on the state NHEIAP, 2. a recipient of the National Blue Ribbon of Excellence Award, and 3. a school with a great &quot;word of mouth&quot; reputation. Visitations and interviews (as described in #1 above) occurred at each site.</td>
<td>I researched the State Department of Education web site in order to locate a top scoring NHEIAP school. I located a most recent NH Blue Ribbon through the National Blue Ribbon web site. I spoke to a representative from the State Principals' Association and from the State Department of Education regarding schools with excellent reputations. Through the staff and parent interviews, I coded and analyzed responses to questions that focused on school effectiveness indicators.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
basis for the search for common themes and significant elements that helped to address the research question. An analysis of these interviews is described in Chapter Four.

Plymouth Elementary School: Summary of Staff and Parent Interviews

Question #1: How would you describe your school?

Staff Responses:

Staff responses to this question were, on the whole, very positive and conveyed a sense of pride and satisfaction in the school. A number of different descriptors were used by staff as they described their school. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in response to this question included:

- "a structured home away from home"
- "everyone cares about the kids...from the custodians to the kitchen staff to the teachers"
- (2) "our school is friendly"
- (2) "this is a place that values children first...above and beyond anything else"
- "PES is a place that truly values quality education"
- (2) "it is a school that has created, stresses, and maintains high standards"
- "our school has very high morale and an outstanding staff"
- "we have a very diverse and caring staff"
- "PES has a very positive environment"
- "PES has a very respectful environment"
- (2) "our school is a place that values parent participation and parent volunteers – it is a place that welcomes parents"
- "this is simply a great school"
- "everyone works together as part of a team"
A review of the comments indicates that there is a strong and positive culture that exists at Plymouth Elementary School. There is a sense of pride that exists, a sense of teamwork, and a philosophy in place that puts children first and welcomes parent participation as part of the educational process.

Parent Responses

Parent responses to this question were, on the whole, very positive and conveyed a sense of pride and satisfaction in the school. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the school. A summary of these responses is shown below. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in response to this question included:

- "Plymouth Elementary is a great environment for kids"
- "We have a good arts program"
- "There is good overall support for kids"
- (3) "There is a caring and respectful environment"
- "The entire school is very supportive to children and parents"
- "This is a great school"
- (2) "Each child here is acknowledged and seen by the staff"
- "This is an enthusiastic school"

Responses to this question demonstrated a high degree of satisfaction with the school. Parents had many positive things to say in describing their school. Their comments reflected a sense that the school works hard to meet the needs of students, that it has a healthy and positive environment, and that caring and respect are values that are apparent to parents. There were no concerns noted in parent response to this question.
Question #2 – What kind of reputation does this school have among the staff and community?

Staff Responses

The staff who answered this question unanimously viewed their school as having a positive reputation both among their colleagues and in the community of Plymouth. Staff made a number of different statements as they discussed the reputation of their school. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase.

Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (3) "We have an excellent reputation in the town...people think our school is great"
- (3) "We have a very good reputation and are viewed positively by people inside and outside the school"
- "99% of our staff feel we are excellent"
- "Many people move to Plymouth because of the reputation of our school"
- "People in the school and in the community are proud of our school"

The above comments convey a sense of pride and a confidence that the school is viewed as a quality institution. Unanimously, staff members felt confident in stating that their school had a good reputation and felt confident that their colleagues shared the same opinion.

Parent Responses

Parent responses to this question were, on the whole, very positive and conveyed a sense of pride and satisfaction in the school. There was a sense that the school, indeed, had a very strong and positive reputation. One would expect comments of this nature given the parents’ response to question #1.
above. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the reputation of the school. A summary of the responses is shown below. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in response to this question included:

- (3) “The reputation of PES is very good”
- “Most people you could talk to would be very supportive of our school”
- “PES has a great reputation in town. The main reason for this is the experiences that parents and students have had along with a tremendous amount of outreach this school does in the town”
- “PES is very well respected”
- “People move here because of the school”
- “It has a great reputation because it has awesome teachers”
- “The school is filled with very compassionate people”
- “It has a good reputation as a school with lots of support for children, like guidance and special education”

The parents interviewed are proud of their school. They feel that it has a very good (and well-deserved) reputation in the town. They feel the reputation is perpetuated through the ongoing efforts of the staff, the first-hand view afforded the many volunteers and parents who are involved in the school, and the many community outreach initiatives that occur. As one parent aptly stated, “You can’t even go to the dump without running into someone from the elementary school doing a recycling project or something else...the school is in the town and the town is in the school.”
Question #3 – How would you describe the staff in your school?

Staff Responses

This question brought a smile to many of the staff that I interviewed. I understood this smile to be one of pride and genuine caring as words were put to feelings people had about the individuals with whom they worked. Again, the comments were very positive and a feeling of personal connection seemed to exist.

Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described their colleagues. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (2) "Good natured – people have good attitudes and are generally very good natured"
- "When we’re together there is lots of laughter and fun"
- (2) "People in this school have a good sense of humor"
- "People here are happy"
- (3) "There is a good mix of age, experience, and expertise"
- "The staff here serve as excellent role models"
- "People here are friendly"
- "Our teachers are well educated...they are always looking to grow...to learn more...to better themselves"
- "There is a high energy level that you feel among the staff"
- "Our staff is savvy and hard working...they are committed beyond the scope of the regular school day"

As can be seen from the above comments, there are a number of descriptors that were used to characterize the staff. Clearly, from the perspective of the staff members interviewed, the staff members view their colleagues with respect and in a very positive light. A sense of good naturedness and good
humor seemed prevalent. People generally described their colleagues as fun people who worked hard on behalf of children, who also cared about one another, and who worked as friendly, energetic and dedicated team members.

Parent Responses

Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the staff at Plymouth Elementary School. Overall, the comments made were complimentary and reflective of parents who were very satisfied and impressed by the caliber of teachers in the school. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase in response to the question, "How would you describe the staff at Plymouth Elementary School?" Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (2) "The staff is very friendly"
- "The staff is very accessible"
- "Teachers here do whatever needs to be done for children"
- "The staff is very professional...they are hard working, motivated, and have a great sense of humor"
- "This is a wonderful staff"
- (2) "The PES is very dedicated in what they do"
- "The teachers here are open, honest and creative"

As can be seen by these responses, parents are impressed by the staff and view them as professional, friendly and dedicated. Parents had many positive things to say about the teachers and about the administration. They offered a variety of personal stories and anecdotes as a way of illustrating their favorable responses.
**Question #4 – How would you describe the leadership at Plymouth Elementary School?**

**Staff Responses**

This question was designed to assess how staff viewed the leadership at Plymouth Elementary School. The question was not focused solely on administrative leadership but rather, any forms (formal or informal) of leadership that may exist in the school. Most people answered this question with an emphasis on the administrative leadership but most also noted that there were other influential leaders in the school.

Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described the leadership at Plymouth elementary School. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase.

Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- “The principal is hands-off in his approach and let’s teachers do their job without unnecessarily interfering”
- (3) “The administrative leadership is very support of the teachers and staff”
- (2) “The principal is very intelligent – he stays current in education”
- “Leadership is sophisticated and competent”
- “The administrators don’t let things slip through the cracks”
- “The principal is very flexible and proactive”
- (2) “The principal is awesome...he is fabulous”
- “The principal leads by example”
- “We are all made to feel like leaders”
- “The Student Council plays a key role, especially at the middle school”
- (2) “The leadership is respectful of teachers, parents, and students”
- (3) “The principal is skillful in working with people inside and outside the school. He is a wonderful problem solver and is very creative”
• "In this school, leadership is delegated"
• "Leadership comes from the lowest level whenever possible"

As can be seen from these comments, the view of leadership held by those who were interviewed is very positive and complimentary. Comments aimed at the principal illustrate a caring and sensitive person who empowers the staff and who works well with people. The principal is seen as supportive, flexible, and creative, a person who is intelligent and who provides solid leadership in all ways.

The other area in which leadership seems to emerge is the area of "team leaders." Each grouping of teachers grades K-2, grades 3-5, and grades 6-8 have a designated team leader and work together in the same wing as a team. This team leader helps with areas such as ordering supplies, budget, and curriculum work. The teachers look favorably upon this model. Also notable is the role team meetings play at Plymouth Elementary School. The principal and assistant principal meet regularly with each team and much of the day to day problem shooting and decision making occurs at these meetings (decisions that do not impact the entire school and are germane only to that particular grade level team).

It should also be noted that the Student Council was noted by one staff member who views that organization as providing leadership at the middle school level.
Parent Responses

This question was designed to assess how parents viewed the leadership at Plymouth Elementary School. The question was not focused solely on administrative leadership but rather, any forms (formal or informal) of leadership that may exist in the school. Most people answered this question with an emphasis on the administrative leadership but most also noted that there were other influential leaders in the school.

Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the leadership at Plymouth Elementary School. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "The principal is a great leader"
- "There is good interplay and teamwork between the principal and the assistant principal"
- "The Principal's Information Group" is a vehicle that provides some leadership for the school"
- "The PTA is an organization that seems to provide leadership"
- "The administration here is very approachable"
- "The administration serves as a great role-model"
- "The principal is open and honest"
- "The administration is always visible...no matter where you go in the school...they are present at everything"
- "The principal is an important part of the fabric of this school"
- "The principal is very well respected inside and outside our school"
- "I see almost everyone acting like a leader"

The predominant leader that emerged from these comments was the principal and the administration (principal and assistant principal). Parents clearly viewed the PES administration as integral in providing leadership.
Parents found the administrative leadership to be very approachable, open, honest and respected. The principal was described as part of the "fabric of the school", illustrating how important he is in representing and leading the school. Parents spoke of the principal with kind and supportive words, conveying a sense of respect and genuine trust.

Question #5 – Does the school program meet the needs of all students?

Staff Responses

This question was designed to ascertain whether or not teachers perceived the school as having programs and processes in place to meet the needs of all students at all levels. It was also designed to understand how teachers themselves strive to meet the needs of students.

Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described how Plymouth Elementary School worked to meet the needs of all students. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (2) “Our staff gets together constantly to look at individual students and develop plans to meet their needs...we constantly monitor our students”
- “The teachers do whatever they can to meet the needs of students”
- “We do a lot for special education students...we have lots of staff designed to work with these students, but we do not do enough for our upper end students”
- “Our school meets the needs of students by being committed and dedicated to doing this”
- (3) “By differentiating instruction”
- (3) “We have lots of specialists as well as programs like Reading Recovery, an Emotionally Handicapped non-categorical resource room, Title One, etc.”
• (4) "There are opportunities for the arts...two-thirds of our students participate in after-school programs we offer, we have lots of positive connections with Plymouth State College"

• (2) "We have flexible scheduling that enables teachers to develop schedules and programs that best meet the needs of students"

The responses to this question clustered around two areas. One area dealt with the efforts of staff to do whatever needs to be done to meet the needs of students. There was mention of specialists and special programs available. There was mention of teachers meeting often, monitoring students, and then responding to needs collaboratively and appropriately.

The second area that was often mentioned dealt with extra opportunities for children that existed. Some of these opportunities were provided by the school in the form of intramurals and after-school programs. Opportunities for participation in the arts were mentioned along with connections with Plymouth State College.

Parent Responses

This question was designed to assess how parents viewed the ability of the school to meet the needs of all students. Responses to this question were probably the most mixed of any of the questions. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described how PES meets the needs of all students. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

• (2) "Special education students are certainly well taken care of...others, I'm not sure"

• "Advanced students could use more"
• (2) “The school tries to meet the needs of everyone”
• “It is positive that we are integrating special education students”
• “This is a large staff that is designed to meet the needs of and deal with all types of kids”
• “The school probably doesn’t meet the needs of everyone...but it tries”
• “Unfortunately, kids do slip through the cracks”

As can be seen by these comments, parents feel fairly secure in the fact that students with learning issues are well taken care of but that the other students are not afforded the same level of programming. Many of the parents voiced concerns about the more “advanced” students and the need to provide more challenges. At the same time, most parents also recognized that this was a public school and was doing its best to meet diverse needs. Some parents said that meeting the needs of all students was probably impossible.

Questions #6 - 8 - Who is involved in making change in your school? Who or what initiates change? How are decisions made that affect the entire school?

Staff Responses

This question was designed to learn about the change process at Plymouth Elementary and the staff perceptions surrounding change. Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described how the change process occurs at Plymouth Elementary School. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase.

Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

• (2) “Change happens in many different ways here. Sometimes it is top-down and sometimes it is bottom-up”
• (2) “Change can be initiated from outside the school...from the community and/or parents”
As can be seen from the sampling of responses, the staff feels quite comfortable with the change process in the school. The staff feels included and involved in the change process and individuals feel that they are free to initiate change. They felt empowered in the process rather than threatened by it. People felt that the administration valued their ideas and input and created the right conditions for this input to be discussed and considered. Decisions are made at the lowest possible level. The team format seems to work well for people, with decisions that affect particular grade levels and wings being discussed and decided upon by those people in the wing. There appears to be a very collaborative process in place in which communication and open dialogue are valued and important elements in the process. The result is that people feel
that change occurs slowly and with a large degree of input and involvement from all stakeholders, including the parents and community when appropriate.

Parent Responses

This question was designed to learn about how parents perceive the change process at Plymouth Elementary School. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described how they perceive the change process occurring. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "Parents can go to school board meetings and fight for change"
- "The Principal’s Information Group is a good place to start if you want a particular change to occur"
- (2) "There seems to be a lot of in-house curriculum work"
- "Members of the community or public can initiate change"
- "The PTA is a vehicle that is involved in change"
- "Parents work in collaboration with the school"
- "Lots of different people seem to be involved in the change process"
- "There are committees comprised of parents and teachers...these committees are largely responsible for the change process"

As can be seen from these responses, parents feel that the change process occurs in many different ways and that many different people are involved in change. Change is viewed as a process that is collaborative. They see that change can be initiated in many different ways and can start at a number of different venues.
Question #9 – In order for Plymouth Elementary School to continue to be an outstanding school...a high-flying school...what must leadership do, or continue to do?

Staff Responses

This final question was designed to tie back into the topic of leadership. From this question, I was hoping to elicit summary information regarding leadership skills that were either currently in place or perhaps, needed.

Staff responded to this question in a number of different ways. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "Make teachers feel good about being honest...even if that means disagreeing with the principal. Teachers need to always be able to speak their minds"
- "It is important to always maintain a sense of humor and good-naturedness"
- "Leadership needs to really look at how we’re educating our kids and make sure that the reality of the world and society matches what we’re doing in our schools"
- "Leadership needs to continue to make everyone feel important"
- "Keep communication open and flowing at all times"
- "Continue to respond proactively and anticipate needs before they become problems or issues"
- "Provide opportunities for professional growth – keep teachers current and support their continuing education"
- "Leadership must be a good problem solver over time"
- "Always continue to improve. Don’t rest on your laurels. Continue to always strive for excellence"
- "Take care of the facility"

The responses to this question were very much in line with what leadership theory says a good leader must do. Themes that emerged from this question included communication, support, problem solving, and perpetuating a healthy culture that included humor and fun. The Plymouth teachers felt as if these things all existed with their current leader and
expressed concern that their next leader may not have these important qualities.

Parent Responses

This final question was designed to tie back into the topic of leadership. From this question, I was hoping to elicit summary information regarding parent perception of leadership skills that were either currently in place or perhaps, needed in the future.

Parents responded to this question in a number of different ways. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "Leadership needs to continue inviting people into the school to be part of what is going on"
- "Leadership needs to continue to reach out into the community"
- "Leadership must always keep staff morale high"
- "It is important for leadership to stick with what works"
- "It is essential to keep the energy level in the school high"
- "Leadership needs to continue using a team approach"

As can be seen from these responses, parents view leadership as being key to maintaining high morale, a high energy level, and a team approach. Parents also perceived leadership as playing a major role in keeping teamwork at the forefront and persisting in outreach efforts in the community. Overall, the parents felt that the current leadership was doing an excellent job and needed to continue what it was already doing into the future.
Rye Elementary School: Summary of Staff and Parent Interviews

Question #1: How would you describe Rye Elementary school?

Staff Responses

Staff responses to this question were, on the whole, positive and conveyed a sense of pride and satisfaction in the school. There were several responses, however, that were more critical of the school and conveyed a sense of uneasiness and unhappiness. Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described their school. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in response to this question included:

- (2) “Small and close-knit”
- “Not very diverse”
- “We have an excellent staff...there is good camaraderie”
- (2) “Student centered and supportive”
- “Balanced in terms of curriculum and the arts”
- “Getting bigger”
- “A caring school”
- “Welcoming”
- (2) “A happy place”
- (2) “A place with a motivated and happy student body”
- (3) “An energetic school”
- “A conservative school”
- (2) “Affluent”
- (2) “A place that works hard to please parents”
- “A cliquish place...staff included”
- “A school with lots of parent involvement”

In reviewing the staff interviews, it was clear that the majority of staff felt very positive about their school. There were a few comments, however, that indicated some degree of dissatisfaction. The words “cliquish” and
"conservative" were used to express this dissatisfaction and the issue of "lack of diversity" was used to describe the town and school relative to socioeconomic status, race, and learner profile. This lack of diversity was seen as taking away from the school rather than enhancing it. Also, the issue of size came up and a concern was expressed about the growing population and larger classes.

For the most part, the staff who were interviewed saw themselves as part of a tight-knit group who worked hard to meet the needs of children.

Parent Responses

Parent responses to this question were very positive and conveyed a sense of pride and satisfaction in the school. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the school. A summary of these responses is shown below. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in response to this question included:

- (2) "Friendly...people feel comfortable here"
- "Safe"
- "Lots of parent involvement"
- "A place with happy kids"
- "This is a good facility"
- "We have good arts and specials"
- "We have good teachers"
- "A changing place with a new principal"
- "A school that is accountable for all students...it is child-centered"
- "A growing school"

The responses to this question indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the school and the parents had positive things to say in describing it.
Their comments reflected a sense that the school does good things for children and that a welcoming and positive environment existed. One parent also noted that the school was growing in size and that this was changing the way the school felt.

**Question #2 – What kind of reputation does this school have among the staff and community?**

**Staff Responses**

The staff who answered this question unanimously viewed their school as having a very good and positive reputation both among their colleagues and within the community of Rye. Staff made a number of different statements as they discussed the reputation of their school. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (4) “People think our school is outstanding”
- “Older citizens think we spend too much money”
- (4) “Parents think very highly of us”
- (3) “People move to Rye because of the reputation of this school”
- (2) Among staff, we think our reputation is very good”

The above comments convey a sense confidence in the fact that the school is viewed as a quality institution by those inside and outside the school. There was no doubt in the mind of the interviewees relative to the good reputation of their school. They knew that they were looked upon very favorably.
Parent Responses

Parent responses to this question were similar in many respects to comments made by the staff. There were a few comments, however, that indicated that not everyone in the town of Rye might look as favorably upon the school. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they discussed the reputation of Rye Elementary School. A summary of the responses is shown below. The number in parentheses ( ) indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in response to this question included:

- (4) "The reputation is very good"
- "People move here because of the reputation of the school"
- "The town supports the school through the budget"
- "I think the reputation is over-inflated"
- "The reputation is that this school is doing its best"
- (3) "There are some people who might not like this school"
- "Rye Elementary reaches out to the town"

It was interesting to note that three of the parents indicated that some of the residents in town did not look favorably upon the school and one person said that the reputation of the school was over-inflated. In general, the parents who were interviewed felt that the school had a good reputation and that it was doing the best job it could.

Question #3 – How would you describe the staff in your school?

Staff Responses

Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described their colleagues. The number in parentheses ( ) indicates the number of staff
members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "Dedicated"
- "Child-centered"
- "Needy and high maintenance"
- (2) "Cliquey...some back stabbing occurs"
- "Competitive"
- "Strong"
- "Very positive"
- "Committed"
- "Well-educated"
- (3) "A mix of styles, personalities, and experience"
- "Energetic and enthusiastic"
- "Some need to retire"
- "Grumpy"
- "Black and white...very linear"

As can be seen from the above comments, there are a number of descriptors that were used to characterize the staff some of which were positive and some of which were negative. A feeling of discord became evident as various staff answered this question and it was interesting to note that people were quite honest about the way they viewed their colleagues. There was no denial or sugar-coating. A number of positive attributes were listed (committed, dedicated, child-centered, positive) and seemed to be referring to the profession/teaching aspect of staff. Some of the more negative comments seemed to refer to personality traits or inter-personal issues that may be prevalent among various staff members.
Parent Responses

Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the staff at Rye Elementary School. Overall, the comments made were complimentary and reflective of parents who seemed satisfied and impressed by the staff in the school. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase in response to the question, “How would you describe the staff at Rye Elementary School?” Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- “Great”
- “Good”
- “There might be a couple who aren’t as good as some of the others”
- “There is a range of young and older teachers”
- “Committed”
- “Dedicated”
- “Lots of different styles seem to exist”

As can be seen by these responses, parents view the staff quite favorably, with only one parent acknowledging that she felt some teachers may not be as good as others. The parents acknowledged the hard work of the staff by using words such as “dedicated and committed.”

Question #4 – How would you describe the leadership at Rye Elementary School?

Staff Responses

This question was designed to assess how staff viewed the leadership at Rye Elementary School. The question was not focused solely on administrative leadership but rather, any forms (formal or informal) of leadership that may exist in the school. Most people answered this question
with an emphasis on the administrative leadership but most also noted that there were other influential leaders in the school.

Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described the leadership at Rye elementary School. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "The principal is a good person"
- "As far as the staff goes, there really isn't a core of movers and shakers"
- "The first and fourth grade teams have shown some leadership in the school"
- "The Principal's Advisory Group serves in a leadership capacity"
- "I would describe the leadership as weak"
- "There is a lack of assertiveness"
- "Leadership is not visible enough"
- "I feel comfortable that I can be honest with the principal"
- (6) "Leadership has undergone lots of change with two different principals with two very different styles over the past 2 years"
- "The current leadership is unclear"
- "Positive"
- "Leadership is relaxed and trusting"
- (3) "Leadership comes from different wings in the building"
- "The Reading Specialist is a leader"
- "The Guidance Counselor is a leader"

Staff reviews were mixed when asked about leadership at Rye Elementary School. The staff members did recognize that outside of the principal, there was some leadership at work in the form of "wing leadership" as well as some leadership that is displayed by the Reading Specialist and Guidance Counselor.
The most common response dealt with the fact that there had been change in leadership over the past two years. This was seen as a major issue by most of the staff. In listening to how this has impacted leadership, it was clear that Rye Elementary School was a school in transition. The current principal had been there for one and a half years. She replaced a principal who was there for six years. The previous principal's style was described as very nurturing and people centered. She was the type of principal who let the staff make their own decisions about things and was comfortable with the way things were going in the school. The new principal came to Rye Elementary School challenging the status quo and took a more active leadership role. At times, her decisions were seen as autocratic and too swift. People who had been trusted to make their own decisions and do their own thing were now being pressured to conform to the wishes of the principal. This difference in style created some unhappiness and discomfort and a rift was created between those who were supportive of the "old ways" and those who liked the "new ways." This rift was evident in listening to various staff members describe the staff using words such as "cliquey, linear, and back-stabbing."

Parent Responses

This question was designed to assess how parents viewed the leadership at Rye Elementary School. The question was not focused solely on administrative leadership but rather, any forms (formal or informal) of leadership that existed in the school. Most people answered this question with an emphasis on the principal leadership.
Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the leadership at Rye Elementary School. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (2) "The leadership is good"
- "We got lots of lip-service from the past principal. We came to her with concerns, she listened and seemed interested in our views, and then did her own thing or nothing at all"
- "The new principal seems above-board"
- "I'm not really familiar and feel like I don't know the principal"
- "I wasn't impressed with the past principal"
- "This principal seems innovative"
- "She seems to be a hands-on principal"

Parents did not say much about the current principal. It seemed as if they were still in a state of transition where they were getting to know her and reserved comments based on their unfamiliarity with her. Two of the parents did make some negative comments about the prior principal and expressed unhappiness with her leadership style. In general, parents seemed optimistic and positive with their early impressions of the principal leadership.

Parents did not mention the Principal’s Advisory Group as a source of leadership, even though there are parents who serve on this board.

**Question #5 – Does the school program meet the needs of all students?**

**Staff Responses**

This question was designed to ascertain whether or not staff members perceived the school as being successful in having programs and processes in place to meet the needs of all students. It was also designed to understand how
staff themselves worked to meet the needs of their students. The question and corresponding responses were used to help better understand the culture of the school relative to teaching and learning.

The staff used a number of different descriptors as they described how Rye Elementary School worked to meet the needs of all students. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (3) "We have an advanced curriculum"
- (3) "We utilized challenges and extensions in the classrooms"
- "We try to meet students' needs through inclusion...but that is not going well"
- "Students' needs are better met in the intermediate grades and not as well in the upper grades"
- "We need to pick up the pace for the bright children"
- "Our specialists are excellent"
- (3) "We are using inclusion to meet the needs of students"
- "We utilize center-based learning"
- "We've kept class sizes small"
- "Exceptional efforts on the part of the staff in class, before, or after school"
- "We provide some nice after school opportunities"

Staff responses to this question resulted in the emergence of several themes. First, several staff used the term "challenges and extensions" in describing what teachers do in the classroom to meet the needs of students. This was a term that the principal also used. The expectation is that all teachers do whatever they can to challenge students at all level. A second theme that emerged dealt with what was called an "advanced curriculum,"
Several staff members commented on having a preponderance of bright students who required an advanced curriculum. This advanced curriculum is modified and created by classroom teachers based on the students in their room.

Inclusion was another response that emerged from several people. Over the past year, Rye Elementary School has worked to include all special education students in their regular classroom setting and has moved away from a resource room model. This change in philosophy seems to have caused some discomfort with some of the staff, with at least one person indicating that it was “not going well.”

Finally, there was some concern expressed about meeting the needs of the more academically advanced students. At least two of the staff members felt that a better job could be done in this area.

Parent Responses

This question was designed to assess how parents viewed the ability and effectiveness of the school in meeting the needs of all students. As with the two other research sites, the responses to this question were probably the most mixed of any of the questions. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described how Rye Elementary School meets the needs of all students. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:
• (2) "The needs of advanced students are not addressed adequately”
• "I'm disappointed that there is no foreign language”
• "I don't think we deserve a Blue Ribbon because I don't think we do a very good job meeting the needs of all students”
• "I'm concerned about kids in the middle who slip through the cracks”
• "My child's learning problems were never adequately addressed”
• "I think the bright kids are challenged”
• "There are special things for everyone”
• "Bright kids in the upper grades are challenged more than bright kids in the lower grades”
• "There are lots of opportunities for everyone”

As can be seen in the above comments, there was some concern expressed about whether or not students' needs were being adequately met. Overall, the parents who were interviewed seemed quite hesitant to say that Rye Elementary School meets the needs of all students. Most of these parents had a story or example that illustrated how needs are not always meet effectively.

Questions #6-8 – Who is involved in making change in your school? Who or what initiates change? How are decisions made that affect the entire school?

Staff Responses

This question was designed to learn about the change process at Rye Elementary School and the staff perceptions surrounding change and their part in it. Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described how the change process occurs at Rye Elementary School. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:
• (2) "The principal makes decisions or change if there is an immediate need or a safety issue"
• (2) "We work on staff consensus"
• "The Principal’s Advisory Group" can be an impetus for change"
• (2) "Grade levels can initiate change"
• (3) "Change usually start with a grade level team who expresses an idea or concern"
• "Sometimes I’m not sure how or why things are decided"
• (2) "Committees make change and are involved in making decisions"
• (2) "Things have happened quickly and lots of people have been unhappy with some of the decisions (i.e. mandatory team meetings and inclusion)

As can be seen from these responses, the staff feels that it is part of the change process and understands that change can come from within the teaching ranks through grade level team. Staff also recognizes that change and decisions can be made at the committee level.

Most of the staff responses indicated a high degree of teacher involvement in the change process, though a couple of staff expressed some concerns and confusion about the way change occurs and decisions are made as illustrated by the comment, "I’m not really sure how things happen sometimes."

Based on staff response to this question, there appears to be a collaborative process in place in which ideas can be brought forth, discussed with the principal, and then decisions are made based on available data.

Parent Responses

This question was designed to learn about how parents perceive the change process at Rye Elementary School. Parents used a number of different
descriptors as they described how they perceive the change process and decision making occurring. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "I'm not really sure how it happens"
- "If the parents complain, things happen"
- (2) "Parents need to be more involved in changes"
- "The PTO and the Rye Education Foundation seem to have the most power"
- "The principal works with teachers for the most part"

Parents did not seem very clear about the change process as they attempted to answer this question. None of the parents mentioned the Principal’s Advisory Group as a change/decision making vehicle but did identify the PTO and Rye Education Foundation as wielding some degree of power. There was a feeling of disconnectedness between parents and the change process; not a feeling of shared power and involvement. Two parents felt that parents needed to be more involved in the change process.

Question #9 – In order for Rye Elementary School to continue to be an outstanding school...a high-flying school...what must leadership do, or continue to do?

Staff Responses

This final question was designed to tie back into the topic of leadership. From this question, I was hoping to elicit final thoughts and comments regarding the manifestation of leadership in its current form as well as what that leadership needed to look like into the future.
Staff responded to this question in a number of different ways. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "Support teachers"
- "Support students through good decisions"
- "Remember to operate at all times from the question, "Is it in the best interest of students?"
- "Leadership needs a mixture of management and leadership styles in our principal"
- "Leadership needs to acknowledge people...give them a pat on the back when they deserve it"
- "Maintain high standards"
- "Leadership needs to keep a balance of welcoming and embracing parents and communicating with them the needs of the school"

Staff responses to this question were varied. One teacher voiced the need for positive recognition. The need to have a balanced leader who could be both a leader and a manager was mentioned by another. There was no strong sense that the current leadership was doing what it needed to do nor was there the sense that the current leadership was not working.

Parent Responses

This final question was designed to tie back into the topic of leadership. From this question, I was hoping to elicit summary information regarding parent perception of leadership skills that were either currently in place or perhaps, needed in the future.

Parents responded to this question in a number of different ways. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (2) "Involve parents in the decision-making process"
- "Teachers need to be able to be open and honest with the principal"
- "Leadership needs to be open to people’s thoughts, ideas, and opinions"
As can be seen from these responses, parents want the school's leadership to involve them. They want lines of communication maintained and want high standards to be in place. Parents did not give a clear indication through their answers as to how they viewed the current leadership. Parents want open and honest communication to be a part of their school and its leadership into the future.

**Gilford Elementary School: Summary of Staff and Parent Interviews**

**Question #1: How would you describe your school?**

**Staff Responses:**

Staff responses to this question were, on the whole, very positive and conveyed a sense of pride and satisfaction in the school. A number of different descriptors were used by staff as they described their school. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in response to this question included:

- (3) "It's fun!"
- (2) "There's always something new happening here"
- "You are encouraged to be innovative"
- "It's an intelligent place...people are always learning and growing here"
- (3) "We have a good time...people are friendly here"
- "GES is a school that puts the focus on kids"
- (2) "We have very caring teachers...a very committed staff"
- "This is an enriching place for students"
• (2) "This is a warm and nurturing environment...It's a happy and positive place"
• "A school that takes lots of pride in its programs and facilities"
• "We have a very cohesive staff"
• "This is an open and honest place...we enjoy tremendous community support"

A review of the comments indicates that there is a strong and positive culture that exists at Gilford Elementary School. The staff enjoy their work and enjoy working with their colleagues. The word "fun" was used a number of times. There is a sense of pride that exists, a sense of teamwork, and a philosophy in place that puts children first and welcomes parent participation as part of the educational process. Innovation is valued and seen as something that is important. There is a feeling of trust that exists, encouraging innovation to occur and supporting the efforts of staff.

Parent Responses

Parent responses to this question were, on the whole, very positive and conveyed a sense of pride and satisfaction in the school. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the school. A summary of these responses is shown below. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in response to this question included:

• "Wonderful!"
• (2) "It has a nurturing environment...a great environment for all kids"
• "There is great community spirit in this school"
• "A school very committed to education"
Parents had many positive things to say in describing Gilford Elementary School. Their comments reflected a sense that the school works hard to meet the needs of students, that the staff is nurturing and committed, and that the leadership is strong. Parents view their school as an open environment that welcomes their involvement and input.

**Question #2 – What kind of reputation does this school have among the staff and community?**

**Staff Responses**

The staff who answered this question unanimously viewed their school as having a positive reputation both among their colleagues and within the community of Gilford. Staff made a number of different statements as they discussed the reputation of their school. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase.

Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (6) "The community thinks highly of us"
- (5) "Our staff knows that we have a good reputation"
- (3) "People move to our community because of our school"
• “The community is involved in our school...this leads to a positive reputation”
• “Benefits and working conditions are good”
• “We’re proud of our integrated arts program”

The above comments convey a sense of confidence in the fact that the school is viewed as a quality institution by those inside and outside the school. Unanimously, staff members felt confident in stating that their school had a good reputation and felt confident that their colleagues shared the same opinion.

Parent Responses

Parent responses to this question were very similar to comments made by the staff. There is, indeed, a very strong and positive reputation that exists. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they discussed the reputation of their school. A summary of the responses is shown below. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in response to this question included:

• (3) “Gilford Elementary School has an excellent/good/great reputation”
• (2) “People move here because of the school”
• “This school provides a well-rounded experience for children and has a reputation of doing so”
• “The showcases are excellent and lend themselves to the school’s good reputation”

Parent responses to this question mirrored staff responses in that the reputation of Gilford Elementary School was viewed as very positive. Parents noted that people moved to Gilford because of the school.
Question #3 – How would you describe the staff in your school?

Staff Responses

Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described their colleagues. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "Open and honest...always looking for new ideas"
- "Open to sharing with others"
- (2) "Gilford Elementary School has a mix of experience and age among staff"
- "Fun-loving"
- "Professional"
- (2) "Everyone works their hardest here"
- (2) "Positive"
- (2) "Caring and nurturing"
- "Supportive and family-like"
- "The staff isn’t as happy as it was years ago, when we met more with each other"

As can be seen from the above comments, there are a number of descriptors that were used to characterize the staff. With the exception of one person, all interviewees described the staff in very positive terms. Again, the notion of "fun" came up as the staff was described as "fun loving." Other terms such as caring, nurturing, and positive were also used.

Parent Responses

Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the staff at Gilford Elementary School. Overall, the comments made were complimentary and reflective of parents who were very satisfied and impressed by the staff in the school. The number in parentheses () indicates
the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase in response to the question, “How would you describe the staff at Gilford Elementary School?”

Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- “Responsive to concerns”
- (2) “Quick to pick up on kids having problems”
- “They have good school spirit”
- (4) “The staff is very committed...however there are a very few that have “attitudes”
- (2) “Nurturing”
- “Dedicated”
- “The staff looks at the whole child”
- “Open and inviting to parent volunteers”
- “Enthusiastic...positive...accessible”
- “It’s a loving group”
- “Fun”

As can be seen by these responses, parents are pleased with the staff and view them as responsive, positive, accessible, and dedicated. Parents had many positive things to say about the staff. They offered a variety of personal stories and anecdotes as a way of illustrating their opinions. Only one parent commented that a few of the staff members seemed to have “attitudes” (a negative impression). However, this parent was quick to add that she felt the majority of the staff was excellent and very dedicated.

**Question #4 – How would you describe the leadership at Gilford Elementary School?**

**Staff Responses**

This question was designed to assess how staff viewed the leadership at Gilford Elementary School. The question was not focused solely on administrative leadership but rather, any forms (formal or informal) of
leadership that may exist in the school. Most people answered this question with an emphasis on the administrative leadership but most also noted that there were other influential leaders in the school.

Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described the leadership at Gilford elementary School. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- "Leadership has changed for the better since Mike got here"
- "The principal likes to be involved in everything"
- "The assistant principal is very positive"
- "The technology teacher is a leader in our school"
- "Leadership used to be stronger...I think the principal sits on the fence and vacillates on decisions too much nowadays"
- "Leadership is very defined and very good"
- "The principal and assistant principal work very well together"
- "The administration works well with parents"
- "Leadership does a good job staying focused on our goals and mission"
- "The administration has been great with dealing with student behaviors and creating and implementing effective policies to make the building run well. But we need more in the area of curriculum"
- "There is shared leadership in this school through a variety of committees"
- (5) "Team leaders provide leadership"
- "The principal stays current and is very knowledgeable"

Based on the comments made in answer to this question, it is clear that the leadership at Gilford Elementary is seen as strong and involved. Interviewees described the principal as very professional and critical to the overall operation of the school. Interviewees also were quick to note that there was other shared forms of leadership that existed, specifically, team
leaders. One staff member expressed concerns about the current administration and feels that outside pressure from parents and internal pressure from some staff have caused the administration to function in a less decisive way. One interviewee responded that "The buck stops with Mike." This staff member was attempting to illustrate the point that the principal is a very strong person and strong leader who is not afraid to take risks and who is quick to assume responsibility for decisions that are made in the school. This staff member appreciated this greatly.

The other area in which leadership seems to emerge is the area of team leaders. Each grade level has a designated team leader. This team leader helps with areas such as ordering supplies, budget, and curriculum work. The teachers look favorably upon this model.

Parent Responses

This question was designed to assess how parents viewed the leadership at Gilford Elementary School. The question was not focused solely on administrative leadership, but rather, on any forms (formal or informal) of leadership that existed in the school. Most people answered this question with an emphasis on the administrative leadership (principal and assistant principal).

Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described the leadership at Gilford Elementary School. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:
• "The leadership is better than I've seen in several other schools"
• (2) "The administrators are visible and always around students – very involved"
• "They are good disciplinarians"
• (2) "They are very approachable"
• "The principal is not easily swayed by disgruntled people. He is a strong person...a strong leader"
• (2) "He is very strong in a good way"
• "Very positive"
• "A tone of respect is clearly set...there is a very positive and respectful environment"
• (3) "There is nice teamwork between the principal and assistant principal"
• (3) "The principal is quick to respond to issues...there is good follow-through"
• "The administrators really listen"
• "The principal runs a tight ship and it shows all the way down. He is not afraid to put himself out there and willing to let the buck stop with him"
• "The assistant principal is wonderful"

Based on the parent interviews that were conducted, it appears that the term "leadership" was almost universally applied to the building administration (principal and assistant principal). From the parents' perspective, these are the most visible leaders at Gilford Elementary School. The parents who were interviewed viewed the Gilford Elementary School administration to be very approachable, open, honest, respected and strong. The principal was described as very visible and involved. The teamwork exhibited between the principal and assistant principal did not go unnoticed by the parents. The tone of order and respect that existed in the building was noted. Parents felt fortunate to have such a strong administrative team leading the school.
Question #5 – Does the school program meet the needs of all students?

Staff Responses

This question was designed to ascertain whether or not staff members perceived the school as being successful in having programs and processes in place to meet the needs of all students. It was also designed to understand how staff themselves worked to meet the needs of their students. It spoke to the culture of the school relative to teaching and learning.

The staff used a number of different descriptors as they described how Gilford Elementary School worked to meet the needs of all students. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- “We have teacher assistants”
- (2) “We have resource rooms...we have a strong special education department”
- “We do a lot with assessment information”
- “We have extensive after-school activities”
- “We have a good summer program”
- “We have an enrichment curriculum”
- “We match teaching and learning styles as best we can”
- “We use small group instruction”
- “We do a nice job with arts integration”
- “Showcases bring out the talent of students”
- “We really don’t meet the needs of all students”
- (3) “We don’t challenge our upper students but we do provide a lot for the lower end”
- “The enrichment curriculum isn’t clearly defined...it doesn’t consistently go through all the grade levels”
Staff responses to this question resulted in the emergence of several themes. First, staff viewed the resource rooms and special education program as a positive and effective mechanism in the school. Second, there were a number of responses that referred to “opportunities for students” that helped meet their needs. Some of the opportunities mentioned included summer programs, after school programs, and arts integration experiences such as monthly “Showcases.” Third, instructional expertise and savvy were mentioned as important in meeting the needs of all students. Grouping practices, utilization of assessment results, and matching teaching-learning styles were mentioned as methods of meeting the needs of students at Gilford Elementary School.

Parent Responses

This question was designed to assess how parents viewed the ability and effectiveness of the school in meeting the needs of all students. As with the two other research sites, the responses to this question were probably the most mixed of any of the questions. Parents used a number of different descriptors as they described how Gilford Elementary School meets the needs of all students. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of parents who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (2) “Yes...we meet the needs of all students”
- “We certainly hope so and feel that as a school, we certainly try to do so”
- “The teachers work hard to do this. They arrive early and leave late to provide remedial work”
• "Our bright kids are challenged through special math groups, literature circles, small group instruction, and opportunities in the arts"
• "We maintain small class sizes...this helps us meet the needs of all kids"
• (2) "We have an enrichment curriculum which is effective"
• (2) "I'm not sure it's really possible to always meet the needs of all students but they do try hard...sometimes I wonder about the upper kids"
• "This is a hard question to answer...I'm not sure"

The responses to this question clustered around two areas. One area dealt with the efforts of staff to do whatever needs to be done to meet the needs of students. There was mention of an "enrichment curriculum" for more academically advanced students. Upon further questioning, this curriculum was defined as an advanced curriculum given to identified students at every grade level. It happens predominantly in math and language arts. The enrichment curriculum is presented in a pullout model and taught by an assistant teacher at each grade level. It should be noted, however, that some teachers viewed this as relatively ineffective and not truly operational at all grade levels.

The other area in which responses clustered was the area responding to needs of children by working hard and creating a variety of grouping and instructional options for students. Parents saw the staff as being committed to meeting needs and working hard to do whatever they could to accomplish this to the best of their ability.
Questions #6–8 – Who is involved in making change in your school? Who or what initiates change? How are decisions made that affect the entire school?

Staff Responses

This question was designed to learn about the change process at Gilford Elementary and the staff perceptions surrounding change and their part in it. Staff used a number of different descriptors as they described how the change process occurs at Gilford Elementary School. The number in parentheses () indicates the number of staff members who used a particular word or phrase. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

- (3) “Anyone who needs to be involved can be involved. Key staff are part of the process”
- (5) “Whoever initiates change is involved in sharing ideas and involved in its implementation and follow-through”
- “Change comes from the principal”
- “The buck stops with the principal”
- (2) “Team leaders are involved in change”
- (2) “Committees make decisions but the principal always has the final say”
- “Parents can initiate change”
- “I don’t really like the team-leader model. Some ideas get shot down early and never make it to the principal”

As can be seen from these responses, the staff feels empowered, involved, and respected members of the change process. In talking about change, it was clear that staff felt empowered in the process rather than threatened by it. People felt that the administration valued their ideas and input and created the right conditions for this input to be discussed and considered. One person did express concern about ideas being stopped at the grade level team leader level.
Decisions at Gilford Elementary level are made by those involved and most affected by them. Change occurs in many different ways, most often from the bottom up. It was clear that the principal was involved and needed to agree to changes.

There appears to be a very collaborative process in place in which communication and open dialogue are valued and important elements in the process. The result is that people feel that change occurs effectively and with involvement and buy-in from appropriate stakeholders.

In response to this question, parents seem to recognize that change comes from many different places and that staff members and others can and are involved. Not a single parent mentioned the principal as the major change agent. They see a collaborative and collective process in place that drives the change and decision making process.

**Question #9 – In order for Gilford Elementary School to continue to be an outstanding school...a high-flying school...what must leadership do, or continue to do?**

**Staff Responses**

From this question, I was hoping to elicit final thoughts and comments regarding the manifestation of leadership in its current form as well as what that leadership needed to look like into the future.

Staff responded to this question in a number of different ways. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:
• (2) "Know what is going on...stay informed...make good decisions and don’t shoot from the hip"
• (2) "Be willing to look at and be open to discussing issues that may be difficult or controversial at times"
• "Point out the positive things going on. Recognize the staff for their efforts."
• "Be the type of leader who promotes good programs and ideas"
• (2) "Support the efforts of staff"
• "Keep everyone together and on the same page"
• "Foster open communication between teachers – parents – and community"
• "Be consistent"
• "This staff needs to become more cohesive...we need to meet and talk together more often"

The responses to this question were very much in line with what leadership theory says a good leader must do. Skills such as fostering open and honest communication, building staff cohesiveness and remaining current and knowledgeable emerged as important now and into the future. Staff recognition and support were also mentioned as important aspects of leadership that needed to continue to occur.

Parent Responses

This final question was designed to tie back into the topic of leadership. From this question, I was hoping to elicit summary information regarding parent perception of leadership skills that were either currently in place or perhaps, needed in the future.

Parents responded to this question in a number of different ways. Some of the quotes recorded in answer to this question included:

• "Communicate effectively with parents, students, and staff"
• "Stick to the rules...be consistent"
• (3) Maintain strong communication...be open"
• (2) “provide a friendly and welcoming environment”
• “Maintain high standards”
• “Make sure that people are friendly and upbeat...keep things positive”
• “Leadership needs to continue to be a strong and visible force”
• “Provide accountability on all fronts”
• “Recruit excellent teachers”
• “Continue to be innovate”
• “Stay well-balanced”
• “Listen to what the parents are saying”

As can be seen from these responses, parents want the school’s leadership to maintain a positive, friendly and open environment. They want lines of communication maintained and want high standards to be in place. Overall, the parents felt that the current leadership was doing an excellent job and needed to continue what it was already doing into the future. Communication was the major theme that emerged.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSES

Plymouth Elementary School

Contextual/Demographic Information

Plymouth Elementary School is located in Plymouth, NH, a college town that lies between the White Mountains and the Lakes Region of New Hampshire. Plymouth relies heavily on four season tourism and serves as a hub of professional and social services for many of its smaller surrounding towns.

Plymouth Elementary School was rebuilt in 1990 and serves students from a wide spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds. The school is a K–8 facility but its physical layout allows for three independent yet connected levels based on student age/placement. By philosophical design, Plymouth Elementary School has adopted the “3-3-3” team model, with separate wings housing primary (K–2), intermediate (3–5), and middle (6–8) units. The current principal has been at Plymouth Elementary School for 11 years.

Plymouth Elementary School has set and adheres to the following mission and goals:
In order that each student may become a self-fulfilled person and a successful productive citizen the school shall provide experiences that enable the student to:

- Attain a level of mastery in the basic areas of reading, mathematics and communication skills appropriate to the student’s individual abilities.
- Develop an understanding of social and political systems and encourage responsible participation in our democratic process.
- Gain insight into the nature of human relationships, respect the rights of others and develop successful interpersonal skills.
- Develop a basic understanding of how our economy works and utilize those consumer skills necessary for personal economic survival.
- Understand and practice personal behaviors which lead to sound mental and physical health.
- Develop an understanding of the natural laws of science especially as they affect ecological balance, to appreciate and participate in the maintenance of that balance.
- Practice a system of values and ethics conducive to the well being of the student, the school, and society.
- Develop creative and critical thinking, and an intellectual curiosity for lifelong learning. Be aware of, and appreciate world cultures through a variety of experiences derived from the fine arts and the humanities.
District/School/Community Demographic Information

District Finance Information –
1998-99 expenditure per pupil = $7432
1998-99 total expenditures (all categories) = $3,935,271

Community Data –
Regional Unemployment Rate = 2.5
Equalized School Tax Rate = 23.29
Per Capita Income = $9045

Enrollment –
(PK – 8) = 495 students

Race/Ethnicity –
White/non-Hispanic = 94.34% Other = 5.66%

Students with Limited English Proficiency = 0%
Students being home schooled = 0.8%
Students eligible for free/Reduced Lunch = 41.8%
Percentage of Students identified as Special Education = 17.97%
Student-Teacher Ratio = 13.2:1
Student to Computer Ratio = 7:1
Percentage of teachers holding Master’s Degrees or above = 65%
Average Teacher Salary = $39,399

1999-2000 State Testing Results (Mean Scaled Score) –
Gr. 3 English/Language Arts = 266
Gr. 3 Mathematics = 263

Question #1: How would you describe your school?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

There was a great deal of commonality in the responses made by both parents and staff regarding the question: "How would you describe Plymouth
Elementary School?” Clearly, there is a great deal of satisfaction that exists among all stakeholders. Plymouth is viewed in a very positive light by both staff and parents. The words “positive,” “respectful,” “caring” and “supportive” emerged from both sets of interviews. The notion of “kids come first” also was evident in both sets of interviews. The enthusiastic, positive, and supportive school culture was noted repeatedly in both sets of interviews. All of this demonstrates a strong concurrence of opinion and a very similar view that is shared by those inside the school and those outside the school.

Question #2 – What kind of reputation does this school have among the staff and community?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

There was a great deal of commonality in the responses made by both parents and staff regarding the question: “What kind of reputation does this school have in your town?” Clearly, there is a great deal of pride that exists among staff and parents. Plymouth Elementary School is seen as a school with a great, and well-deserved, reputation built on an enthusiastic and caring staff who work hard to support students in many different ways. The school is seen as a very visible and positive entity in the town of Plymouth and there is a good deal of outreach work that occurs. All of this demonstrates a strong concurrence of opinion and a very similar view that is shared by those inside the school and those outside the school. In short, Plymouth Elementary School has a very strong and positive reputation within the town of Plymouth.
Question #3 – How would you describe the staff in your school?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

In describing the staff at Plymouth Elementary School, both parents and teachers used very positive descriptors and conveyed a sense of competence, caring, respect, humor, and professionalism. Again, there was a great deal of commonality in the descriptors used by the parents and the staff. This indicates a high degree of agreement regarding how the staff is viewed both inside the building and outside by the community.

Question #4 – How would you describe the leadership at Plymouth Elementary School?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

One of the most common themes that emerged was that the principal leadership is the predominant leadership at work in the school. While staff mentioned team leaders, grade level teams, and committees, it was the principal’s name that kept emerging as the heartbeat of the leadership in the school. Parents also were quick to mention the principal and elementary school administration as the primary leaders. The administrative leaders in the school have a reputation of being very human...very approachable...very caring...and very competent. As people described the administrative leadership, they did so with a tone of respect and care. They genuinely care about the principal and appreciate all he does and the manner in which he leads.
Question #5 – Does the school program meet the needs of all students?

Common Themes that Emerged From Staff and Parent Interviews

There were mixed reviews in the way that staff and parents answered this question. Of all the research questions, the responses here showed the most diversity between parent and staff responses. Parents all acknowledged that the school was trying to meet the needs of all students and that the teachers cared about all of the students and did their best in meeting their needs. However, the majority of parents felt that the more advanced students (students at the upper end) were not challenged to a great enough degree. These same parents indicated that students with special needs and those who were low performers received the most assistance. They felt that there were adequate resources for these students but that the same level of service and attention was not afforded the high-achieving students.

Staff responses clustered around the efforts being made to meet the needs of all students as well as positive responses concerning the specialists and special services that were available for students. Several staff did acknowledge that higher-achieving students probably could use more enrichment and attention but that everyone was doing the best they could to challenge these students and meet their needs.

Questions #6–8 – Who is involved in making change in your school? Who or what initiates change? How are decisions made that affect the entire school?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

In analyzing the responses to the “change process” questions posed to both parents and staff, it was evident that there was a high level of agreement in
several areas. Both parents and staff view change as a process that can be initiated from many different places. Both view change as occurring through a collaborative process that involves different stakeholders. Both view the change process as something done, for the most part, by committee. Neither group focused on the principal or administrative team as the sole initiators of change.

**Question #9 – In order for Plymouth Elementary School to continue to be an outstanding school...a high-flying school...what must leadership do, or continue to do?**

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

In analyzing the responses to the question, "What must leadership do or continue to do in order to assure that Plymouth Elementary School continues to be an outstanding school?" several common themes emerged.

First, both parents and staff almost unanimously felt that the current leadership was doing a great job and that it needed to simply continue to do what it was already doing in order to perpetuate success. Maintaining a high level of energy, humor, and esprit de corps were all mentioned by both parents and staff. Both groups saw the importance of continuing to involve parents and the community in the educational process. Both groups talked about keeping communication open and honest. Finally, both groups mentioned that the leadership needed to continue to strive for excellence and set high standards for the school.
Final Analysis of Plymouth Elementary School Research

This section will summarize the research conducted at Plymouth Elementary School and will seek to address this study's research question: How is leadership given shape and substance in outstanding schools and how is it experienced by those working within the school? How do the elements of school culture and leadership exist in three high-flying New Hampshire schools?

As per the research design, Plymouth Elementary School was chosen as an outstanding (high-flying) school using the "National Blue Ribbon" criterion. This definition occurred within the context of the Blue Ribbon award program which required Plymouth Elementary School to meet a rigorous criteria of excellence. This resulted in recognition locally, state-wide, and nationally.

The connection between culture and leadership was very strong at Plymouth Elementary School. As discussed earlier in the review of literature, culture influences everything that occurs in a school: how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, instructional methodology, and the emphasis given student and staff learning (Deal & Peterson, 1994; Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Newmann & Associates, 1996). Culture is the deeply rooted set of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have evolved and developed over time (Deal & Peterson, 1990). It lies in the commonly held beliefs of teachers, students, and principals. Culture is developed as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges.
School culture shapes how people think, feel, and act. It is a powerful web of influence that binds the school together and makes it special. It is up to school leaders--principals, teachers, and parents--to help identify, shape, and maintain a strong and positive culture. For a school to grow, improve, and achieve greatness, the right culture has to exist. A healthy and thriving culture clearly exists at Plymouth Elementary School.

Alongside culture stands leadership. These two concepts are intricately connected and culture depends greatly on leadership. Bennis and Townsend (1995) described two types of leaders: a leader who controls, orders, and predicts, (a COP); and a leader who acknowledges, creates, and empowers, (an ACE). The COP is a hierarchical and bureaucratic leader who will eventually be ineffective because s/he relies solely on the ability to keep everyone in line, to enforce rules, and to coerce results. An ACE is a transformational leader who is capable of creating the energy and synergy needed for a school to take off and achieve great things. The principal at Plymouth Elementary School was described by staff and parents as an ACE in many different ways. Similarly, Wheatley (1999) used metaphorical terms such as “gardener, steward, facilitator, and servant” to describe the role and functions of leadership in today’s world. The principal at Plymouth Elementary School was all of these things.

Current leadership theory speaks to the inclusive and empowering nature of true leadership. Leadership from many different people helps to make or break the culture of a school. Leadership that is vision-oriented,
people focused, and strong in both transformational and transactional processes leads to the growth and development of a healthy and thriving school culture. This culture then provides the foundation on which change, reform, and success are built.

The researcher's four visits to Plymouth Elementary School revealed a number of insights into the culture and leadership at work in that school. These visits, which involved spending time within the school and within classrooms, coupled with the parent and staff interviews that were conducted, helped the researcher grow to understand how leadership was manifested in the school and how culture was affected by leadership and how leadership was affected by culture.

From a cultural standpoint, Plymouth Elementary School is a thriving and positive place where people work together with a common goal and vision. The culture at Plymouth Elementary School is built on ideals and concepts such as collegiality, teamwork, cooperation, flexibility, humor, dedication, creativity, and child-centered actions and decision-making. The culture also nurtures the idea of life-long learning as evident through the number of staff involved in graduate work. There was a very positive feeling in the building. The students and staff seemed happy and freely engaged one another in a variety of ways. There was a mutual respect that existed and a sense of pride in the school.

Parents and staff spoke of Plymouth Elementary in very positive terms. They indicated pride in what the school accomplished, the opportunities that
existed for students, and in the fact that their school was truly exemplary. People knew that their school was a special place. A feeling of engagement and empowerment emanated from staff and it was clear that they felt a great deal of ownership and responsibility for Plymouth Elementary School's success. They were quick to point out the collaborative efforts of their colleagues and quick to point to their principal as being critical in their success.

Based on four site visits and the parent and staff interviews, there were a number of leadership traits and behaviors that seemed to manifest themselves at Plymouth Elementary School in different ways. The principal was widely regarded as being excellent and people spoke of him in very positive terms. Through the structured interviews, it became evident that leadership manifested itself in a number of different ways.

One of the characteristics of strong leadership that was evident was a stated shared vision for the school. The staff and parents at Plymouth Elementary School shared a vision of excellence. There was an expectation that programs would be developed to meet the needs of all students. There was an expectation that all students could and would be successful and that they would be respected as learners and as people. A vision existed that Plymouth Elementary School would work to make connections with parents and the community and that parents were an integral part of the educational process. Parents and community members were welcomed into the school and invited to be a part of the Plymouth Elementary learning community. There was also an expectation that Plymouth Elementary School would reach
out into the community and contribute in some way. The vision that was shared at Plymouth Elementary School was sustained by all stakeholders. Decisions were made from a child-centered perspective. The staff viewed the principal as behaving and acting in accordance to the vision. They saw the administrative team leading by example.

Another leadership characteristic that became evident at Plymouth Elementary School was trustworthiness and honesty. Many different people commented on how they perceived the principal to be honest and open. He was viewed as a person who would genuinely listen to the needs and ideas of others and who would respond respectfully and thoughtfully. The staff viewed the principal as open and felt that they could go to him any time with any problem. They felt that he had no hidden agenda and that he would share information with them as appropriate.

Strong leadership helps foster and promote leadership in others. The notion of shared leadership was a part of the culture of Plymouth Elementary School. The staff felt empowered and part of the educational process in their school. When asked who was responsible for initiation of and participation in the change process, one staff member said, "we are all involved!" This comment spoke loudly about how that particular staff member viewed leadership and the change process. It illustrated how leadership is not viewed as an isolated function of the principal; leadership involves other people in a collaborative and meaningful manner.
Aside from cultivating the belief that “everyone can be a leader,” the principal utilized several other strategies that openly demonstrated shared leadership at work. The Principal’s Advisory Group was recognized as an entity that shared in decision-making and in the change process. Comprised of teachers, parents, and administration, this group met regularly to communicate and work in collaboration on a variety of topics and issues.

Another strategy in place focused on “wings” in which teachers at the same or similar grade levels worked together. The physical layout of the building was such that teachers were grouped together in instructional clusters. These clusters, in the form of “wings” met on a regular basis with the principal. The wings had informal leaders who assumed responsibility for some of the work that needed to be done (ex: budget, class lists, etc.). Wings felt very empowered to make decisions that affected their wing and that were in the best interest of students. The principal’s role was to facilitate these meetings and assist as a resource in any way possible. When necessary, the principal brought one wing’s issues to another wing if there was a potential impact. Issues that impacted more than one wing were brought to regularly scheduled staff meetings and discussed.

Another way that shared leadership occurred at Plymouth Elementary School was through the Student Council. The Student Council was comprised of close to 100 students in the upper grades. Many decisions about things that occurred in the building were discussed and decided upon by the Student Council.
Overall, leadership manifested itself in many different ways, all of which were viewed as very positive and effective. The outstanding leadership of Plymouth Elementary School served to perpetuate an equally effective and healthy school culture.

Leadership at Plymouth Elementary School is manifested in a number of ways. First, leadership manifests itself in the creation and maintenance of school culture. A healthy and thriving culture exists which is marked by a staff that has a shared sense of purpose, where they pour their hearts into teaching; and where the underlying norms are of collegiality, improvement, and hard work. Plymouth Elementary School is a place where success, joy, and humor abound.

The leadership at Plymouth Elementary School is intuitive and understands the ethos and the explicit and embedded core values of the institution. The principal has been there since the building was first built and has a sense of what was before, what was created, and what is still yet to come.

Leadership is manifested at Plymouth Elementary School through the administrator’s definition and maintenance and focus on goals. The principal understands the core values of the school and the community. He sets goals that are clearly defined and consistent with the school’s mission. By constantly communicating his goals and by “walking the walk” he makes his school and community believe in those goals.

Leadership manifests itself in the way people are motivated. The principal creates energy and stays optimistic; he leads by example. Leadership
is manifested in the way that people are empowered. The administration recognizes that sharing power enhances effectiveness and influence. By sharing power, the principal creates a culture for growth and opportunity. The staff at Plymouth Elementary School refers to itself as "going above and beyond the call of duty for children." This occurs because people have "bought into the program". Sharing power has empowered the Plymouth Elementary School staff and has created a high degree of unity. A community of learning exists at Plymouth Elementary School, a school that is flying high and achieving great things.

Rye Elementary School

Contextual/Demographic Information

Rye Elementary School is located in Rye, NH, in the southeastern corner of New Hampshire. Rye was one of the first settlements in New Hampshire in 1623. Rye has been identified as one of the "Top Ten Communities Statewide" in a study reported by a local newspaper, which included comparisons of the Rye Elementary School State Testing results.

Rye Elementary School is a K-5 facility serving students located in the town of Rye, NH. At the time of this research study, the principal had been at the school for eighteen months after moving to Rye from Massachusetts.

The mission of the Rye Elementary Schools is as follows: Learning is a voyage. We are dedicated to awakening curiosity and creating an acceptance and respect for each individual. We will provide meaningful academic experiences through the ebb and flow of the ever-changing world.
District/School/Community Demographic Information

District Finance Information –
   1998-99 expenditure per pupil = $6881
   1998-99 total expenditures (all categories) = $5,754,786

Community Data –
   Regional Unemployment Rate = 1.8
   Equalized School Tax Rate = 7.27
   Per Capita Income = $28,020

Enrollment –
   (PK – 5) = 362 students

Race/Ethnicity –
   White/non-Hispanic = 99.45%  Other = .55%

Students with Limited English Proficiency = 0%

Students being home schooled = 0.8%

Students eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch = 3%

Percentage of Students identified as Special Education = 0.09%

Student-Teacher Ratio = 15:1

Student to Computer Ratio = 5:1

Percentage of teachers holding Master’s Degrees or above = 51.3

Average Teacher Salary = $ 41,604

1999-2000 State Testing Results (Mean Scaled Score) –
   Gr. 3 English/Language Arts = 269
   Gr. 3 Mathematics = 263

Question #1: How would you describe Rye Elementary school?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

There were several areas of commonality between parents and staff in their responses to the question: “How would you describe Rye Elementary School?” First, there was a sense of pride and satisfaction in relation to the
environment that existed. Parents and staff viewed the school as a positive and happy place where children enjoyed coming to school.

There was also agreement that the school involved parents and worked hard to maintain the parent-school connection. Comments regarding the "child-centered" nature of the school were also evident in both sets of interviews.

**Question #2 – What kind of reputation does this school have among the staff and community?**

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

One aspect of Rye's reputation that parents and staff seemed to agree on was the notion that people moved to Rye because of the school. The school seems to be a selling point with people who are looking to relocate in the Rye area.

The staff seemed to feel the school had a better reputation in the town than the parents did. Though the parents indicated it had earned a positive reputation, they were quick to point out that not everyone might agree and one parent said that in her opinion, Rye's reputation was over-inflated.

**Question #3 – How would you describe the staff in your school?**

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

In describing the staff at Rye Elementary School, the parents were more positive as a whole than the staff themselves. This would seem to make sense because the parents are basing their opinions on what they see on the surface regarding daily teaching and instruction with children. Some of the interpersonal concerns, made by staff, about people being cliquey, grumpy, and
competitive were not obvious to the parents. The staff interviewees were quicker to point out these flaws because of their closer relationship with their colleagues beyond the ordinary view of parents. The one thing that was agreed upon was that the staff is hardworking, dedicated, and committed to providing quality education to children.

**Question #4 – How would you describe the leadership at Rye Elementary School?**

**Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews**

There were not many common themes that emerged when contrasting and comparing staff and parent responses to this question. It seemed that the jury was still out on the current principal. Parents were somewhat hesitant to comment on her style based on the fact that she was relatively new. The staff also seemed somewhat tentative to make definitive statements about the principal's leadership style. Clearly, there are some transitional pains occurring at Rye Elementary School as people adjust to two different administrative styles.

The principal, herself, seemed very aware of these transitional issues and recognized that some members of the staff were having a hard time adjusting to her style and personality. She recognized that dealing with a rift in the staff was a necessary part of her work and she was actively trying to implement strategies in this effort.
Question #5 – Does the school program meet the needs of all students?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

Some of the staff and most of the parents stated that students needed to be challenged to a greater degree. There was also agreement that upper grade students are better challenged than lower grade students are.

Another area of agreement was in the area of extra opportunities. Both staff and parents responded to this question by indicating that there are special opportunities that exist for students. Terms like “challenges and extensions” and “inclusion,” which were mentioned by staff, were not mentioned by any of the parents who were interviewed.

Questions 6-8 – Who is involved in making change in your school? Who or what initiates change? How are decisions made that affect the entire school?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

In analyzing the responses to the “change process/decision-making” question posed to both parents and staff, no clear commonalities emerged. The staff expressed feelings of involvement and felt that change occurred from within. Mention was made of grade level teams and committees that were involved in decisions.

Parents did not express a feeling of empowerment or involvement. In fact, parents seemed somewhat unaware and/or uninformed about the decision-making process. Two of the parents expressed concern that parents were not involved in the change process.
Question #9 – In order for Rye Elementary School to continue to be an outstanding school...a high-flying school...what must leadership do, or continue to do?

Common Themes that emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

In analyzing the responses to the question, “What must leadership do or continue to do in order to assure that Rye Elementary School continues to be an outstanding school?” there were strong and clearly connected common themes that emerged.

One theme that did emerge was that of maintaining a high level of open and honest communication. The staff wants leadership to be honest and open and so do the parents. The staff wants decisions to be made in the best interest of students and wants students to be supported. Parents also want decisions to be made in the best interest of students and want high academic standards maintained.

Final Analysis of Rye Elementary School Research

This section will summarize the research conducted at Rye Elementary School and will seek to address this study’s research question: How is leadership given shape and substance in outstanding schools and how is it experienced by those working within the school? How do the elements of school culture and leadership exist in three high-flying New Hampshire schools?

As per the research design, Rye Elementary School was chosen as an outstanding (high-flying) school due to its standing as one of the State of New Hampshire’s top scoring schools in the New Hampshire Educational...
Improvement and Assessment Program (NHEIAP). The NHEIAP is given annually to all New Hampshire third, sixth, and tenth graders. Rye Elementary third graders have consistently scored in the top ten schools statewide. Performance on state-mandated testing has been used as an indicator of a school’s overall effectiveness. Many would argue that a school that consistently performs well above the state average could be considered an outstanding school. For this reason, a high performing NHEIAP school was chosen as one of the three outstanding schools targeted in this study.

The connection between culture and leadership appeared in a somewhat different form at Rye Elementary School compared to the other two research sites: Plymouth Elementary School and Gilford Elementary School. As discussed earlier in the review of literature, culture influences everything that occurs in a school: how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, instructional methodology, and the emphasis given student and staff learning (Deal & Peterson, 1994; Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Newmann & Associates, 1996). Culture is the deeply rooted set of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have evolved and developed over time (Deal & Peterson, 1990). It lies in the commonly held beliefs of teachers, students, and principals. Culture is developed as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. School culture shapes how people think, feel, and act. It is a powerful web of influence that binds the school together and makes it special. It is up to school leaders—principals, teachers, and parents—to help identify, shape, and maintain a strong and positive culture.
For a school to grow, improve, and achieve greatness, the right culture has to exist.

Of the three schools in this study, the culture of Rye appeared to be the most unsettled. Comments from staff and parents indicated that Rye Elementary was a school in transition. There was some confusion that existed about change and decision making. There was some discomfort and uneasiness with the current administration, some negative feelings expressed by staff about the staff as a whole, and a general feeling of uncertainty regarding the future. On the surface, a culture of academic excellence seemed to exist, with Rye Elementary School demonstrating consistent academic excellence based on their NHEIAP scores. However, interviews with staff and parents indicated some rough waters just below the seemingly tranquil surface.

As previously stated in this study, school culture stands next to and connected to leadership. These two concepts are intricately connected and culture depends greatly on leadership. Bennis and Townsend (1995) described two types of leaders: a leader who controls, orders, and predicts, (a COP); and a leader who acknowledges, creates, and empowers, (an ACE). The COP is a hierarchical and bureaucratic leader who will eventually be ineffective because s/he relies solely on the ability to keep everyone in line, to enforce rules, and to coerce results. An ACE is a transformational leader who is capable of creating the energy and synergy needed for a school to take off and achieve great things.
It was difficult to clearly categorize the principal at Rye Elementary School as either an ACE or a COP due to the variability in the interviews that were conducted. Some staff clearly viewed her as an ACE while others viewed her as more of a COP. The reason for this discrepancy was fairly clear. As previously noted, Rye Elementary School was in a period of transition between two principals, principals who appeared to have very different leadership styles and personalities. Some staff appeared to be having difficulty with this transition and thus, their comments regarding leadership were not entirely positive. There were concerns expressed about the principal's leadership style and the manner in which leadership was being manifested in the building. Some staff felt confused about how decisions were being made, with some perceiving an autocratic approach that failed to take into account the needs and opinions of everyone. These staff members tended to view the current principal as more of a COP.

Other staff viewed the new principal as effective and indicated that she was more willing to make the tough decisions that needed to be made. They indicated that these were decisions that needed to be made by the principal and recognized that these decisions may be somewhat unpopular with certain segments of the staff. Nonetheless, they saw the need to make these decisions and applauded the principal's vision and philosophical base. These staff members tended to view the principal as more of an ACE.

There were two issues that arose in the staff interviews that were illustrative of the incongruent view of leadership manifestation at Rye
Elementary School. One of the issues dealt with "teaming" and the other dealt with "inclusion."

The teaming issue resulted from the principal's mandate that all grade level teams meet together a minimum of twice a week to discuss common issues and conduct team planning. Prior to the principal's arrival, there was no requirement for teachers at the same grade level to meet. The new mandate resulted in two very different reactions: one negative and one positive.

The negative reaction came from people who saw the principal as acting in a dictatorial, COP-like way. They resented the fact that she had mandated that they work together on a regular basis, preferring instead to continue working together in a less structured way. The staff members perceived that their planning time had been infringed upon and that professional responsibility for "getting the job done" was being stripped from them.

The positive reaction to the teaming issue came from people who saw the principal acting more as an ACE. Prior to this mandate, they perceived a lack of cohesion and team-level planning and communication. They perceived that people were acting independently of one another and saw competition emerging as a negative factor among teachers. The mandate to begin meeting regularly as a grade level was welcomed by these staff. They viewed this as a progressive and necessary move designed to build collegiality and cohesion within grade levels. They saw this move as empowering grade levels, allowing them to meet and make good decisions in the best interest of
students. These staff applauded the principal and viewed her as thoughtful, perceptive, and strong. They saw her as making decisions that were congruent with her expressed desire and vision to make Rye Elementary School a cohesive and collaborative school.

The second issue that caused a rift among staff and a discrepancy in how the leadership was viewed dealt with inclusion. Within the past year, resource rooms were being phased out in favor of having all special needs students work in their regular classroom setting. Rather than going to a resource room for support and remediation (pull-out model), students were kept in their regular classroom and special education staff was brought into the room to support these students and co-teach with the regular education teacher. As with the “teaming” issue, staff interviews revealed two distinct camps that had formed around this issue: one negative and one positive.

The negative view of this focused not so much on the philosophy of inclusion. There was almost unanimous agreement about the social benefits of inclusion. Staff who felt negative about inclusion expressed concerns about the manner in which the change had occurred. They that the principal had made an autocratic decision to move to inclusion without fully exploring the issue and opening a dialogue with those most affected: the teachers. Some staff felt that they were “out of the loop” and that their opinions and concerns were never sought. They felt disenfranchised and “put upon” by an administration that failed to take their needs into account.
The positive view of inclusion was expressed by other staff. These staff felt that the principal was again, being proactive and progressive. They viewed the decision as being one that needed to be made. There was a feeling that discussion did occur and that opinions were sought. These staff members viewed the principal as sticking to her expressed goal and vision for the school: engaging in effective practices that benefit students and give students opportunities to be challenged to the greatest degree possible. These teachers applauded the move toward inclusion and gave kudos to the principal for doing “the right thing.”

The two examples illustrated above demonstrate why the view of leadership at Rye Elementary School was varied and difficult to categorize. The answer to the question, “How is leadership manifested and experienced at Rye Elementary School?” is difficult to answer and depends upon the source.

Current leadership theory speaks to the inclusive and empowering nature of true leadership. Leadership from many different people helps to make or break the culture of a school. Leadership that is vision-oriented, people focused, and strong in both transformational and transactional processes leads to the growth and development of a healthy and thriving school culture. This culture then provides the foundation on which change, reform, and success are built.

Visits to Rye Elementary School revealed a number of glimpses into the culture and leadership at work in that school. From a cultural standpoint, Rye Elementary School is a school in transition. It is clearly a school that has a long
tradition of academic excellence as demonstrated by its strong test scores. Teachers and parents are quick to mention the academically talented student body. Teachers are equally quick, however, to note that demographically, the school is in a wealthy town that values education. Many of the students come from families that have the economic means to travel and enrich their children’s life experiences in different ways. This was evident in looking at Rye Elementary School’s population of free/reduced lunch figures (3%) compared to the two other research sites (see School Demographic Information).

Several of the teachers noted that the students at Rye Elementary School enter already “above grade level” and that the regular classroom curriculum is raised to meet the needs of a high degree of very capable and academically talented students. One staff member mentioned that the student body was not very “diverse,” meaning that most students presented as middle/upper middle class Caucasian students who came from intact families and who had high academic readiness skills upon entering the school. The principal spoke to advancing curriculum and meeting the needs of these academically talented students through “challenges and extensions” in the classroom. Her expectation was that all teachers would extend and challenge students as a matter of good teaching and as part of the regular curriculum.

From a financial resource standpoint, parents and staff commented that the town of Rye was very supportive of education and that the budget had never been cut. Staff expressed their appreciation of the resources that were
available to them, noting that the Rye Education Foundation was there to provide additional financial assistance.

Overall, the parents and staff spoke of Rye Elementary in positive terms. They indicated pride in what the school accomplished, the opportunities that existed for students, and in the fact that their school enjoyed an outstanding and well-deserved reputation. People knew that their school was a special place.

Based on the four site visits and interviews, there were a number of leadership traits and behaviors that seemed to manifest themselves at Rye Elementary School in different ways. It is important to keep in mind that at the time of the school visitations, the principal had only been at the school for about one and one-half years.

From the staff's perspective, the principal was viewed positively by some and not so positively by others. From a parent perspective, there were no clear opinions that emerged. Many of the parents felt unqualified to answer questions about the principal's leadership due to their lack of opportunities to know her and work with her. There was a sense from parents, however, that the principal was doing a better job than her predecessor, who they viewed as somewhat ineffective.

One of the traits that was evident was a stated shared vision for the school. The principal had a clear expectation that students would be challenged and that individual needs would be met effectively and efficiently. She used the term "challenges and extensions" in this regard, and through
staff interviews it was clear that this expectation was shared, in practice, and functional at the classroom level. The staff and parents at Rye Elementary School shared a vision of excellence. There was an expectation that programs would be developed to meet the needs of all students. There was an expectation that all students could and would be successful and that they would be respected as learners and as people.

Another shared vision focused on embracing parents as part of the educational process. Through interviews and visitations, it quickly became clear that parents were an integral part of the educational process at Rye Elementary School. Staff members talked in concrete terms about how they involved parents in their classrooms and parents gave numerous examples of ways the school provided opportunities for them to participate. This parent-school connection was something on which all stakeholders prided themselves.

Another way that leadership manifested itself at Rye Elementary School was through efforts to foster and promote leadership in others. The notion of shared leadership was a part of the principal's personal and professional philosophy. She described her vision of grade level teams working cooperatively together as functional and effective teams. She expressed her desire to have grade levels reach consensus on decisions that affected them and their students. Leadership was also shared through vehicles such as the Parent Teacher Organization and exhibited by individual staff members such as the guidance counselor and the reading specialist. The principal expressed
the desire to show others that she believed in their abilities as professionals and that leadership could come from almost anywhere.

In comparison to Gilford Elementary School and Plymouth Elementary School, the leadership at Rye Elementary School was in its infancy. It was evident that Rye’s lack of administrative stability over the years impacted the school in some negative ways. Plymouth and Gilford were schools that had well established cultures molded by consistent leadership over time. Rye was a school whose culture was somewhat less defined due to transitional issues. In short, it was more difficult to discern the impact of leadership on Rye Elementary School than it was on the other two research sites due to issues of consistency and administrative turnover.

Gilford Elementary School

Contextual/Demographic Information

Gilford Elementary School is located in the Lake’s Region of Central New Hampshire. The K-5 School is located in the town of Gilford, NH, and has a student enrollment of approximately 550 students. The principal has been at the school for eighteen years.

The community of Gilford features twelve miles of shoreline on the state’s largest lake, Lake Winnipesaukee. It is a four-season resort destination for tourists from all over the country. Skiing and snowmobiling in the winter, hiking in the spring and fall, and water sports in the summer make Gilford a popular vacation destination.
The mission of the school, in partnership with parents and community is: to actively engage all students in a broad range of exceptional educational opportunities that provide a foundation for continued learning, responsible citizenship, and the ability to thrive in a changing and diverse society.

The Gilford Elementary School goals are:

- To promote good character and citizenship with a focus on respect, responsibility, and independence.
- To develop the full academic potential of each student by implementing curriculum which is relevant and challenging.
- To refine our emphasis on integrating the arts and curriculum with higher order thinking as part of the H.O.T. School Philosophy.
- To encourage collaboration with staff and teams to provide relevant learning experiences for students.
- To become involved and involve students in wellness programs which promote healthful living.
- To encourage interaction between students at different grade levels.
- To plan and coordinate student activities in which all grade levels can share common experiences.
- To foster school activities that can be shared at home.
- To promote community and school partnerships
- To assist parents in understanding their responsibility in achieving our school priorities.
To continue to provide a safe physical environment where children are taught conflict resolution skills and respect for individual differences and offered opportunities to practice the democratic process.

District/School/Community Demographic Information

District Finance Information –
1998-99 expenditure per pupil = $7263
1998-99 total expenditures (all categories) = $10,237,458

Community Data –
Regional Unemployment Rate = 2.2
Equalized School Tax Rate = 13.69
Per Capita Income = $16,541

Enrollment –
(PK – 5) = 550 students

Race/Ethnicity –
White/non-Hispanic = 99.64% Other = .36%

Students with Limited English Proficiency = .5%
Students being home schooled = .9%
Students eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch = 11.5%

Percentage of Students identified as Special Education = Data Not Available
Student-Teacher Ratio = 17.3:1
Student to Computer Ratio = 6:1
Percentage of teachers holding Master's Degrees or above = 57.7%

Average Teacher Salary = $37,664

1999-2000 State Testing Results (Mean Scaled Score) –
Gr. 3 English/Language Arts = 258
Gr. 3 Mathematics = 263

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Question #1: How would you describe your school?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

There was a great deal of commonality between parents and staff in their responses to the question: "How would you describe Gilford Elementary School?" There was a great deal of pride and satisfaction that existed among all stakeholders. Gilford was viewed in a very positive light by both staff and parents. The words "positive, open, honest, happy, caring, and nurturing" were used by many of the parents and staff. Comments regarding the "child-centered" nature of the school were also evident in both sets of interviews. In analyzing the comments of parents and staff, it is clear that Gilford Elementary School is viewed warmly and with pride. All stakeholders seem to be of the opinion that they indeed, have a great school.

Question #2 - What kind of reputation does this school have among the staff and community?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews:

There was a great deal of commonality in the responses made by both parents and staff regarding the question: "What kind of reputation does this school have in your town?" Based on responses to this question, Gilford enjoys a very good reputation in the opinion of those inside and outside the school. When asked about the school’s reputation, it was interesting to note that not one of the interviewees even hesitated slightly before saying something positive about the reputation.
Question #3 – How would you describe the staff in your school?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

In describing the staff at Gilford Elementary School, both parents and teachers used very positive descriptors and conveyed a sense of confidence, caring, respect, and dedication. Again, there was a great deal of commonality in the descriptors used by the parents and the staff. This indicates a high degree of agreement regarding how the staff is viewed both inside the building and outside by the community. A sense of community and collegiality seems to clearly exist at Gilford Elementary School and this expressed in a number of different ways in the interviews.

Question #4 – How would you describe the leadership at Gilford Elementary School?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

One of the most common themes that emerged was that the administrative leadership is at the heart of the leadership being provided at Gilford Elementary School. While staff mentioned team leaders, grade level teams, and committees as other vehicles providing leadership, it was the principal’s name that kept emerging at the center of the leadership in the school. Parents almost universally talked about the principal and assistant principal as being the leaders in the school.

The administrative leaders in the school had a reputation of being very caring, in tune with their staff, very approachable, and very competent.
Question #5 – Does the school program meet the needs of all students?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

The responses to this question when posed to Gilford Elementary School staff and parents were somewhat different than the responses from Plymouth Elementary School and Rye Elementary School. At both Plymouth and Rye, the parents expressed more concerns than the staff regarding whether or not the needs of all students were being met. In particular, parents at those two schools expressed concerns that bright students were not challenged to the degree they needed to be. The staff at these two schools was more forgiving of itself and felt that a good job was being done.

At Gilford Elementary School, the parents expressed satisfaction in the efforts to meet the needs of all students. They recognized that the school was making a good effort and was for the most part, successful. Staff, on the other hand, felt as if needs were not necessarily being met. They felt confident that mechanisms were in place to challenge advanced students, but felt that students in need of remediation and support were perhaps not getting all they needed. Some of the staff also expressed concerns about the adequacy and consistency of the “enrichment curriculum” and its application in the school.

The common theme that did emerge from both parents and students revolved around the hard work and dedication of teachers to give students what they need to be successful. Both parents and staff mentioned that people came in early, worked hard, and did all they could to assure a quality educational program for all students. This seems to speak to the culture of
professionalism, dedication, and investment that has been cultivated at this school.

Questions #6-8 – Who is involved in making change in your school? Who or what initiates change? How are decisions made that affect the entire school?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews:

In analyzing the responses to the “change process” question posed to both parents and staff, it was evident that there was a high level of agreement in several areas. Both parents and staff view change as a process that can be initiated from many different places. Both view changes as occurring through a collaborative process that involves different stakeholders. Both groups view the change process as something that occurs collaboratively and not by and through one person. Neither group focused on the principal or administrative team as the sole initiators of change, indicating that they see a democratic structure at work in the school.

Question #9 – In order for Gilford Elementary School to continue to be an outstanding school...a high-flying school...what must leadership do, or continue to do?

Common Themes that Emerged from Staff and Parent Interviews

In analyzing the responses to the question, “What must leadership do or continue to do in order to assure that Gilford Elementary School continues to be an outstanding school?” several common themes emerged.

First, both parents and staff almost unanimously felt that the current leadership was doing an excellent job and that it needed to simply continue to do what it was already doing in order to perpetuate success. Maintaining a high level of open and honest communication and fostering teamwork and
collaboration were seen as critical. Both groups saw the importance of maintaining a healthy and positive school environment and that if this environment existed, good things would continue to happen. Both groups felt that leadership needed to stay current and informed, and they wanted consistency and high expectations and standards to remain in place.

Final Analysis of Gilford Elementary School Research

This section will summarize the research conducted at Gilford Elementary School and will seek to address this study’s research question: 

*How is leadership given shape and substance in outstanding schools and how is it experienced by those working within the school? How do the elements of school culture and leadership exist in three high-flying New Hampshire schools?*

As per the research design, Gilford Elementary School was chosen as an outstanding (high-flying) school using a “word of mouth/reputation criteria.” As stated earlier, the researcher spoke to other administrators, educators, the State Principal’s Association, and the NH Department of Education, asking each group to name some “outstanding schools” of which they were aware. A number of schools were noted several times during this process and Gilford was chosen, due in part, to its proximity to the researcher’s own physical location. Gilford Elementary School is widely known to be a school of excellence and has been recognized at the local and state level for its accomplishments and exemplary programs and practices in past years.
The connection between culture and leadership was very strong at Gilford Elementary School. As discussed earlier in the review of literature, culture influences everything that occurs in a school: how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, instructional methodology, and the emphasis given student and staff learning (Deal & Peterson, 1994; Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Newmann & Associates, 1996). Culture is the deeply rooted set of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have evolved and developed over time (Deal & Peterson, 1990). It lies in the commonly held beliefs of teachers, students, and principals. Culture is developed as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. School culture shapes how people think, feel, and act. It is a powerful web of influence that binds the school together and makes it special. It is up to school leaders—principals, teachers, and parents—to help identify, shape, and maintain a strong and positive culture. For a school to grow, improve, and achieve greatness, the right culture has to exist. A healthy and thriving culture clearly exists at Gilford Elementary School.

Alongside culture stands leadership. These two concepts are intricately connected and culture depends greatly on leadership. Bennis and Townsend (1995) described two types of leaders: a leader who controls, orders, and predicts, (a COP); and a leader who acknowledges, creates, and empowers, (an ACE). The COP is a hierarchical and bureaucratic leader who will eventually be ineffective because s/he relies solely on the ability to keep everyone in line, to enforce rules, and to coerce results. An ACE is a transformational leader...
who is capable of creating the energy and synergy needed for a school to take off and achieve great things. The principal at Gilford Elementary School was described by staff and parents as an ACE in many different ways. Similarly, Wheatley (1999) used metaphorical terms such as "gardener, steward, facilitator, and servant" to describe the role and functions of leadership in today's world. The principal at Gilford Elementary School was all of these things.

Current leadership theory speaks to the inclusive and empowering nature of true leadership. Leadership from many different people helps to make or break the culture of a school. Leadership that is vision-oriented, people focused, and strong in both transformational and transactional processes leads to the growth and development of a healthy and thriving school culture. This culture then provides the foundation on which change, reform, and success are built.

The researcher's four visits to Gilford Elementary School revealed a number of glimpses into the culture and leadership at work in that school. These visits, which involved spending time within the school and conducting parent and staff interviews, helped the researcher grow to understand how leadership was manifested at Gilford Elementary School and how the school's culture was affected by leadership and how leadership was affected by culture.

From a school culture perspective, Gilford Elementary School is a thriving and positive place where people work together with a common goal and vision. The culture at Gilford Elementary School is built on ideals and
concepts such as collegiality, teamwork, cooperation, flexibility, humor, dedication, creativity, and child-centered actions and decision-making. The culture also nurtures the idea of life-long learning as evident through the number of staff involved in graduate work. The staff noted that staying “current and cutting edge” is almost an unspoken expectation. One staff member remarked that “those who are not motivated to keep learning and growing soon find they are no longer a good match for our school and end up leaving.”

There was a very positive feeling in the building. The students and staff seemed happy and freely engaged one another in a variety of ways. On the first visit to the school, there were parents and students smiling and freely conversing with one another. Among the staff, administration, and parents, there was a mutual respect and a sense of pride that was evident in the school.

Parents and staff spoke of their school in very positive terms. They spoke proudly of what their school accomplished, the opportunities that existed for students, and in the fact that their school had earned and deserved an excellent reputation. People knew that their school was a special place. There was a feeling of engagement and empowerment that emanated from staff and it was clear that they felt a great deal of ownership and responsibility for Gilford Elementary School’s success. They were quick to point out the collaborative efforts of their colleagues and quick to point to their principal as being critical in their success. They talked fondly of working with one another and how collegiality and collaboration were the standard methods of
operating. This appeared to be deeply ingrained in the culture of the school. Very few "I" statements were heard. When people spoke, they used the word "we" in almost every circumstance. Notable in the interview with the principal was the lack of "I" statements as well.

Based on site visits and interviews, there were a number of leadership traits and behaviors that seemed to manifest themselves at Gilford Elementary School in different ways. The principal was widely regarded as being excellent and people spoke of him in very positive terms. He was seen by many as a symbol of Gilford Elementary School, a leader who had been there over time and who had come to represent the core values that were at the heart of the school. Under the leadership of the principal, the school had flourished and grown in many positive ways. Excellence had been a goal from the start and the principal and staff had worked together to achieve this level of excellence. This excellence was recognized not only by the staff, but by the parents and local community as well.

Through the structured interviews, it became evident that leadership manifested itself in a number of different ways. One of the traits that was evident was a stated shared vision for the school. The staff and parents at Gilford Elementary School shared a vision of excellence. There was an expectation that programs would be developed to meet the needs of all students. Meeting the needs of all students was seen not only through the academic programs in the classrooms, but also through a strong art component and an extensive after school program and summer program. At Gilford
Elementary School, there was an expectation that all students could and would be successful and that they would be respected as learners and as people.

A vision existed that Gilford Elementary School would work to make connections with parents and the community and that parents were an integral part of the educational process. Parents and community members were welcomed into the school and invited to be a part of the Gilford Elementary learning community. The Volunteer Steering Committee served as a viable, effective, and visible mechanism for involving parents in the school in a coordinated and effective manner.

Another leadership trait that became evident at Gilford Elementary School was trustworthiness and honesty. Many different people commented on how they perceived the principal to be honest and open. He was viewed as a person who would genuinely listen to the needs and ideas of others and who would respond respectfully and thoughtfully. The staff viewed the principal as open and felt that he was very approachable at any time and with any issue.

Strong leadership helps foster and promote leadership in others. The notion of shared leadership was a part of the culture of Gilford Elementary School. The staff felt empowered and part of the educational process in their school. Comments made by the staff regarding "grass roots" involvement and staff-generated initiatives illustrated how leadership was not viewed as an isolated function of the principal; leadership involved other people in a collaborative and meaningful manner. Staff members at Gilford felt very much in control of their own fate. While they all recognized that the "buck
stopped” with the principal, they conveyed a clear sense of empowerment in the change and decision-making processes.

In an interview with the principal, he discussed the importance of sharing leadership and giving people the power and authority to be decision makers and change agents. He spoke of making very few decisions by himself, preferring to get the pulse of the staff, discuss ideas and issues, and then collectively reach agreement on issues. There were several vehicles in place that demonstrated this philosophy in action. One vehicle was the previously mentioned Volunteer Steering Committee. This was a group that was involved in providing ideas and input, which functioned as a sounding board. It was comprised of parents and staff.

Another vehicle designed to empower and share leadership was the grade level team and team-leader concept. At Gilford Elementary School, each grade level functions as a team, meeting regularly with each other and working to make decisions which affect their grade level. Each grade level has a paid “team leader” who is responsible for coordinating a team’s efforts as well as some of the administrative requirements, such as budget, for the team. Grade level team leaders meet regularly with the administration and serve as intermediates between the principal and the other teachers. The principal spoke very positively about this model and felt that it helped streamline and positively affect communication and changes in the building. In the staff interviews, it was clear that teachers felt very empowered to make decisions that affected their grade level. The principal’s role was to support these
decisions and help to acquire resources that may be necessary. When appropriate, the principal brought grade level issues to other grade levels or perhaps to regularly scheduled staff meetings where they could be discussed.

Overall, leadership manifested itself in many different ways, all of which were viewed as very positive and effective. The outstanding leadership of Gilford Elementary School served to perpetuate an equally effective and healthy school culture.

Leadership at Gilford Elementary School is manifested in a number of ways. Leadership manifests itself in the creation and maintenance of school culture. A healthy and thriving culture exists which is marked by a staff that has a shared sense of purpose, where it is expected that staff goes above and beyond the call of duty for students, and where the underlying norms are of collegiality, improvement, and hard work. Gilford Elementary School is a place where success, joy, and humor abound. The researcher was struck by how many times the word “fun” was mentioned in the staff interviews. When this was pointed out to one staff member, she replied, “fun is absolutely necessary...we do have fun here...the word “fun” is even mentioned in our school song!” Fun seemed to be an essential building block in the cultural foundation of Gilford Elementary School. Joy and celebration are part of the fabric of Gilford Elementary School. Monthly “Showcases” are held at which students perform and show their work in many ways. The Showcases are interdisciplinary and integrated with the arts. These Showcases, attended by all staff and students as well as parents, are joyful exhibitions of learning that
provide students with many different ways to share their knowledge and accomplishments. Showcases are perhaps one of the most visible elements that make Gilford the special place that it is. The principal’s leadership has continually provided the support, structure, and emphasis necessary to make Showcases a large part of the Gilford Elementary School experience.

Leadership is manifested at Gilford Elementary School through the principal’s definition, maintenance and focus on goals. The principal understands the core values of the school and the community. He sets goals that are clearly defined and consistent with the school’s mission and ones that are visionary. By constantly communicating his goals and by “walking the walk,” he makes his school and community believe in those goals. One of the parents commented on the professional image that the principal displays day in and day out. She commented on how the principal always looks nice (with a jacket and tie) and how through his own behavior, he sets the tone and expectations. He leads by example.

Leadership at Gilford Elementary School manifests itself in the way people are motivated. The principal creates energy and stays optimistic. Leadership is manifested in the way that people are empowered. The principal recognizes that sharing power enhances effectiveness and influence. By sharing power, the principal creates a culture for growth and opportunity. The staff at Gilford Elementary School refers to itself as “always keeping the best interests of children first.” This occurs because people believe in what Gilford Elementary School stands for and what it is trying to accomplish. Sharing
power has empowered the Gilford Elementary School staff and has created a high degree of unity. People work together and enjoy each other's company. There is a feeling of family that exists...a feeling of togetherness and positive energy...a genuine feeling of care and concern for others. Gilford Elementary is a school that is flying high and achieving great things. One needs only to ask the parents, staff, or community to find this out.

Overall Analysis of the Three Research Sights

The analysis of the three schools in this study revealed some common themes. These schools all possessed staff members who valued themselves and their colleagues. They had a sense that they were responsible, in great part, for the ultimate success or failure of their school. All of the employees who worked in these schools seemed very clear about what was expected of them and what they needed to do. A strong work ethic was evident and they spoke of their responsibility for keeping their skills, knowledge, and expertise current. Many of the staff surveyed in these high-flying schools talked about an "educated staff" that worked hard to keep abreast of new ideas in education.

The leadership in all three schools was progressive and did, in fact, reflect the current research on effective leadership behaviors and characteristics. I failed so see purely "traditional management" at any of the research sites, though the leaders in all three schools expressed an understanding that they needed to be both managers and leaders in order to accomplish their goals and perform at their highest level of competence.
The leaders in these three schools valued and supported their staff. They recognized that education is a people business and that working effectively with all people is an essential element of leadership. These leaders helped create an environment which satisfied people's personal, professional, and emotional needs, built on people's strengths and diversity, and which allowed all individuals to contribute to their fullest.

It became clear during the research phase of this project that a feeling of continuity, consistency, and stability existed in both Plymouth Elementary School and Gilford Elementary School. This was due, in large part, to the fact that the principals in these schools had been there for over ten years each. At Rye Elementary School, this same level of continuity and stability did not exist due to the fact that the principal was in her second year at the school. Rye Elementary School was a school in transition. Some of the uneasiness and concerns that are typical of any organization undergoing a significant change in leadership were present and revealed through the staff and parent interviews. Even the principal, herself, spoke to this instability and fully recognized that it existed and needed to be dealt with as part of her leadership strategy.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Common Themes and Characteristics among Three High-Flying Schools

A leader is a person who guides the efforts of a group toward a result beyond its current reach. Leaders are not necessarily managers and they can come from anywhere in an organization. Though leaders may not necessarily be managers, good leaders learn to “manage” and also “lead” at the same time. Leaders know how to follow the lead of others and rely on the strength of others. Human qualities, not position or title, make a leader. The signs of outstanding leadership are found among the followers, for without them, there would be no leaders (Jocelyn Bourgon, the Clerk of the Privy Council, 1994–1999, in the *Fifth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada*).

Today's schools are dynamic organizations that need dynamic leadership in order to grow and thrive. The most highly effective schools possess staff members who, themselves, are the most important resource or the organization. This view of schools, staff, and leaders was reflected in the high-flying schools that were studied. The employees who worked in these schools seemed very clear about what was expected of them and what they needed to do. They knew that they were expected to look for solutions,
contribute ideas, share information with others, innovate, and make a positive contribution to their school. They also knew that they were expected to share a responsibility for keeping their skills, knowledge, and expertise current and for contributing to the development of others. Many of the staff surveyed in these high-flying schools talked about an "educated staff" that worked hard to keep abreast of new ideas in education. This can be seen reflected in each school's demographic information listing the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees. The staff in these schools also referred to their leaders as being the people who remained current and knowledgeable about educational issues...the "go to" people with knowledge, experience, and a high degree of respect from the staff at-large.

In listening to staff and parents describe leadership in these high-flying schools, it was obvious that leadership was progressive and did, in fact, reflect the current research on effective leadership behaviors and characteristics. In all schools, the leaders exercised power and authority. They set priorities, organized work, and were accountable for results. The manner in which these leaders achieved results and got the best from everyone was not through a traditional system of rewards and punishments but through a deep belief in addressing the human needs of people and the power of relationship building.

The leaders in these schools were not COPs but rather, were more ACE-like in their approach to leadership engendered a climate of trust, encouraged collaboration, and fostered inclusiveness (both in a student sense and in a staff
sense). These leaders recognized the importance of sharing power in exchange for having everyone gain a greater sense of collective responsibility.

There were several common characteristics that were identified in the three principals who were part of this study:

- They had a sense of direction. They were confident in their beliefs and values and had a clear sense of purpose.

- They were the servants of their followers. They freed the energy and talents of others and allowed their ideas to flow, helping them reach and extend their potential.

- They understood the importance of, and ways to free the potential of others. They understood that leadership was required at all levels and allowed others to discover their own leadership potential.

- They fostered inclusiveness by being flexible and open-minded. They encouraged but did not pressure or coerce others to become part of the collective effort. They listened and fostered two-way communication.

- They valued and supported their staff. They recognized that people want to make a difference and want to be proud of their results and to be recognized for what they do. These leaders helped create an environment which satisfies these needs, builds on people’s diversity, and allows all individuals to contribute to their fullest.

Through a variety of formal and informal structures (i.e., grade level teams, wings, department chairs, etc.) the principals at the three elementary
schools demonstrated that they understood the importance of leadership at all levels and the imperative to develop people who have leadership qualities.

In reflecting on the manifestation of leadership in three high-flying elementary schools, it became more difficult to separate the leader from the school. The relationship was tightly connected and lent credence to the belief that leadership sets the tone in a school. In studying leadership in these three schools, it was interesting to note that there were two different perspectives that could naturally be taken. The first perspective was more managerial in nature. In viewing leadership from this perspective, one looks at the way the school is run, its physical appearance, its supplies and inventory, its material and human resources, the operational schedule, and all of the other surface elements that indicate a well managed school.

The second perspective looks at leadership as more of a human quality. A quote from Warren Bennis in his book *An Invented Life: Reflections on Leadership and Change* speaks to this perspective:

The standard criteria for choosing top-level managers are technical competence, people skills, conceptual skills, judgment, and character. And yet effective leadership is overwhelmingly the function of only one of these--character. (Judgment is an important secondary criteria.) If you ask subordinates what they want in a leader, they usually list three things: direction or vision, trustworthiness, and optimism. Like effective parents, lovers, teachers, and therapists, good leaders make people hopeful.

This quote is germane to the study of leadership because clearly, the personal qualities of the leaders in these three schools were of critical importance to the survey respondents. It was interesting to note that during the interviews, many people spoke very fondly of the principal, almost as if he
or she was a revered member of their own family. There was a very human quality that came through in the interviews and strong statements were made about the leader as a person...as a human being. It should be noted that this was much more evident at Gilford Elementary and Plymouth Elementary School, where the principals had been in place for eighteen and eleven years respectively. At Rye Elementary School, the principal had only been there for eighteen months; thus, had not really had an opportunity to fully establish herself in any personal or professional way. In comparing the interviews conducted in the three schools, it was evident that her short tenure impacted the way that staff and parents answered the questions. While a feeling of continuity, consistency, and stability existed in Plymouth and Gilford, Rye Elementary School was in a transitional phase and lacked these feelings.

In his book, *An Invented Life: Reflections of Leadership and Change*, Warren Bennis spent five years researching the concept of leadership. During this time, he traveled around the country spending time with ninety of the most effective, successful leaders in the nation; sixty from corporations and thirty from the public sector. Bennis wanted to study people with leadership ability, in contrast to just "good managers." He was looking for people who affected the culture or their organizations and who created and maintained values. His goal was to find these leaders' common traits. One of the goals of this research study was to study common leadership traits that existed in three high-flying schools.
What Bennis found was both left-brain and right-brain thinkers; some who dress for success and some who don't; well-spoken, articulate leaders and inarticulate ones; some John Wayne types and some who were the opposite. The group included only a few stereotypically charismatic leaders.

Despite this diversity, Bennis identified certain areas of competence shared by all ninety leaders. In his research, he defined four competencies evident to some extent in every other member of the group:

- Management of attention;
- Management of meaning;
- Management of trust;
- Management of self.

Management of attention focuses on a leader's ability to draw others to them, because they have a vision, a dream, a set of intentions, an agenda, a frame of reference. The communicate with an extraordinary focus of commitment, which attracts people to them.

In my research, I found two of the principals to have particularly strong management of attention. The Gilford Elementary School principal and the Plymouth Elementary School principal both had a very clear and well articulated vision for their school and clear expectations for their staff and students. There was a clear sense of direction that seemed to exist and this sense of direction was developed in a shared manner. Though the direction was jointly developed and the vision was shared, it was clear that the principals in these two schools were the keepers of the vision and the driving
force behind the perpetuation of that vision. Management of attention existed in these two schools.

**Management of meaning** focuses on communicating vision and then helping to align that vision with all stakeholders. Management of meaning goes beyond mere explanation or clarification of the vision and direction, but the creation of meaning. This is done through a leader's ability to integrate facts, concepts, and anecdotes into meaning for those around them. Managing meaning comes from the whole person. Using the right catch phrase or buzz words is not enough.

A good example of management of meaning occurred at Plymouth Elementary School. The principal talks about the school being a place where everyone participates and where everyone is responsible for everything that occurs. In the staff interviews, this notion of "shared responsibility" was mentioned a number of times in a variety of ways. In my first visit to Plymouth Elementary School, I observed the principal outside the building doing bus duty. He had a two-way radio in his hand and was supervising the dismissal process from outside next to the buses. Clearly, this was an example of the whole person communicating meaning. He was leading by example. He was walking the walk.

**Management of trust** is another important trait Bennis found to exist in outstanding leaders. Trust was a key concept that came up again and again in the interviews at all three schools. Trust is essential to schools. The main determinant of trust is reliability or what Bennis calls "constancy." People are...
more likely to follow leaders they can count on, even when they disagree with their viewpoint, than they are to follow leaders they agree with but who shift positions. At Gilford Elementary School, a number of staff spoke about the principal’s office being the place where “the buck stopped.” When describing the leadership in the school, staff used words such as “strong,” “competent,” and “open.” There was a feeling that “whether you liked it or not, you always knew where the principal was coming from and what he stood for.” This is the essence of management of trust...talking the talk and walking the walk. Leading by example.

Management of self is the fourth trait found in Bennis’ study of ninety great leaders. This competency means knowing one’s skills and using them effectively. Management of self is a critical skill. Without it, leaders and managers can do more harm than good. Effective leaders know themselves; they know their strengths and nurture them. They also have the ability to accept risk.

In my interviews with the three principals, I found high degrees of self awareness evident in all. All principals were able to clearly articulate their personal leadership style and identify which personal skills worked well for them. They all identified things or circumstances that “pushed their buttons” and elicited an emotional response. They also recognized their personal attributes that complimented their leadership. The positive qualities mentioned by staff and parents were recognized by the leaders. They were able
to be reflective and introspective about what worked well for them and what did not.

One of the more striking themes that emerged across all three high-flying schools was the notion of empowerment. The staff in all three schools felt empowered, valued, and respected by their community and by their leadership. This feeling of empowerment was clearly evident from the conversations that occurred throughout this study. Empowerment was one of the major effects of leadership in these three schools. Empowerment is critical because it makes people feel significant. The staff members in these three schools felt that the school was "their" school, and that they played a crucial role in the goals and direction of the school.

The leaders in these schools valued learning and so did the staff in these buildings. Leadership sent a strong message that there was no failure...only mistakes that give feedback for future work. The staff in all three schools talked about having the latitude and authority to try things, to make decisions, and to make change. They felt no pressure or threat of retribution or punishment if their decisions did not work out. They clearly felt an atmosphere of support and felt empowered to try things. They felt that their principal was treating them as professionals. Again, Rye was less emphatic on this point and indicated that they were still trying to fully understand the new principal's style and expectations.

Another common theme that emerged strongly at Plymouth Elementary School and at Gilford Elementary School was a feeling of
"community." This feeling of community did not emerge as strongly at Rye Elementary School. Strong leadership promotes unity. The staff and parents in both Plymouth and Gilford referred often to a feeling of togetherness, collegiality, and community that existed in the school. Leadership helps build this cohesiveness and nourishes its continuation.

Finally, the theme of fun and excitement emerged as an important element that exists within the culture of all three schools. Effective leaders help to set a tone of involvement, investment, and empowerment. When people feel that they are an active and integral part of a school, there is excitement that is generated. By nature, people who are excited about what they are doing often have fun while doing it. The word “fun” was mentioned a number of times in all three schools by various staff members. As one Gilford teacher pointed out, “The word FUN is even in our school song!”

Effective leaders help keep work stimulating, challenging, and fun. An important ingredient in organizational leadership is pulling rather than pushing people toward a goal. A leader who pulls rather than pushes attracts and energizes people to become invested in an exciting vision for the future. Without the fun and excitement in the workplace, a staff will soon begin to feel alienated and their work will begin to lack meaning. This will begin to erode the very foundation on which a successful school is built, and the culture will begin a negative spiral making positive change and success more and more difficult to achieve.
Leadership in the three schools recognized the importance of fun and excitement in the workplace. As one principal put it, "When people love to come to work and are excited about the work we are doing, it makes my job easy. I just need to plant a few seeds and then stand back as my staff takes off and makes things happen...my job is to nurture and support." Clearly, empowerment serves as a motivating force. Leaders who motivate people by fear appear to be powerful and effective...but only for a short time. People are more motivated by getting some attention from their leader. The three principals in this study all are in tune with their parents, students, staff, and community and place value on listening and attending to their needs.

In this study of the manifestation of leadership in three highly effective schools, there were some other commonalities that emerged across all three schools. The three primary leaders (the principals) had more similarities than differences. Those similarities could be grouped under the title of "personal qualities" that each possessed. These qualities seemed to be innate human qualities that helped them work with and successfully lead people inside and outside their school.

I found all three principals to be "authentic" in their approach and style. That is, they were honest and forthright with people and they seemed to be very "centered" individuals who balanced many different aspects of their job and their life effectively. These leaders also exhibited a zest or enthusiasm for their job and for their school. This enthusiasm is contagious and
inspirational. The leaders in these schools recognized that if they were not excited about their school, they could not expect others to be excited about it.

Trust of staff is another common theme that emerged. As previously stated, this trust was strongest at Plymouth Elementary School and Gilford Elementary School. In both schools, the leadership had been in place consistently for a number of years. At Rye Elementary School, trust of staff did not seem as high. This was because there had been administrative turnover in the past year. The principal at Rye had been there for only 18 months. Her predecessor had been there six years. The predecessor’s style had been very different and the staff was having a more difficult time adjusting to the new principal’s more assertive leadership style. Trust had not yet had time to truly develop. Trust is something that takes time and needs to be established slowly. The Rye principal recognized that trust building was important and was working to establish greater levels of trust. The Plymouth and Gilford principals recognized that an established level of trust existed in their building and that they needed to continually nurture this trust in order to maintain it. It was interesting to note that the terms “open and honest” arose quite often at Plymouth Elementary School and Gilford Elementary School. These terms are strong prerequisites for the establishment of a trusting environment.

Effective leadership requires strong communication skills. Strong communication is something that was shared by all three principals. The foundation of effective leadership is ongoing and accurate feedback, feedback to stay in touch with the needs of all stakeholders, remaining aware of how
the school and staff is doing, and how well oneself is doing. Therefore, effective leadership requires strong communication skills including listening, speaking, giving feedback, and questioning. The principals in this study utilized a variety of strategies to keep communication open and functional.

In Plymouth, the principal relied on an Advisory Committee comprised of parents and staff. This committee met on a regular basis to share information, ask questions, and provide feedback. There were other structures in place as well, such as wing meetings, grade level meetings, and full staff meetings. All of these methods helped keep people "in the loop" and made them feel empowered and part of the fabric of the school. The Plymouth principal recognized the power of these communication vehicles and worked hard to maintain them.

In Gilford, the principal described staff meetings along with grade level teams and grade level team leaders. Again, this principal recognized the value of communicating in both small and large forums and involving a variety of people in the process. A parent component also exists at Gilford in the form of the Volunteer Steering Committee. This committee, comprised of parents and staff, met monthly to discuss relevant school issues. The principal relied on this committee to provide feedback from the community and as a sounding board for new ideas being considered. As can be seen, there were a variety of communication vehicles in place at Gilford that helped empower and develop trust.
At Rye Elementary School, the principal held regular staff meetings and met regularly with grade level teams. She had restructured the long-standing daily schedule to enable teachers at a grade level to have common planning time. She then mandated that grade level teachers meet twice a week together for planning and communication purposes. This mandate was not well received by some teachers, who felt that their personal planning time was being infringed upon. However, others felt this was a very positive step toward opening lines of communication. The principal at Rye personally attended one of these meetings at each grade level every three weeks so that she could be part of the communication loop.

Two other mechanisms used by the Rye principal to establish and maintain communication was the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and the Principal's Information Committee. These organizations met monthly and the principal's involvement was critical in maintaining the linkage between parents and school. The principal also used these entities as sounding boards for ideas as well as vehicles for gathering input and as ways for parents to express concerns, ideas, and suggestions.

Trust and communication are clearly foundational elements that must exist in an effective school and these elements were evident in varying degrees in all three research sites. A leader who strives to build trust and communication must possess strong interpersonal skills and recognize the strengths, weaknesses, differences, and needs of each of his/her own staff members. In this study, each primary leader understood that staff members
had different motivational needs. For example, there was recognition that some people liked a great deal of freedom to reach their goals. Some people preferred a great deal of recognition. Others wanted no personal recognition. The principals in all three schools worked to know their staff members on a personal level so that they could accurately discern their preferences. The principals in Gilford and Plymouth had a very clear sense of their staff and the individuals and their needs. The Rye principal was still working to know her staff and their needs.

In Gilford, one of the teachers relayed a story about having an intense meeting with the principal after school one afternoon, but then getting together with him socially later in the evening. She felt that the principal put himself “out there” so that people would know him as a person, not just as a principal.

In this study, the principals discussed ways in which they changed their style or approach based on the particular situation. They recognized that no one style of leadership was appropriate for every situation. The principals stressed that it was important to know their staff in terms of knowledge, ability, and personality-type.

Leadership in all three elementary schools was manifested through leadership traits such as:

- Listening openly to others
- Offering and accepting constructive suggestions
- Giving clear directions
• Helping staff identify and solve problems
• Setting an example of desired behavior
• Showing appreciation of others' contributions
• Encouraging staff to communicate and exchange ideas
• Handling conflict
• Delegating responsibility
• Creating a positive and productive environment

In attempting to clearly answer the research question: "How is leadership manifested in three high-flying schools?" several themes emerged:

(1) **The leaders were honest.** This gave them credibility which resulted in the trust and confidence of their staff, parents, and community. They created pride in the organization as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive view of the school and staff held by teachers and parents. They fostered a spirit of cooperation and teamwork and promoted feelings of ownership, empowerment, and personal responsibility.

(2) **The leaders not only talked the talk, they also walked the walk.** They were quick to roll up their sleeves and show people that they were not just figureheads. They did what they said they were going to do, kept their promises, and followed through on their commitments. They made sure that their actions were consistent with the wishes of their stakeholders. They had a clear idea of what others value. Again, this was more evident in Plymouth and Gilford. In Rye, there was some
confusion about what the staff wanted and needed and what the principal was trying to accomplish.

(3) **The leaders all had a strong and apparent believe in the self-worth of others.** They recognized the importance of treating people with respect and as professionals and trusted them to do good work. They avoided phrases and messages that caused feelings of resentment, reluctance, and resistance. For example, principals and staff members both expressed the importance of avoiding saying that something “had to be done” using instead, requests or recommendations that staff members do something.

(4) **They created a trusting and open environment in their schools.** In the interviews, the words trusting and open were used again and again by people within and outside the school. A very evident trusting and open environment was evident and was described at Plymouth Elementary School and Gilford Elementary School. Rye Elementary School’s environment was less stable and in a state of transition.

(5) **The leaders did not push too much.** They did not come on too strong. They encouraged their staff to do more, but knew when it became too much. While some of the staff at Rye Elementary School felt that the principal was acting in a collaborative manner, some did feel that she was pushing them to change and was making decisions with which they were not comfortable.
When referring to a school's culture, it is said that the culture is often an intangible element that can be felt but not necessarily seen. As a researcher spending time in three different schools, I believe that this is true. A definite "energy" was felt in each school. This energy is made up of a complex mix of interactions that involve the experience, skills, and enthusiasm of staff, parents, and students. Energy flow is influenced by the quality and quantity of these interactions. The positive energy was most evident in Gilford and at Plymouth and in a somewhat lesser degree at Rye. It was marked by the way people interacted, the way the staff viewed each other, the way parents spoke about their school, and in the way the principal spoke about his/her involvement with, view of, and connection to the staff and community.

Creating the right structures to get people working together and interacting in positive ways is critical in the maintenance of a positive school culture. The principals in all three schools adhered to this idea and continually sought to involve people in meaningful and productive ways. They understood that teaming people provided interaction and communication, increased flexibility for planning and programming, encouraged people to collaborate and take on new roles and responsibilities, and enabled the development of a common vision. Though the teaming concept was not well received by all Rye Elementary Staff, the principal understood that in order to create the right culture, it was essential. She stood strongly behind her convictions.
The teaming within all three schools led to the development of a capacity that is important to any outstanding school: decentralized decision-making. Empowerment of individuals and groups implies authority and responsibility to make and carry out decisions. The principals in all three schools held an underlying belief that people affected by decisions should be involved in shaping those decisions. They understood that the overall effect was very powerful in shaping the leadership and culture of their schools.

In the final analysis, trust and professionalism were the two key elements that arose most clearly in these three high-flying schools. Leadership was manifested in the belief that all stakeholders are an integral part of the school and those stakeholders play key roles in the educational process. Parents were regarded as co-equals with staff and there were vehicles in place to empower and involve parents in all three schools.

The principals in these schools fostered a culture that encouraged whole-school participation and sharing of leadership. The principals focused on sharing power to bring out people's power and creativity while making sure that the school's mission was achieved.

The principals in these schools believed that their staff and teams should do their own problem-solving, even though it might have been easier at times to make "executive decisions." All principals focused considerable energy on creating a climate of trust for decision-making.

The principals in these schools sought to build leadership capacity in those around them. They recognized that leadership should not be localized
in one or two staff because people's energy around leadership ebbs and flows based on interest, time, and personal stresses.

Unanticipated Discoveries

During my research, there were several unanticipated discoveries that I made which I believe are worth noting. First, I was a bit surprised at what I found at Rye relative the culture of the school and satisfaction of the staff. Like any school, I expected to learn about the positive and negative perceptions shared by staff and parents. What came through more loudly than I expected was the uneasiness and sense of concern which came from the staff. I had the sense that the staff was becoming polarized in some unhealthy ways and that the level of trust and collegiality was disintegrating to an unhealthy level.

On one hand, perhaps the staff rumblings and cultural issues were predictable given the change in leadership (two principals within six years) but on the other hand, one might suppose that a strong and healthy school culture should be more equipped to deal with leadership/transitional issues. Through my research, I learned that culture takes a long time to be created. Perhaps it takes much less time to be eroded. It would seem that a truly strong, positive, and well established culture would be more resilient and able to handle change more effectively. This was not the case at Rye Elementary School.

The other noteworthy discovery that I made during my research was just how personally connected people felt to the principals at both PES and GES. I considered both of these schools to have exceptionally strong and
positive school cultures and it was interesting to see how the principal's fit into these cultures. As I interviewed parents and staff, a clear trend emerged as I listened to the words they used and observed the emotion they conveyed when they spoke about their principal. People spoke of their principals in very warm and endearing terms, terms that one might hear used as people described loved-ones in their own family. It was clear that people felt fulfilled and satisfied as people and professionals due in great part to the relationship they shared with their principal. I believe that this discovery affirms the very important role of the principal and leadership in elementary schools and that it has important implications for all educational leaders. The human factor clearly is a major element in successful leadership.

Implications for Further Research

This study suggests that there are several directions for additional research in the area of leadership, school culture, and school effectiveness. As stated in the review of literature, there are studies that have looked at the connection between leadership and school culture, leadership and school effectiveness, and school culture and school effectiveness. There are however, very few studies that have effectively looked at all three of these variables together. A comprehensive study would be beneficial in helping to clearly articulate the interrelationship among these three variables.

As seen in this research, three high-flying elementary schools in New Hampshire had common elements that included strong leadership, leadership that was transformational in nature. The human aspects of the leaders in
these schools seemed to significantly impact the way staff and parents viewed the leaders. Their personal attributes and characteristics seemed to be paramount, with their professional/managerial skills falling closely behind in importance.

It would seem to be very important for a school choosing its leader to be able to assess and take into account these personal attributes which contribute to an effective leader. Given what we know about the manifestation of leadership in effective schools, the following questions are worth exploring:

- How important are a leader's interpersonal skills in determining his/her overall effectiveness as an elementary school principal?
- What strategies can universities and school districts include in their leadership training programs in order to improve leadership skills in their leaders?
- How should we design staff development or graduate programs for our future leaders to prepare them for the complexities of today's schools? How can these programs be designed to positively impact and foster the "human side" of effective educational leaders?
- What impact do highly effective leaders have in low performing schools? Can leadership alone help transform these schools and what other conditions which must be addressed in order for these schools to begin to transform?

Further investigation of these questions will help refine the understanding of successful leaders and their complex interactions with all
stakeholders. A clearer understanding will help more schools create the necessary conditions to achieve high-flying status.

One other implication for further study evolves from the study of culture at the three schools. As previously stated, the culture at Rye Elementary School appeared to be affected by the principal leadership. One supposition might be that culture takes a long time to establish. It would be interesting to study the culture of a healthy school during good times when leadership was consistent and then to study this culture at a time when leadership was inconsistent or in transition. A research question might be developed such as: "How long does it take for a healthy and positive school culture to be created? How long does it take for a healthy culture to be destroyed?"

Epilogue

So what do these three high-flying schools need to do in order to continue to be successful into the future? One thing is for certain: nothing remains the same. Over the course of the coming years, all three of these schools will undergo change. Some of this change can be planned and managed by the school and much of it cannot be changed. Principals will move on or retire, populations and enrollments may increase or decrease necessitating certain changes, the teaching corps will undergo dramatic change as more and more teachers reach retirement age. New teachers will need to be hired and brought in. New requirements may be added by the districts and state. Key parents and community members will become involved in the
schools to varying degrees, some perhaps with issues and agendas that will need to be dealt with. Children will come and go and assessments and demands on the schools will become more challenging. The funding of public schools will continue to be an issue at the state and local levels and will have an impact on the operation of the schools and the human and material resources that are available.

All of these factors will impact the schools in some way. It will be critical for leadership to maintain a firm grasp on local expectations and the overall mission and goals of the their school. Maintaining a healthy and positive culture will be essential if these high-flying schools are to weather the changes that will continue to buffet them from all sides.

There were a number of common themes that emerged from the question: "What must leadership continue to do in order to keep this school flying high?" Perhaps the most common response dealt with maintaining open and honest communication. People commented on how important communication was and would continue to be into the future. They recognized that good communication would make or break their school and urged leaders to do all they could to make communication a central part of their job. The other response dealt with keeping children's best interests in mind at all times. Parents and staff commented on the need to constantly ask: Is this in the best interest of students? After all, students are at the heart of why public schools exist.
Leaders for the future must do all they can to maintain and enhance the positive energy flow among their staff, for a strong energy flow leads to many good things. Leaders must also navigate the winds of change by creating and maintaining collective purpose. Binding all stakeholders together with a common vision and common purpose is paramount in driving schools toward success. Finally, caring for and nurturing school culture is critical. Leaders must do all they can to strengthen their school’s culture over time. Finding and articulating what is central to the culture of their schools is a job that must be done with resolve and tenacity. For in the end, it is the delicate balance between leadership and school culture that determines whether a school languishes in mediocrity or soars above others, flying-high and achieving truly amazing results.
REFERENCES


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Schwan & Spady (1998). Taken from a handout in Professor Charles Ashley's Personnel and Communication Course at the University of New Hampshire. The only reference on the handout indicated that it was from Schwan and Spady's book *Total Leaders*. No other reference information available.


APPENDIX A

Structured Interview Questions

Parent Questions:

1. How would you describe your school?
2. What kind of reputation does this school have in your town?
3. How would you describe the teachers in this school?
4. How would you describe the leadership?
5. Does the school program meet the needs of all students?
6. How do you perceive important changes being made in your school?
7. How are you involved in the school?
8. How are decisions made that affect the entire school?

Staff and Principal Questions:

1. How would you describe your school?
2. What kind of reputation does this school have among the staff and community?
3. How would you describe the staff in this school?
4. How would you describe the leadership of this school?
5. How does your school meet the needs of all students?
6. Who is involved in making changes in your school?
7. Who or what initiates change? Who follows through and makes sure it happens?
8. How are decisions made that affect the entire school?
APPENDIX B

School Demographic Comparison Charts

Enrollment Comparison

1998-99 Per Pupil Expenditure

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Average Teacher Salary

1998-99 Equalized School Tax Rate

$30,000
$35,000
$40,000
$45,000
$50,000

$25,000
$30,000
$35,000
$40,000
$45,000
$50,000

$20,000
$25,000
$30,000
$35,000
$40,000

$15,000
$20,000
$25,000
$30,000
$35,000

$10,000
$5,000

$0

Plymouth
Rye
Gilford

Plymouth
Rye
Gilford

$25.39
$23.2

$7.27
$13.00

$30,000
$35,000
$40,000
$45,000
$50,000

$25,000
$30,000
$35,000
$40,000
$45,000
$50,000

$20,000
$25,000
$30,000
$35,000
$40,000

$15,000
$20,000
$25,000
$30,000
$35,000

$10,000
$5,000

$0

1 Schools

1

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Percent of Students on Free/Reduced Lunch

- Plymouth: 42%
- Rye: 3%
- Gifford: 12%

Per Capita Income

- Plymouth: $40,000
- Rye: $35,000
- Gifford: $25,000

Towns

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LAST NAME Kelley
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OFF-CAMPUS ADDRESS 79 Blueberry Hill Road, Meredith, NH 03253

PROJECT TITLE The Manifestation of Leadership in High-Flying Schools

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research reviewed your protocol and recommended approval of the use of human subjects in this protocol contingent upon the following:

- Investigator needs to clarify how he is going to recruit parents to participate in the study.
- Investigator needs to clarify if teachers who volunteer are granted anonymity and if so, how will it be maintained?
- Investigator needs to develop a separate consent document for parents and teachers containing information pertinent to each group.

The IRB will continue its review of your project upon receipt of the information requested above. Formal written approval will not be issued until the IRB reviews and approves your response.

If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact our office at 862-2003. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this project. Thank you.

For the IRB

Julie F. Simpson
Regulatory Compliance Manager
Office of Sponsored Research

cc: File
Barbara Krysiak, Education
The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research reviewed your protocol and approved the protocol for your project as Expedited and described in Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46, Subsection 46.110 (b) 7.

The IRB made the following comment(s) or recommendation(s):

- In both consent documents, investigator should remove the following language from the end of the 4th sentence, 4th paragraph: "or in the event of a research-related injury."

Approval for this protocol expires one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a project report with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your project is still active, you may apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

The protection of human subjects in your study is an ongoing process for which you hold primary responsibility. In receiving IRB approval for your protocol, you agree to conduct the project in accordance with the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research, as described in the following three reports: Belmont Report; Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46; and UNH's Multiple Project Assurance of Compliance. The full text of these documents is available in the OSR information server at http://www.unh.edu/compliance/Regulatory Compliance.html and by request from the Office of Sponsored Research.

Changes in your protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to their implementation. If you have questions or concerns about your project or this approval, please feel free to contact me directly at 862-2003. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this project. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB

Julie F. Simpson
Regulatory Compliance Manager
Office of Sponsored Research

cc: File
Barbara Krysiak, Education
The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research has reviewed and approved your request for time extension for this protocol. Approval for this protocol expires on the date indicated above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a project report with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your project is still active, you may apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

The protection of human subjects in your study is an ongoing process for which you hold primary responsibility. Changes in your protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review and receive written, unconditional approval prior to implementation. If you have questions or concerns about your project or this approval, please feel free to contact this office at 862-2003.

Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this project. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Regulatory Compliance Manager

cc: File
Barbara Krysiak, education