

# **Principals' Instructional Leadership in Successful Hispanic Majority High Schools**

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## **Abstract**

The authors report a study in which they examined how principals utilize instructional leadership in high schools within a Hispanic majority context. The emphasis was on students' academic performance, goal development and implementation, school culture, and instructional management, which make up the broader theoretical framework of school leadership. Following a multiple case study approach, two successful high schools in the south of a central state participated in the study. These schools were selected based on their "Recognized" status as measured by the state standardized test results.

Findings of this study revealed that principals in successful Hispanic majority high schools have a strong focus on student achievement. They are equally engaged in goal setting meetings to develop student goals, provide support to teachers and assistant principals as a vehicle to enhance the school culture, and monitor student performance, relying on leadership teams for instructional management purposes. Findings also revealed that principals as instructional leaders involve and empower teachers to develop and implement student academic goals, shape the school culture, and monitor the instructional program closely. More importantly, principals in successful Hispanic majority high schools sustain a strong emphasis on teacher accountability for the academic performance of all students.

## **Introduction**

Examining the instructional leadership role of school principals in improving

the learning outcomes for the students they serve has come to the forefront of the educational agenda. While the literature supports the belief that principals exercise a measurable effect on school effectiveness and student achievement, and that they play a key role on the campus, limited research highlights the role of the principal in majority/minority contexts.

Principal instructional leadership may be conceptualized as narrow and broad (Murphy, 1988; Sheppard, 1996). The narrow definition focuses on instructional leadership as a separate entity from administration, and it only includes those actions that are directly related to teaching and learning. In contrast, the broad view of instructional leadership includes development and implementation of goals, school culture, and instructional management aimed at enhancing student learning outcomes. In particular, the principal's role in shaping the school's direction through vision, mission, goals, and school culture is highlighted as a primary avenue of influence (Bamburg & Andrews, 1991; Brewer, 1993; Cheng, 1994; Cruz, 1995; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Additionally, how principals and teachers organize and coordinate the work life of the school (e. g., its goals, curriculum, instructional techniques, student grouping) shape the environment in which they work as well as the learning experiences and achievement levels of the students (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Heck & Marcoulides, 1996).

However, there is a lack of understanding of how a principal affects school and student outcomes within certain contextual forces that influence school leadership, such as student diversity and grade level (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Murphy, 1988). Therefore, due to changing environments and increased student diversity, studies regarding principal instructional leadership should be pursued within the specific context of a school (Boyd, 1992; Hord, 1992). As Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) suggest, additional research of principal's instructional leadership needs to (1) use models that account for effects of the school context on a principal's leadership to gain a better understanding of the relationship between principal and school effectiveness, and (2) to examine the effects of principal leadership on student learning in terms of theoretically relevant intervening variables, such as socio-economic status, ethnic background, and school outcomes.

Consequently, it is imperative to focus on the principal's instructional leadership role in schools experiencing an increase in student population diversity, particularly in schools that are becoming predominately Hispanic. For instance, in Texas, the enrollment of Hispanic students in public schools continues to increase, and the Hispanic student population drives statewide growth in enrollment.

Thus, this paper reports the results of a study conducted to identify the instructional leadership role of the principal in successful Hispanic majority high schools. Presented here is a brief account of the theoretical background, the purpose of the study, the study procedures, findings, and conclusions.

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## **Theoretical Background**

Several paths describe how principal leadership influences student learning. However, there is a need to gain further understanding of principal instructional leadership, particularly in majority/minority school contexts (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Hord, 1992). To this end, three bodies of literature formed the theoretical background for this study. These included principal leadership and student achievement, principal leadership and minority student achievement, and principal leadership and school culture.

First, research suggests that the role of the principal is essential for the academic achievement and success of all students and the school itself. Previous studies of the principal role exemplify certain behaviors and actions (fostering a positive learning climate, focusing on student progress, valuing gender equity and multicultural education, and promoting early identification of learning difficulties) that may influence student achievement (Bossert 1988; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Heck & Marcoulides, 1993; Ogawa & Hart, 1985).

Focusing on urban high schools, Louis and Miles (1990) identified the common characteristics as the school engaged in the process of improvement, specifically with regard to student performance. This study found that principals who engaged in effective systematic planning for improvement were more successful. Furthermore, the principals' and teachers' engagement in successful problem solving was a significant indicator of school improvement. The highest ranked principal behaviors to enhance student performance included: (1) improving the school's atmosphere or climate; (2) creating more structured educational environments; (3) improving discipline and safety; and (4) creating high expectations for student performance.

A national study (Ogden & Germinario, 1995) focused on the leadership in "Blue Ribbon High Schools" and completed an analysis of "Best Schools." This study suggests that the principal is instrumental in the formulation and realization of student performance and school goals. The successful high schools have a clear sense of purpose, and develop a mission that serves as the focus for school practices and improvements. In addition, principals recognize their primary goal as creating and maintaining a student-centered school. Further, principals in "Best Schools" systematically involve teachers, students and parents in meaningful educational decisions related to the improvement of student performance.

Anderson and Shirley (1995) investigated the role of high school principals in implementing a specific learning project that required clearly defined student performance goals and close monitoring of the teaching process. The study involved 15 high schools implementing a major student-centered reform project. The findings suggest that effective principals communicate their vision and commitment to teachers and staff, and serve as guides or coaches so that student-centered instructional programs are properly implemented. Finally, the researchers

noted that the effective principals truly empower the teachers to realize the vision of schooling.

Second, principal leadership in monitoring student achievement is also supported as a critical function. While previous research supports the notion that the principal is instrumental in achieving student success, it does not account for principal leadership in the context of schools that serve a majority Hispanic student population, particularly at the high school level. Few studies have addressed principal leadership within a majority/minority context. For instance, Cruz (1995) reports that in effective majority Hispanic elementary schools principals have a clear understanding of the communities they serve and believe that their students will achieve academic success. Furthermore, they have strong focus on student needs.

A more comprehensive study of effective elementary, middle, and high schools with majority Hispanic student enrollment in the south Texas border (Wagstaff & Fusarelli, 1999) concluded that principals have a clear and coherent vision of schooling that is expressed and communicated at site-council meetings, staff meetings, and student meetings. In addition, this study found that principals view themselves as facilitators whose job is to get teachers, parents, and students the resources needed to achieve success. Furthermore, effective principals recognize the importance of building trust among staff, teachers, parents, students, and the community. Principals in these schools understood teachers' individual styles and were willing to accommodate these differences to achieve success (Wagstaff & Fusarelli, 1999).

One of the few studies of the principal in majority Hispanic high schools that focused on nine California high schools with the lowest dropout rates (Pulido, 1991) suggests that the staff, students, and community see the principal's leadership as extremely important. Furthermore, it is suggested that interpersonal relationships with all members of the school community are essential for a positive social environment that fosters students' academic success (Pulido, 1991).

In another study of six successful high schools serving mostly language minority students, Lucas, Hence, and Donato (1990) found that principals hold high expectations of language minority students and work with teachers to ensure that the expectations are realized in the classrooms. Moreover, this study suggests that principals take a strong instructional leadership role in strengthening curriculum and instruction for all students, including language minority students.

Others also reported that principal leadership is central to the improvement of student performance in reconstituted high schools with large Hispanic populations (Retana, 1997). It is suggested that principals provided an instructional focus to address student performance goals and objectives, and that they led the process to redesign the low-performing campuses to improve student attendance, staff development, and parent and community outreach. Principals displayed high expectations in all endeavors, including strategic planning and classroom accountability for student and teacher performance.

Third, the principal leadership in building school culture conducive to success for all students is also recognized as essential (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998). In effective school cultures, teachers and principals share norms of collegiality and achievement, a clear sense of the school's goals, and high expectations for all students. Indeed, the power of school culture recognizes that the beliefs and actions of its members move the school either toward greater effectiveness or ineffectiveness (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993; Stolp & Smith, 1995). Thus, it is generally accepted that principal leadership is instrumental in creating a school culture that promotes and ensures student success.

Since leadership and culture are intimately linked, it is believed that principals can develop, influence, and manage school cultures (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Furthermore, principals' actions are central to the development of a school culture that is conducive to high levels of achievement and learning (Deal & Peterson, 1993). Principals who shape school cultures that support educational excellence for all students are often described as "visionary" or "transformational" leaders (Kirby & Paradise, 1992; Sashkin & Sashkin, 1990; Sashkin & Walberg, 1993).

Previous research also suggests that there is a link between school principal leadership and the development of a school culture aimed at student success. For instance, Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1990) discovered that principals influence student learning by creating a mission for the school that emphasizes an instructional focus for the teachers. This way, a principal "fosters a school climate that focuses on and facilitates student acquisition of knowledge" (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1990, p. 28).

The personal beliefs of principals may also influence the development of the school culture. For instance, Krug, Ahadi and Scott (1991) concluded that effective principals affect the academic culture of the school by spending a high percentage of their time defining and/or communicating school goals. Assisting teachers to improve student achievement, monitoring students' academic progress, reviewing student records of performance, and providing feedback to teachers were also found important principal actions.

School culture can also be a predictor of school effectiveness. As Heck and Marcoulides (1996) found, school performance can be determined from knowledge of the school's culture. This study further suggests that principals who foster a school culture of innovation and risk taking, encourage teacher participation in decision-making, and provide significant time for collaboration, have higher levels of student achievement. However, Heck and Marcoulides recommend that the same variables identified in this research be studied in a qualitative manner in order to add a description of teacher perceptions. Thus, a deeper understanding of principal leadership in the development of school culture in high schools can be achieved.

Principal and teacher relationships and communication of expectations are also essential to the development of a school culture. Others support the notion that

the interactions between an effective principal and teachers fosters an environment that ensures the realization of student achievement goals (Campo, 1993; Fullan, 1982, 1991).

Similarly, Heck, Larsen, and Marcoulides (1990) conducted a comparative study of high-achieving and low-achieving elementary schools and high schools to measure the type of teacher-principal interactions. Principals in the high-achieving schools empowered staff to clarify, coordinate, and communicate their school's mission and report their students' progress to other staff members and to the school community. These researchers note that the schools in the study were standardized to control for "hard to change" variables such as student ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language. Thus, the context of the schools, specifically the student populations served, in which the principal leadership actions were observed, was not considered.

### **Purpose of the Study**

According to some researchers (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996) the relationship between the role of the principal and school effectiveness could be best understood by examining effects of the school context on principal leadership with an emphasis on socioeconomic status, ethnic population, and school outcomes. Consequently, it became imperative to consider the environmental variables that may influence principal leadership in successful Hispanic majority high schools (Cruz, 1995; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998). Therefore, this study examined how principals utilize instructional leadership, within the context of high schools to enhance the academic success of Hispanic students. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do high school principals use student performance goal development and implementation to enhance the academic success of Hispanic students?
2. How do high school principals shape the culture of the school to enhance the academic success of Hispanic students?
3. How do high school principals use instructional management to enhance the academic success of Hispanic students?

### **Methodological Considerations**

The researchers used a multiple case study, including a cross-site analysis (Patton, 1990) of two high schools that have experienced academic success with Hispanic students. Research using a qualitative design provides a thorough understanding of the complexities underlying human behavior, such as values,

actions, relationships, and other variables. As Yin (1984) suggests, “the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (p. 14), and to study phenomenon in its natural setting which becomes the direct source (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992).

### **Procedures**

Data were collected through extensive interviews with principals and teachers in each high school. An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was used “to understand and capture points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories” (Patton, 1990, p. 24). Interviews with principals and teachers were conducted on each campus. Interviews were tape-recorded, and transcribed. Interview data were analyzed and synthesized under emerging categories representing the three areas of emphasis of the study.

Direct observations added new dimensions for understanding the context and the phenomenon being studied and allowed for rich descriptions of principals instructional leadership (Yin, 1984). Visits to classrooms, lunchrooms, teacher lunchrooms, teacher meetings, principal meetings, and various conferences were also completed. Additionally, document reviews supported and expanded the data collected. Documents such as letters from the principal to teachers, students, parents, and staff, agendas, minutes of leadership meetings, staff memos, newsletters and campus calendars were reviewed as well.

By triangulating data sources, the researchers crosschecked the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means to strengthen the research (Patton, 1990). Peer debriefings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed an ongoing credibility check.

### **Participants**

Two high schools were purposefully selected for the study. Both high schools received a “Recognized” rating according to the public school accountability standards set by the State Education Agency. The two selected campuses were considered “Recognized,” based on the following criteria:

1. At least 80 percent of all students and each student group (African-American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged) must pass each subject area of the exit-level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills;
2. Attendance rate must be 94 percent of higher; and
3. Dropout rate must be 3.5 percent or lower for all students and each student group (African American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged). (Texas Education Agency, 1998)

In addition, each school had a total enrollment of more than 1,500 students with

80 percent or more being Hispanic students. Only five high schools in the state met the above criteria. Further, the principal had to serve at the high school at least three consecutive years. Of the five high schools, only three met the principal tenure criteria. A final requirement was that the schools had a record of high levels of student performance. Of the remaining three high schools, only two had a record of high student achievement. Table 1 offers a description of salient characteristics of the two schools.

Participants included two principals, ten teachers representing each academic department and elective areas, a member of the site-based decision-making team, members of the principal's leadership team such as counselors, department chairs, assistant principals, and two parents. This cross-section of participants provided a thorough representation of the high schools.

Teachers had at least three years at the high school campus; participated in the planning process for improvement efforts in the school; had knowledge of campus improvement efforts and goal realization; and participated in developing the campus performance objectives. The principal suggested approximately one-third of the teachers interviewed. The researchers nominated the remaining teacher participants based on the selection criteria.

## Findings

**Table 1**  
**Participating Schools**

Characteristics	High School "A"	High School "B"
Student Population	2,031	1,699
Student Ethnicity		
Hispanic	82%	89%
White	15%	9%
Other	3%	2%
LEP	17%	17%
Economically Disadvantaged	46%	71%
Principal Tenure	3 years	5 years
Initiatives	Academic Focus	High Schools that work
	TAAS Pullout	The Eagle News
	Freshman TAAS practice	Cooperative learning team
	Advanced placement courses	Advocacy program
	Parent link program	
	Middle-High school transition	

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The following summary of findings is organized according to the three main areas of the study. These included principal instructional leadership for academic performance goal development and implementation, shaping the school culture of the school, and instructional management to enhance the academic success of high school Hispanic students.

### **Principal Leadership for Students' Academic Performance Goal Development and Implementation**

Data revealed that principals in both schools had a strong focus on student achievement, and they used goal-setting meetings as main strategy for goal development.

*Goal-setting meetings.* Data revealed that principals use goal-setting meetings to develop performance goals. To this end, principals allocated staff development days and met with teachers periodically. Further, principals encouraged teacher meetings to develop academic goals for each department. The main focus of these meetings was tri-dimensional including student performance, how to align campus performance goals to overall district goals, and how to raise student achievement. The following comments support the importance of goal development,

This spring, April 6 to be exact, we will set goals and objectives for the different areas . . . we form subcommittees to review the goals set up in the long-range plan and we revise them at this time. This is an all day staff development opportunity for teachers . . . we take the time to develop the goals in the spring in order to be focused and set the tone for the following school year.

. . . within each department is where we have developed specific goals that have helped to achieve recognized status, sometimes we discuss the overall district goals, sometimes they are a little vague. Specifically we see our kids, we know our kids, we know what our kids need, and I think within the department you really see that (focus).

We have a campus plan that we develop. It is developed in part by the teachers and some of it is developed by central office. The district sets certain goals for the performance of all students and then the campus have a to align themselves with the district goals. The district has goals as to where they want to be by a certain time, and we get as close to that as possible.

Furthermore, other strategies that the principal in “High School A” used included development of a master schedule, communication, and student performance data analysis; whereas, the principal in “High School B” used central office support, interdisciplinary accountability, and the restructuring of some academic departments.

### **Principal's Leadership in Shaping School Culture to Enhance Student Achievement**

Data revealed that both participating principals use support for teachers as a

strategy to influence the school culture. This support may be offered in several forms. However, as it can be observed from the following account, other emerging themes revealed a difference in how principals shape school culture.

*Support for staff.* Principals created an environment of professionalism and trust by consistently supporting teachers and assistant principals in their efforts to improve student performance. Further, these principals fostered a school culture in which teachers and other administrators are risk takers, leaders, and innovators. Teachers were provided with time, resources, opportunities for innovations, security, flexibility, and financial support to improve the quality of education. As a teacher commented,

Mr. Reed provides financial support when he can and he makes accommodations where necessary...for example, with the advanced placement program in English, he sets aside two days and provides two of the teachers, a junior and senior AP teacher, with substitutes so that the teachers can administer a practice AP exam in the library... then he lets them grade the exam the next day... just like the real AP... they get the scores and then they can use that as a diagnostic tool to prepare for the test... he does that with the practice TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) as well... he gets substitutes for all the teachers involved with that so we can grade and discuss strategies for improvement.

Additionally, these principals provided valued understanding and assistance to teachers in both personal and professional matters. As a teacher noted:

When I was going through a personal crisis, he (the principal) called me in and he said: "I know you are going through some personal problems, are you handling that okay?; do you need another teacher to come in and help you.

A department head also observed:

In our profession, we are always under a lot of pressure... but as long as the principal keeps giving us the support, I think we will be okay. We feel blessed in the math department because our principal has given us support. She has given us all the support, guidance and backing and we feel very happy to be here at this high school... and there is a high level of trust between the teachers and the principal.

Furthermore, support for the assistant principals to make decisions and implement ideas and innovative programs also emerged as a means to shape school culture. Thus, delegation of authority and accountability to the assistant principals, and teachers acknowledged their role in promoting the school culture. As the principal explained:

They (assistant principals) will come to me and share their idea with me and share enough information to where I can make a decision, to go with it or not... Almost always I like to let them go with it, because I feel like they've got to make decisions with the information they have and I need to support them.

Data also revealed regular meetings with the assistant principals are scheduled

to communicate expectations, to share information, and to review collaborative learning team topics and agendas. These meetings allowed the assistant principals to be well informed about activities, initiatives, and projects. More importantly, the principal effectively used these meeting times to offer support to the assistant principals as they provided leadership to the campus. One assistant principal noted:

We have an administrator's meeting every Monday morning, early in the morning at 7:15 and we go over basically what we need to do for the week. She assigns us tasks that are important that need to be done that week . . . we have a really good relationship . . . we work very closely with the principal... it's a very supportive relationship . . . we decided we needed to interact on a daily basis . . . at least twice a week we eat lunch together so that we can go over things that have happened or need to happen . . . so that we know what is going on . . . I think one of the most crucial things for assistant principals is having information to help teachers and kids, so these meetings with the principal really help us out a lot.

Additionally, the principal in "High school A" used the school organization structure and shared decision-making for the purpose of building a strong school culture. On the other hand, the principal in "high School B" used research and collaborative learning teams as vehicles to professional development, and communication that supported the school culture.

### **Principals Leadership in Instructional Management to Enhance Academic Achievement of Students**

Data revealed that the two principals participating in the study use common instructional management strategies, such as monitoring student performance, and reliance on the leadership team (i.e., deans of instruction and department heads), to assist in the implementation of the instructional programs. In addition, one principal also used curriculum alignment to enhance the academic success of Hispanic students.

*Monitoring student performance.* According to the data, monitoring the academic performance of the students to ensure that teachers and staff remained focused on successful student progress constitutes an effective instructional management strategy. Principal monitoring efforts included reviewing student enrollment in regular classes, in pre-advanced placement and advanced placement classes, and students' scores in advanced placement exams. Further, effective monitoring also required the active involvement of teachers, counselors, and assistant principals who concentrated on student attendance, dropout rates, TAAS passing and failing rates. As one principal explained:

Accountability for student success is high at this school . . . I look at failure rates very carefully every grading period . . . I look at the D and F range as well as the B and A range, and look at the numbers on both ends... if any of those extremes stands out of the ordinary . . . I will conference with those teachers at either extreme . . . I do this

to review specifically the strategies they are implementing to make students successful in their classes.

A teacher affirmed:

The principal gives us printed copies of our failure rates by period . . . and he will indicate on the printout comments such as “any way we can help?” is this a rough class? He gives you an opportunity to go in and talk to him.

Another teacher recalled:

He will call you in and he’ll ask what is happening in your class . . . can we find out why we’re having this failure rate? Is there any way we can help you with instruction or what exactly is the problem . . . he wants to find out why we are not able to get across to the kids to learn what they are supposed to.

Data also revealed that contacting parents is part of the monitoring process. For instance regarding student attendance, teachers contact parents of students who have three or more absences. In addition, notices are sent to the parents when students are at risk of losing course credits due to excessive absences. Monitoring attendance is a collaborative endeavor, reflecting a unified effort from the attendance office, the principal’s office, teachers, and counselors in order to achieve a high attendance rate.

Principal-teacher conference is another strategy to follow-up student performance. For instance, when student failure rates are over 20 percent in one class period or for all classes combined, teachers receive a letter from the principal regarding failure rates and the need for a conference with the principal. This letter becomes part of the teachers’ performance documentation and is placed in their professional file. The following is an excerpt of a letter by the principal to a teacher with a high failure rate:

Based on the six weeks failure report you turned in, you have the 4th highest failure rate. Obviously, there is a significant problem, which must include your delivery style not meeting the needs of the students. Your failure rate is 40% . . . your success rate would place you at an unsatisfactory level on PDAS (teacher appraisal instrument) . . . I must strongly suggest that you look carefully at everything you can do which will lead to more success . . . this may include the following: tutoring in class, teaching to different learning modes, maximize your 90-minute period, making home visits, calling home, having heart-to-heart talks with individual students to show you truly care for him/her as an individual, re-teaching, better pacing, making connections to what students can understand, allowing extended time, etc. Effective immediately, turn in detailed lesson plans to me on Fridays. If I am not pleased, you will follow the lesson cycle plan format.

In addition to documenting the high failure rates, conferencing with teachers, and requiring an explanation for student failures, data revealed that providing teachers with support to improve the passing rate of students in their classrooms is

essential. One strategy used by the principal consisted of having teachers with low-failure rates meet with teachers who had high-failure rates in order to share strategies and techniques employed to ensure student success. Additionally, the principal required department chairs to support teachers with high failure rates and assist them with the teaching and learning process. One teacher reflected on the teacher meetings:

She (the principal) took the teachers that had a very low percentage of failures versus those with a very high percentage and she had a meeting with those people. She let the low percentage teachers speak about what things they did that might change the high failure rate . . . she used a peer development approach. Those with very low failure rates shared their teaching strategies . . . sometimes as a teacher you need to hear some strategies and you're willing to try them . . . it worked out well, I didn't hear too many teachers complain about this meeting.

*Reliance on the leadership team.* According to the data, working very closely with their leadership teams, principals enhance their instructional management efforts. For instance, deans of instruction may play a key role. Further, deans of instruction review the exit-level TAAS, manage the administration of the exam, and disaggregate the student results by teacher, class, and department. In addition, deans engage in developing the master schedule, establishing course offerings, and disseminating pertinent state agency information to teachers. More importantly, deans ensure that course content is aligned with state standards.

One principal explained:

The teachers know that the dean and I are united in our efforts to improve the performance of students. I give the dean of instruction complete autonomy. I trust the dean to make decisions . . . the teachers know they can go to him . . . and they do, quite often.

Data also revealed that a strong relationship and a shared common philosophy between the principal and the deans of instruction contribute to enhance instructional management. As another principal said:

I immediately got a good feeling for the dean of instruction. I got a sense that he gave straight answers. I bonded with the dean almost immediately. I realized that the dean had a good perspective about the school and the manner in which it operates. When I first met the dean, I realized that our philosophy about education matched . . . basically do the right thing to benefit all students.

One teacher reflected:

Their relationship (dean and principal) is very close . . . the reason I know this is because when I was hired in the middle of the year, they were both in the interview together . . . Mr. Reed would not start, he introduced himself but the real interview would not begin until they were in there together to bounce questions off and back and forth . . . it was clear that it was important that they get each other's input along the way.

Reliance on department chairs to assist in the management of instruction also

emerged as a strategy to instructional management. The department chairs meetings with the principal and teachers also serve as strategy to share information, act an instructional resource for the teachers in their departments, convey expectations, review agenda items for the weekly collaborative team learning and evaluate the progress toward meeting the student performance goals. Department chairs characterized their role as follows:

The role of the department chair is to meet with the administration and transfer information to the members of my department . . . also, to manage the department's budget and take care of any problems that the teachers in my department may have.

The role of the department chair is to make sure that everything goes according to plan . . . my role is to make sure that the teachers are covering the necessary information . . . that all of the teachers are teaching on the same level (following the instructional timeline). I don't want teacher A to be in chapter 10 when teacher B is beginning chapter 7. I want us all to work at the same pace, the same level and the same materials, so that if, a particular student needs help in math, he can go to another teacher and know that they are basically covering the same thing . . . in other words the student will not be behind . . . I guess we (department chairs) are the "go to" person between the administration and teachers.

Finally, principal in "High School B" also used curriculum alignment to provide structure to instructional management, which in turn required that teachers became familiar with state standards and focus efforts on improving the achievement of their students.

## **Concluding Statement**

Prior research has examined the instructional leadership role of school principals in improving the learning outcomes for the students they serve; however, limited information exists regarding the instructional leadership of high school principals in successful Hispanic majority high schools (Pulido, 1991; Reyes & Jason, 1993). Further, research suggests that school context, particularly high school campus settings, socioeconomic environment, and student ethnicity appear to influence the type of leadership that principals exercise to improve a school (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Murphy, 1988).

This multiple case study examined how principals utilized instructional leadership within the context of Hispanic majority high schools to enhance the academic success of Hispanic students. It focused on three dimensions of instructional leadership including students' academic performance goal development and implementation, school culture, and instructional management.

Two high schools participated in the study. Participants of the study included principals, teachers, key members of the principal's leadership team, and parents. Data collection was completed through in-depth interviews, direct observations,

and document reviews. Data were analyzed and synthesized under emerging categories, and triangulation of data and member checks were used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study.

The results of this study suggest that to develop and implement student academic performance goals, the principals engage in formal goal-setting meetings with the entire staff. They analyze student performance data, develop master schedules, communicate clearly and consistently, benefit from central office collaboration, create an interdisciplinary accountability system, and as needed restructure departments. Furthermore, they promote a school culture that is student-centered, values student learning and continuous improvement, and one in which principals provide support for teachers and assistant principals (i.e., time, resources, budget, development opportunities, and timely feedback). They also use a clear school organization structure, foster shared decision-making, value collaborative learning teams, and use open and honest communication to inform all stakeholders. Finally, to manage the instructional program to enhance academic achievement of students, principals monitor student performance, rely on the campus leadership team, and implement curriculum alignment at all levels.

This study's findings are consistent with and expand the literature regarding effective instructional leadership and high levels of student achievement. On one hand, these are in agreement with previous assertions that the principal directly engages in managing the instructional program and promoting school climate (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) as well as current thinking of instructional leadership that is equity-driven, achievement-focused (Skarla, Scheurich & Johnson, 2000) and learning-centered (Hoy & Hoy, 2003).

On the other hand, this study also found that principals strive to empower teachers and the leadership team by collaboratively using student and teacher achievement data to develop and implement student academic performance goals, shape school culture, and monitor the instructional program. This confirms the assertion that "increasingly the research is affirming that a school's academic emphasis is critical to student achievement" (Hoy & Hoy, 2003, p. 2). More importantly, this study suggests that principals in Hispanic-majority high schools have a strong focus on students needs. And as a result, they hold teachers accountable for the performance of all students, make necessary adjustments in teaching assignments based on teacher performance, and make strong recommendations for modifications in teaching strategies so that all students can learn. This contradicts Grosch's (1999) assertion that accountability is translated into only support for teacher improvement.

Further, the present study supports Sergiovanni and Starrat's (1998) assertion that the school leader is key to shaping the school culture that supports and ensures educational excellence for all students, and, therefore, they have "a critical role to play" (p. 202). This study suggests that principals create a school culture of high expectations, trust, and professionalism via valuing and supporting staff, teacher

collaboration, and shared decision-making. However, creating a student-centered culture in the school goes beyond building collegiality, and encouraging professional development. It also promotes a shift from subject orientation to student orientation, and requires a strong emphasis on teacher accountability for student performance. Thus, this study's findings are congruent with the conceptualization of student learning-centered instructional leadership approach to student success (Hoy & Hoy, 2003) that requires that principals and teachers are familiar with students cultural traditions, attitudes, and values.

Finally, it can be concluded that leading Hispanic-majority high schools require a leadership philosophy that calls for high expectations and accountability from all. Furthermore, to increase academic achievement for all students, school leaders must embrace a work ethic that is collaborative, inclusive and highly student-centered.

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