

ORGANIZATIONAL MINDFULNESS IN RECOGNITION SCHOOLS:
MINDFUL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF PRINCIPALS THAT BUILD
HIGH RELIABILITY LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore mindful leadership practices of principals who represent Recognition Schools at the elementary and secondary level in New York State. School principals throughout the state are met with exhausting and extremely challenging tasks to achieve. They are responsible for the effective development, management, and sustainability of teaching and learning for all the teachers and students in their buildings. School principals are evaluated by a set of standards that represent the decisions they make with and among all the people they work with throughout the multilayered, interconnected educational system. They are the final decision makers as it relates to school building matters and are responsible for the promotion, management, and sustainability of the school they represent. This qualitative, multicase study explored the perceptions of six Recognition School principals, three who led elementary schools, and three who led secondary schools. Purposeful, criterion-based sampling procedures were utilized, in combination with pre-defined selection criteria, to triangulate the phenomena being studied. Data collection tools included demographic survey data, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Data were analyzed and resulted in three findings and six themes. Findings showed that principals described their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools by metacognitively acknowledging specific character

traits or perceptions of self and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques used throughout the building and district that contribute to student achievement. Principals suggested their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving Recognition Schools contributed to organizational success because they established personal and system-wide norms that directly influenced the growth, sustainability, and strategic decision making made by principals in schools. Finally, principals explained there are several barriers that exist in Recognition Schools that can negatively impact student achievement, limit professional development, and weaken the learning organization's alignment from its vision and mission.

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Doctor of Education Dissertation

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I am most thankful to my wife Meghan and our four children, Charlotte, Hannah, Samantha, and Lucy. There are no limits to what you can accomplish in this world. Think big, dream bigger, and remember that your effort and attitude will determine your experience. Mommy and Daddy love you so much.

DEDICATION

“I’ve come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess tremendous power to make a student’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a student humanized or de-humanized.”

Haim Ginott (1972)

Leave it better than you found it.

To everyone who has stood beside me, cheered from a far, or sent good vibes my way during this long journey, thank you. This work represents a collection of feelings but none more important than love, support, grit, growth, and pride. This scholarly pursuit is a symbol of personal growth and resilience underpinned and driven by the spirit of human service, an affinity for the learning process, and a passion for childhood development. The completion of this dissertation is dedicated to the Sullivan’s long before me and for those who have yet to come.

To Meghan and the girls, your sacrifices are the interwoven seams of strength securing the integrity of our family. If not for your endless contributions, encouragement, and teamwork along the way, these roads would have been far more challenging to navigate. Thank you. This is our win.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In recent years, mindfulness has entered the popular culture of the United States and the United Kingdom becoming a billion-dollar industry (Wieczner, 2016). Mindfulness is the intentional focus of awareness on the present moment and there is evidence that it has a significantly positive impact on cognitive and emotional functioning in adults (Armstrong, 2019; Good et al., 2016; Hunter & McCormick, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1990, 2003). An increasing percentage of medical schools, the United States Army, the National Basketball Association (NBA), and several fortune 500 companies including Nike, General Mills, Sesame Street, and Google have instituted mindfulness-based programs to improve their organization's mental performance while fostering the emotional health and awareness of their employees (Barnes, Hattan, Black, & Schuman-Oliver, 2017; Levin, 2017). As an intervention to manage the stressors associated with schooling, mindful school leaders offer compassion to all, inspire hope in others, show resilience when negative events occur, and cultivate a safe and successful work environment (Armstrong, 2019; DeWitt, 2016). Armstrong (2019) stated, "a mindful school leader creates a school climate in which teachers aren't afraid of making mistakes, feel listened to, and feel they have permission to experiment in their classrooms" (p. 101). The rate of change throughout society has accelerated so quickly leading to heightened levels of stress (Jennings, DeMauro, & Mischenko, 2019).

Although the United States has taken incremental steps in recent years to improve its overall educational achievement, compared to other thriving education systems across the globe, America is seriously under-represented in categories such as math, science, and reading (Eck, Stringfield, Reynolds, Schaffer, & Bellamy, 2011). Sharp Rodriguez (2015) explained the importance of how mindful leadership practices exercised by building principals can determine

the total proficiency or effectiveness of a school. Systems Theory and literature supporting mindful leadership has consistently highlighted the proficiency of organizations when planning, responding to, and sustaining complex systems (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). Proficient organizations sustain complex systems when they are met with deliberate, conscientious thought and action by the individual, and by the collective (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Eck et al., 2011; Leithwood, Tomlinson, & Genge, 1996; Senge, 2006). Schools are considered complex learning organizations that require effective leadership. As they grow, face challenging dilemmas, and evolve, the individual, the groups and the whole system learns (Senge, 2006).

This study focused on how high performing building principals operate to achieve success. The researcher investigated the perceptions and lived experiences of elementary and secondary Recognition School principals to better understand the roles these school leaders play in creating a successful learning organization. The researcher's objective was to examine the experiences of building principals through the lens of mindfulness and Systems Theory to identify the behaviors, attitudes, and actions associated with creating, managing, and sustaining a Recognition School accountability status in New York State.

Statement of the Problem

Public schools across the United States are continuing to evolve into extremely complex learning organizations. Overall, school management, the roles and characteristics developed by students, teachers, and principals continue to become more challenging and unique because of the diverse social, economic, and political climate in which they exist (Sunaengsih, Anggarani, Amalia, Nurfatmala, & Naelin, 2019). Since the landmark education report, *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983 by the Reagan administration about the need for immediate education reform, the roles and responsibilities of school principals completely changed (United States

National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Higher standards and new accountability measures were established by federal and state governments and the role of the principal became more challenging. High stakes testing, along with federal, state, and local law and policy, parent, community demands, and ubiquitous technology integration initiatives have all stormed the walls of the school and have altered the role of the school principal (Sharp Rodriguez, 2015; Steele, 2008; Youngs, 2018).

The school principal now has two major identities; one, an efficient bureaucrat playing their middle management roles ensuring that rules are followed and that the building is operating; second, the role requires principals to be highly effective at creating, facilitating, and maintaining a plethora of academic, social, and emotional programs at their respective school (Fullan, 2013). Principals are expected to manage the bureaucracy and operations of the school building while leading the implementation of curriculum and instruction (Reeves, 2006, 2009, 2011). Mindful leadership practices demonstrated by school principals can successfully improve how schools achieve high-performing accountability statuses designated by governing, administrative bodies (Armstrong, 2006). The success of a school reform is attributed to effective leadership represented at the system and building level. “There is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil trajectory in the absence of talented leadership” (Leithwood et al., 1996, p. 5).

Significance and Potential Benefits of the Research

Aspiring and current school leaders can look to this research to understand and to consider utilizing the effective practices and techniques, experienced and used by principals who represent Recognition Schools in New York State. An examination of the data collected from the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) indicated the mindfulness of

Recognition School principals. The instrument assessed general awareness, use, and maintenance of mindfulness throughout typical life experiences. The information gathered was used to explore how school mindfulness, the effects of mindful leadership practices exercised by principals within the school, prevented problems from becoming crises. Understanding the relationships between mindfulness, school mindfulness, and principal perceptions of their own mindful leadership practices spotlighted best practices used by effective leaders to support the complexities that contribute to a school's overall performance (Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1990, 2003, 2009; Langer, 1989, 2000; Magyari, 2015; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Seiling & Hinrichs, 2005). Mindful leadership practices can become an essential element of modern-day leadership development in all high stakes learning environments (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019). The relationship between the accountability status of a school and the Recognition School principal's mindful awareness scores combined with the experiences and perceptions of school principals of high performing, Recognition Schools directly contributed to the established base of knowledge that supports effective, progressive, and transformative leadership practices and successful school outcomes.

Definitions of Key Terms

1. *Mindfulness* refers to what Kabat-Zinn (1990) described as “a process of bringing a certain quality of attention to moment-to-moment experience” (p. 23).
2. *Mindful Leadership* described by Boyatzis and McKee (2005) indicates that “Great leaders are emotionally intelligent, and they are mindful: they seek to live in full consciousness of self, others, nature, and society” (p. 3).
3. *School mindfulness* “is the extent to which teachers and administrators in a school carefully and regularly look for problems, prevent problems from becoming crises,

- are reluctant to oversimplify events, focus on teaching and learning, are resilient to problems, and defer to expertise” (Hoy, Gage, & Tarter, 2006, p. 1).
4. *Organizational Mindfulness* is a construct developed by Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) to describe how high-reliability organizations function in pursuit of error-free performance to avoid or contain mistakes that could lead to disastrous failure.
 5. *High Reliability Organizations (HRO)* described by Eck et al. (2011) suggests that high-reliability organizations are quality management systems that have an environment of collective mindfulness in which all workers look for, and report, small problems or unsafe conditions before those issues pose a substantial risk to the organization.
 6. *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* is the main federal education law for all public schools that replaced the No Child Left Behind Act in 2015. This new legislation increased accountability criteria to measure how students learn and achieve (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2020).
 7. *Recognition Schools* is the title or accountability status of public schools that are the highest performing in the state according to a list of criteria (see Appendix A; NYSED, 2020).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of literature is organized into six sections. The first section introduces landmark education reforms, A Nation at Risk, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to explain the history and complexity associated with creating and sustaining high performing public schools. The second section introduces the emergence of High Reliability Organizations (HRO) and five guiding principles that prevent events from disabling complex organizations; preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). The third section is titled Systems Theory and explains Peter Senge's (2009) five disciplines that organizational members use to create learning organizations: personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision, and systems thinking. The fourth section is titled Mindful Leadership and focuses on three stages of becoming a mindful leader: recognizing leadership challenges in schools, developing an understanding of mindful leadership practices, and applying mindful leadership influence throughout an organization. The fifth section introduces the potential and limitations of the executive functions in the human brain and focuses on mindfulness. The sixth and final section summarizes the review of literature.

Literature Review Search Process

A variety of databases were used to access articles, dissertations, and peer-reviewed studies within the Western Connecticut State University's online library collections. The review of literature began with a keyword search using Google Scholar which led to the researcher utilizing many other online resources which included the following: EBSCO Combined Databases, Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, Journal of Educational Administration, ProQuest Combined Databases and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. The researcher used a variety of

search terms which included the following: (a) mindful leadership in learning organizations, (b) mindful servant leadership, (c) learning organizations and highly effective leadership, (d) highly effective principal leadership in public schools, (e) Systems Theory and high reliability organizations, (f) mindful behaviors of successful principals, (g) principals applying mindfulness in school, (h) characteristics of high performing public school leaders, and (i) mindfulness, education leadership, and public school achievement. The initial keywords searched with the corresponding total number of results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Keywords Searched and Google Scholar Results

Search Site	Search Term(s)	Results
Google Scholar	<i>Mindful leadership in learning organizations</i>	144,000
Google Scholar	<i>Mindful servant leadership</i>	56,000
Google Scholar	<i>Learning organizations and highly effective leadership</i>	3,500,000
Google Scholar	<i>Highly effective principal leadership in public schools</i>	1,950,000
Google Scholar	<i>Systems Theory and high reliability organizations</i>	2,610,000
Google Scholar	<i>Mindful behaviors of successful principals</i>	37,400
Google Scholar	<i>Principals applying mindfulness in school</i>	25,300
Google Scholar	<i>Characteristics of high performing public schools</i>	879,000
Google Scholar	<i>Mindfulness, education leadership, and public school achievement</i>	54,000

The researcher identified four topics that elicited the most substantial sum of results among the Google Scholar and Western Connecticut State University’s online library collections. Research used to support this study fell under four topics; (a) mindful leadership in learning organizations, (c) learning organizations and highly effective leadership, (d) highly effective principal leadership in public schools, (e) Systems Theory and high reliability organizations, and (f) characteristics of high performing public school leaders. The exploration of articles and research studies revealed that there was an absence of work published about effective principal leadership in consistently high achieving schools. Instead, information about systems thinking

(Senge, 2009), mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), and High Reliability Organizations (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006) were all connected to how highly effective leadership practices promote the growth of learning organizations. The researcher was curious about how principal roles contribute to the development and sustainability of high achieving schools.

Landmark Education Reforms

Nation at Risk

In 1981 Secretary of Education Terrel Bell created the National Commission of Excellence in Education and directed it to present a report on the quality of the education in America after two decades of scientific achievement displayed Russia and other global competitors taking the global lead (Hunter & McCormick, 2008). The purpose was to define the specific problems afflicting the American educational system and to provide strategies for improvement. The report generated by Secretary Bell and his commission, *A Nation at Risk: The imperative for Educational Reform* (1984), identified stark, increasing illiteracy rates, plummeting standardized achievement scores, and the lack of education or experience of employed educators (Vik, 1984). As the American education suffered tremendously in comparison to foreign education systems, this reform “specifically targeted the difference between management and leadership in its first implementing recommendation” (Hunt, 2008, pg. 580). Drastically different from the roles years’ prior, the federal funding that was being poured into school systems to develop improvement programs fell directly on the building principal (Abrams, 1998). *A Nation at Risk* changed the expectations of the building principal and created expectations that required the principal to supervise teachers closely, improve school wide instructional practices, manage daily systems that operate schools, while being a dynamic

instructional leader who guided students and teachers toward excellence (Abrams, 1998; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hunt, 2008; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1992; Wimpleberg, 1990).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

In 2001, NCLB had the most profound impact on school administrators because it shifted public focus directly to the building level. Instead of emphasizing the results of complex and continuously restructured federal mandates like, teacher certification standards, and course requirements, NCLB targeted academic performance by the individual and their respective demographic subgroup (Hunt, 2008). The education reforms promoting high-stakes testing, teacher, and school accountability created enormous internal and external pressures for principals (Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2010). Although provisions within NCLB were designed to establish high standards, close the achievement gap, and provide more opportunities for meaningful instruction for students, the prescriptive requirements forced all schools to adopt the same approaches regardless of regional or local needs increasing the amount of time of assessments while decreasing the amount of instructional time (Haller, Hunt, Pacha, & Fazekas, 2016). The expectations outlined in NCLB imposed enormous pressure on building principals that consistently challenged the role of the school leader and the learning organization (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006). Administrators and building principals still adjusting and growing into more academic roles needed to become more personally involved with individual performance to support school improvement planning goals with less federal funding.

Every Student Succeeds Act

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was ratified and signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2015. ESSA reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and replaced NCLB giving more power to the states narrowing the role

that the federal government played in school district accountability, particularly testing (Darrow, 2016; Dynarski, 2015). Although ESSA was designed to bring more opportunities for states to curb the widening achievement gap, like including more non-academic indicators associated with accountability, the “economic bifurcation in the nation, and the opportunity games in school” will limit most schools success in closing the achievement gap (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016, p. 3). Fortunately for school principals, the revised elements indicated under ESSA substantiated research that proved the level of impact principals have on teaching and learning (Haller et al., 2016). De Voto and Reedy (2021) reviewed a study from the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) to identify how states have chosen to address education leadership under ESSA. Each plan, in coordination with their State Education Agency (SEA), were required to map out their vision and goals for school improvement. The UCEA’s data sources included 52 consolidated education plans which included Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico. A constant comparative analysis was applied to multiple pieces of data associated with each of the plans ultimately indicating that states were utilizing funds and prioritizing efforts to support principal preparation and principal development in schools to support student achievement. Although still controversial in many ways ESSA has spotlighted the need for increased student achievement in public schools. To enhance high performance in schools SEA’s need to support principals as they are the multiplier of effective practice and the prudent lever responsible for improving and sustaining achievement in schools (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015; Haller et al., 2016; New Leaders, 2018; NAESP, 2018; De Voto & Reedy, 2021).

High Reliability Organizations (HRO)

Recognition Schools are very similar to High Reliability Organizations (HRO) in that they are each interconnected organizations that manage complex, demanding technical systems,

with significant potential for devastating accidents, under enormous pressure from stakeholders, and they achieve exemplary performance in both safety and reliability over a long period of time (Compton, 2008; Eck et al., 2011).

A Recognition School status is given to the most effective and highest performing schools in New York State. The decision is determined completely by the commissioner's office and supported by very specific criteria, as seen in Table 2. Interim commissioner of the New York State Education Department (NYSED), Dr. Betty A. Rosa, asserted that Recognition Schools are "exemplary public schools that demonstrate that all students can achieve at high levels with the right support and resources" (NYSED, 2021, p. 1). She has expressed that "Recognition schools are the highest performing and rapidly improving schools across the state" essentially because of the relentless commitment of teachers, administrators, staff and parents in communities (NYSED, 2021, p. 2). The complexity and variability of the expectations associated with Recognition School achievement is more specifically outlined in New York State's ESSA, SEA Plan (NYSED, 2021).

Recognition Schools can be considered an HRO because of the complex accountability requirements used to determine its high performing status. HRO's assume and operate from a mindful and proactive perspective that potential pitfalls and problems should be expected, and that the organization should be poised and prepared to successfully handle them when they arise (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

Implementing procedures and programs with consistency, collectively understood by the organization's stakeholders, contributes to successfully managing a complex system. HRO's are mindful organizations where members are interconnected by each other's fidelity to practice which leads to productive and highly efficient organizational outcomes. School personnel who

respect and understand the importance of working together and build on an established set of best practices, led and supported by building principals, improve the quest toward a higher accountability status (Eck et al. 2011; Filpula, 2016; Senge, 2009; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).

Table 2

New York State Recognition School Criteria

Criteria
Have an accountability status of Good Standing.
Have a Level 4 for the Combined Composite Performance and Growth indicator for elementary and middle schools or a Level 4 for the Combined Composite Performance and Graduation Rate for high schools for the All Students group.
Not have a Level 1 for any accountability indicator (English language arts (ELA) and mathematics progress; Chronic Absenteeism; English language Proficiency; College, Career, and Civic Readiness for High Schools) for the All Students group.
Not have any subgroups that were identified as Potential Targeted Support and Improvement (PTSI) based on 2018–19 school year results.
Not have a 2018–19 Participation Rate for ELA or Math for the All Students group that is less than 95%. If a school did not have enough students to receive a participation rate, the school is still eligible to be identified as a Recognition School.

Like a business or any established organization, a school can be an HRO by having, “High levels of student performance, achieved as a result of high-quality instruction, delivered through superior execution of effective research-based practices, with low variability in the quality of instruction within and between schools” (Eck et al., 2011, p. 37). Fullan (2013) suggests “Shared meaning and organizational connectedness are the long-term assets of high performing systems” (p. 28). Weick and Sutcliffe (2015) identified five interrelated processes associated with organizational mindfulness that can also be found in schools: (a) preoccupation with failure, (b) reluctance to simplify, (c) sensitivity to operations, (d) commitment to resilience, and (e) deference to expertise.

Youngs (2018) conducted a mixed methods study to obtain survey data from professional employees, including teachers, principals, and department leaders that represented high achieving high schools in Pennsylvania. Of the total of 784 employees that fit the criteria, 490 were able to provide their perceptions and complete the survey. Of the 490 participants, 9 department leaders provided deeper input through semi structured interviews. The purpose of this study was to understand the relationships between organizational mindfulness of effective high schools and the mindful organizing of teachers by the decisions and actions taken by department leaders. Results indicated department leaders and principals perceived schools to be acting more mindfully than teachers did. Data presented in this study indicated that department leaders rated their schools' mindfulness higher than teachers did but not as high as principals. All department leaders, including the three that were interviewed, indicated that they relied on three common practices to sustain success, communication, collaboration, and innovation. These techniques were recurrent in the interviews and were visually represented in Youngs's (2018) study to demonstrate the interconnectedness of themes and the synergy of practices directly related to Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) work with HRO's and Hoy, Gage, and Tarter (2004) school mindfulness theory. Learning organizations can be vast, departmentalized, and complex systems made up of equal parts, leadership, and management. They become more susceptible to failure as the complexity of the organization increases. Systems and procedures govern the sustainability of the school or organization; however, achievement or success is obtained when targeted, appropriate, and tactful leadership interventions are developed and practiced.

Systems Theory

Economic and political turbulence, growing uncertainty, unsustainable resource consumption, and ungovernability all pose substantial threats to the growth of a business (Senge,

1994, 2006). Schools, like businesses, can be subjected to the same problems. Schools are learning organizations because they are constantly faced with dilemmas that question the need for radical change (Senge, 1994; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001, 2006). Mindful leadership practices that influence one's own personal mastery can be a model to influence the effectiveness or the ability of an organization's members to learn (Senge, 1994). If school and business personnel plan to succeed, scale, grow, and sustain, developing organizational learning capabilities are required.

We have learned that “our traditional ways of managing and governing are breaking down” (Senge, 1994, pg. xii). A learning organization, according to Senge (1994), is the interconnectedness of principles and practices demonstrated by leadership in the areas of systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, and the creation of a shared vision. Reeves (2006) states, “Leaders are the architects of individual and organizational improvement” (p. 27). Marzano and Waters (2009) suggest, “Effective leadership at the district and school levels changes what occurs in classrooms and what happens in classrooms has a direct effect on student achievement” (p. 11). Redesigning the external and internal structures of organizations by encouraging the individuals who represent these organizations to be mindful and conscientious in how they contribute, is what transforms an ordinary network into a learning organization (Senge, 1994, 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001, 2006). “Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots’ ... and systems thinking is a sensibility—for the subtle interconnectedness that gives living systems their unique character” (Senge, 2006, p. 68–69).

As the instructional leader, the school principal must understand the entire learning organization and how each component of the system influences and interacts with each other

(Armstrong, 2019). Systems thinking is the conceptual framework that houses a body of knowledge and tools to make system patterns clearer to educational leaders to achieve high reliability status (Senge, 1994). It is necessary that school leaders work to facilitate the growth and change of their personnel, which ultimately supports the school leader's ability to appropriately lead and manage complex issues that arise in education (Fultz & Gimbert, 2009).

Mindful Leadership

A mindful leader can react timely and appropriately when solving problems while also being meaningfully engaged with others (Critchley, 2020). Langer (1989) suggested a mindful leader is one who is attentive and open to the experiences around them, keenly aware, and non-judgmental. School leaders reported high levels of stress, insufficient time to get the job done, and loss of personal time keeping up with the expectations of the job (Armstrong, 2019; Wells, 2015). Armstrong (2019) explained that “the mindful school leader creates a school climate in which teachers aren't afraid of making mistakes, feel listened to, and they feel they have the permission to experiment in their classrooms. This kind of positive school climate engenders a feeling of mutual trust among all shareholders” (p. 101). A mindful leader can reshape a learning organization and influence others and outcomes in a positive way (DeWitt, 2016).

When Hunter and McCormick (2008) conducted an exploratory study, they interviewed eight professional managers and found that mindfulness resulted in greater external awareness at work, provided a means by which one can better cope with situations, increased ability to remain calm under challenging circumstances; and generally, made way for more positive relationships. Magyari (2015) designed a qualitative exploratory inquiry to highlight real-world experiences and reflections of 20 executive leaders of small to mid-sized companies across industry lines, familiar with implementing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies. Results from this

study were that leadership played an indispensable role in driving performance outcomes, generally, and CSR initiatives, specifically. All participants in this study reported the inherent value of effective leadership frameworks for contemporary organizations bent on success and sustainability.

Ramalho et al. (2010) conducted an exploratory case-study design to determine if successful principals were closing the achievement gap in poor performing schools in large Hispanic communities in Texas. Texas' Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) provided public documents that house the state's annual performance information. Principals who had led their school to a rating of Academically Acceptable, the equivalent to a school in Good Standing in New York, were selected to participate. The researchers interviewed two principals, 11 teachers, 5 administrative staff members, 12 parents, and 11 students from two different public schools that demonstrated significant improvement in writing, ELA, Math, Social Studies, and Science and across all sub-groups. Through triangulation of Texas AEIS reports, individual district and school documents, press interviews, researcher observations, and other historical documents Ramalho et al. (2010) concluded that the three prominent themes that emerged from the analysis were that high achieving schools were led by highly effective principals who spent a majority of their time and effort focusing on student achievement, fostering efficacy and relationship building within and between the staff, students, and community, and by directly building collaborative, trusting relationships with all stakeholders. Highly effective school leadership decision making experiences were mindful and deliberate as it pertained to students, faculty, and the community (Ramalho et al., 2010).

Mindfulness

Definitions for the noun *Mindfulness* typically reference the idea of stabilizing one's attention, being present, or having high levels of personal, unencumbered awareness of feelings and thoughts (Bonney, 2020). Kabat-Zinn (2003) stated that mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (p. 145). The use and understanding of mindfulness in education is documented to improve emotional regulation, social skills, executive functioning, and the ability to orient attention and reduce expression of negative emotions, anxiety, and depression in adults and youth (Baer, 2003; Biegel, Brown, Shapiro, & Schubert, 2009; Burke, 2010; Goldin & Gross, 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1990, 2003).

Highly effective building principals of Recognition Schools act and respond to complex challenges that arise in schools every day. According to Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, and Liberman (2007), mindfulness is the process whereby the individual is aware and receptive to present moment experiences. To prove that higher levels of mindfulness is associated with enhanced neural regulation when experiencing stressful, threatening, alarming or harmful visual stimuli, Creswell et al. (2007) conducted a semester-long correlational study of ($n = 27$) UCLA undergraduates, males ($n = 11$), and females ($n = 16$). Each participant self-identified according to one of the following ethnicities: Asian, Caucasian, Latino, African American. Students who exhibited or revealed that they suffered from serious mental/physical health problems did not participate in the study. All participants ($n = 27$) completed Brown and Ryan's (2003) Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), The Spielberger Trait Anxiety Inventory, International Personality Item Pool, the Beck Depression Inventory, The Global Severity Index of the Brief Symptom Inventory, and the Public Self-Consciousness subscale of the Self-Consciousness

Scale. These instruments were used to measure one's general tendency to be open and receptive to in the moment experiences across cognitive, emotional, physical, interpersonal, and general life domains. Researchers also examined the specific relationships between trait mindfulness and neural activity by creating a labeling task for the participants while they were connected to a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) machine. A (fMRI) measures the small changes in blood flow that occur with brain activity. It was discovered that increased mindfulness was associated with greater widespread prefrontal cortical activation, and reduced bilateral amygdala activity during affect labeling tasks, compared with the gender labeling control tasks. The labeling task consisted of matching facial expressions to appropriate affect words (affect labeling) or to gender-appropriate names (gender labeling control task). Strong negative associations were found between areas of prefrontal cortex and right amygdala responses in participants high in mindfulness but not in participants low in mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Organizational mindfulness is an organization's perception of its internal and external environment and its ability to respond to unexpected events (Levinthal & Rerup, 2006). Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) initially presented the construct of organizational mindfulness based on the research of high-reliability organizations such as nuclear power plants, aircraft carriers, and wildland fire stations because of the organization's complex relationship with potential disastrous outcomes.

Using organizational mindfulness as a construct can support a deeper examination of the reliability of Recognition Schools. Principals are responsible for managing a variety of challenges in schools including standardized testing, student management, resource management, state mandates, family and community relationships, and curriculum planning (Compton, 2008;

Marzano & Waters, 2009). Weick and Sutcliffe (2001, 2007, 2015) determined that the process of organizational mindfulness is the degree to which an organization collects damaging information about organizational issues and how leadership and personnel respond appropriately to meet those challenges. Ray et al. (2011) found that the perception of organizational mindfulness varied amongst administrators as personnel with more authority viewed a higher level of mindfulness in the organization versus those with less authority.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) stated that mindfulness is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (p. 145). The use and understanding of mindfulness in education is documented to improve emotional regulation, social skills, executive functioning, and the ability to orient attention and reduce expression of negative emotions, anxiety, and depression in adults and youth (Baer, 2003; Biegel et al., 2009; Burke, 2010; Goldin & Gross, 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1990, 2003).

Building principals of Recognition Schools act and respond to the complex challenges that arise in schools every day. While mindfulness is an individual characteristic, evidence suggests group interactivity and interpersonal effectiveness is enhanced with its use (Armstrong, 2019; Good et al., 2016).

Deliberate use of mindfulness techniques through leadership in high performing schools are represented in the following studies. Youngs (2018) conducted a mixed methods study to obtain survey data from professional employees, including teachers, principals, and department leaders that represented high achieving high schools in Pennsylvania. Of the total of 784 employees that fit the criteria, 490 were able to provide their perceptions and complete the survey. Of the 490 participants, 9 department leaders provided deeper input through semi -

structured interviews. The purpose of this study was to understand the relationships between organizational mindfulness of effective high schools and the mindful organizing of teachers by the decisions and actions taken by department leaders. Results indicated department leaders and principals perceived schools to acting more mindfully than teachers did. Data presented in this study indicated that department leaders rated their schools' mindfulness higher than teachers did but not as high as principals.

Sharp Rodriquez (2015) conducted a quantitative study of 505 public school principals to learn about mindful, instructional leadership practices within K–12 public schools. This study was designed to explore how principles associated with HRO's were applicable and relevant to educational organizations. Principals were given the opportunity to self-assess their own mindfulness and ability to lead mindfully with the use of the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R) and the Principal Resilience for Educator and Student Success (PRESS). Of the 168 PRESS respondents, 56 completed the CAMS-R survey. Principals from Washington state were randomly drawn from the Department of Education's school list and were sent both assessment tools by a two-wave survey mailing process. Sharp Rodriquez's (2015) findings indicated that principals reported an increased ability to stay focused in the present moment, with 87.5% of the participants responding *often* or *almost always* and 60.7% of the principals responded *often* or *almost always* to paying attention to one task for an extended period of time. These instruments revealed that above average awareness and cognitive engagement increased mindful leadership practices by school leaders. Principal perceptions and experiences related to decision making, leadership, and achievement were compared to Weick and Sutcliffe's (2006) 5 principles of HRO's. The analysis of HRO cognitive processes as separate factors, principals as a group averaged the highest degree of

mindfulness for the principle of deference to expertise. The principal demonstrates an ability to pool the resources of the individuals with their schools in order to increase achievement (Sharp-Rodriguez, 2015).

Steele (2008) conducted a quantitative, correlational study of 4,016 teachers and principals representing 112 elementary schools across Texas. This study defined elementary schools as serving student populations ranging from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Schools in this study were selected by means of convenience sampling and represented large and small districts, a wide range of socioeconomic statuses as determined by the number of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch, and elicited participation from certified teachers, principals, and other school personnel. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived attitudes of teachers and principals regarding their professional behaviors within the school particularly related to mindfulness and collective efficacy. This study focused on two constructs: collective efficacy and school mindfulness. Overall, the general hypothesis that the dimensions of school mindfulness would be positively related to collective efficacy was supported by the correlational analysis. However, only one of the two dimensions of school mindfulness proved to be the best predictor of collective efficacy, teacher mindfulness. These results suggested that there was a strong connection between mindful teacher behaviors and the belief that the faculty has the most potential to impact student achievement. While principal behaviors are important, in this study the results indicated that faculty perceptions of collegial behaviors have a greater impact on the belief that a school can perform successfully. However, teachers were more likely to be positively influenced by the administrators who stayed in their positions longer opposed to administrators who may be transient (Steele, 2008).

Combined, the work developed and presented in this dissertation connects literature that explains High Reliability Organizations, Systems Theory, and mindful leadership in learning organizations while linking leadership applications experienced in schools to high performance behaviors exercised by school leaders in schools explored by Sharp Rodriquez (2015), Steele (2008), and Youngs (2018).

Summary of Chapter Two

In this chapter, the researcher introduced literature to support the exploration of how mindfulness and the practice of leading mindfully directly and positively increase the opportunity for building principals to develop, manage, and sustain high performing public schools. After reviewing three landmark education reforms, the researcher led the reader through the elements of three theories that were most relevant to the study's line of argument and theoretical foundations during the proposal and initial states of this dissertation: High Reliability Organizations (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015), Systems Theory (Senge, 2006), and Mindful Leadership (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The chapter progressed to an explanation of how three peer reviewed research studies supported the significance of this work. Youngs (2018), Sharp Rodriquez (2015), and Steele (2008) drew conclusions that support the connection between the deliberate use of mindful leadership practices by education leaders that can directly improve, support, and maintain high achieving learning organizations. The next chapter will include a description of the methodology utilized for the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore mindful leadership practices of principals who represented Recognition Schools at the elementary and secondary level. A qualitative multiple case study research design with six cases was used to understand the experiences of high achieving school principals. Each case was bound by a principal of a recognition school and was selected to explore and understand the complexity and activity associated with mindful leadership practices, or what Stake (2006) referred to as a quintain, the phenomenon to be studied. This chapter is organized into the following sections: (a) research questions, (b) description of the setting, sampling procedures, contexts, and participants (c) description of the research design, (d) instrumentation, (e) data collection procedures and timeline, (f) description and justification of the data analyses, and (g) an ethics statement.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the proposed study:

1. How do principals of Recognition Schools experience mindfulness or mindful practices in their schools?
2. How are mindfulness-based leadership practices introduced, promoted, and sustained by Recognition School principals of elementary and secondary schools?
3. What are the organizational norms experienced by principals in elementary and secondary Recognition Schools?
4. What are the organizational barriers school principals' experience working in Recognition Schools?

Description of Setting, Sampling Procedures, Contexts, and Participants

Setting

New York State, with an approximate population of 19,453,561, according to the United States Census Bureau (2019), was the setting for this study. NYSED, the New York State Education Department (2020), contains 732 school districts that represent a total of 4,775 public schools. In 2020 there were 212,296 public school teachers who served 2,598,921 registered public school students, grades K–12. The School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS, 2020) consisted of approximately 8,000 public school principals, assistant principals, directors, and coordinators. In 2020, 582 of the 4,775 schools received Recognition School status, 128 elementary and 454 at the secondary level. See Table 3 for details regarding Basic NYS Public School Demographics. The researcher created a database through Google sheets and collected contact information of superintendents and principals who represented those 582 recognition schools.

Table 3

Basic NYS Public School Demographics 2019–2020

Context/Job Title(s)	Sampling Frame Totals
NYS Population	19,453,561
NYS Student Population**	2,598,921
Public School Districts	732
Public Schools	4,775
School Administrators*	8,000
Teachers**	212,296
Recognition Schools	582
Contacted Researcher	Sampling Frame Totals
Superintendents ***	196
Superintendent Response to Study Invitation***	25
Principal Response to Study Invitation***	20

Note. * School principals, assistant principals, directors, and coordinators; **Approximately; ***Recognition School

The researcher was able to solicit participant invitations and conducted interviews virtually. At no point did the researcher or the participants travel to meet in person. This study was conducted completely through virtual applications of the Google and included many Google platform features including, Google forms and Google meets.

Sampling Procedures

Phase I. To obtain study participants, the researcher created a Google form, Permission to Conduct the Study Letter—Superintendent (Appendix B). This document explained the scope and sequence of the study. Appendix B was emailed to 196 Superintendents who represented elementary or secondary schools that received Recognition School status for the 2019–2020 school year. Permission to Conduct the Study Form—Superintendent (Appendix C) was hyperlinked to the bottom of the Permission to Conduct the Study Letter—Superintendent (Appendix B) and encouraged Superintendents to permit their principals to participate in the study. See Table 4 regarding the sampling frame and supplemental details. The researcher monitored the responses collected via Google forms and determined which districts and principals qualified to participate in the totality of the study. After a Superintendent’s approval, 36 Recognition School principals were emailed an Invitation to Participate (Appendix D). This email explained the study and included a hyperlinked Voluntary Consent Form—Principal (Appendix E). Candidates who gave consent to participate in the study immediately began Phase I, a researcher created, Demographic Survey (Appendix F) and Brown and Ryan’s (2003) Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Appendix G). To conclude Phase I, participants were asked if they were interested in participating in Phase II of the study if they fit the criterion to move forward.

Table 4

Sampling Frame Supplemental Details

Job Title	Sampling Frame	Consent Received	Percent Response
Superintendent	196	25	12.75%
Principal	36	20	55.55%

Recognition principal. The sampling criterion of Recognition principal was defined by data collected by New York State Education Department’s (NYSED) office of accountability (2021) for the 2019–2020 academic school year. Schools throughout New York State needed to be considered a school in good standing the year before, have a level 4 combined composite performance and growth indicator, not have a level 1 accountability indicator in English Language Arts (ELA), math progress, chronic absenteeism, English language proficiency, college, career, and civic readiness for high schools, nor a 2018–2019 state assessment participation rate in ELA and math less than 95%, and not have any subgroups be identified as a potential targeted support and improvement school (PTSI) based on 2018–2019 school year results. Using Recognition School accountability status to select participants to examine was chosen to increase the validity of experiences provided by high achieving principals in the field.

Phase II. Participants selected for the semi-structured interview portion of the study included elementary Recognition School principals ($n = 3$) and secondary Recognition School principals ($n = 3$). The criterion for the six participants who continued into Phase II of the study were that they served a minimum of 3 years in the same school that was awarded Recognition School status, self-identified as a mindful leader, and scored a 4.5 or higher on the MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Self-identified mindful leader. The sampling criterion of the self-identified mindful leader was included in the study and presented as a direct question; “Do you self-identify as a mindful leader?” to declare a personal belief that would suggest each participant understood the

critical and mindful approaches leaders exercise in their professional roles to the researcher. Question five; “Have you ever received professional development about mindfulness before becoming a principal?” and question six; “Have you ever received professional development about mindfulness as a principal?” on the Demographic Survey (Appendix F) were designed for the participant to reflect and think about their mindfulness and previous mindfulness professional development.

Experience level. The criterion of experience level for this sample was defined as serving a minimum of 3 years in the school that was awarded Recognition School status for the 2019–2020 school year. Experience in the same role during a reward nomination demonstrated that the principal and their contributions directly determined the accountability status of the school. This rationale came from experience in the field of school building leadership and understanding that continuous school improvement takes time and consistent effort.

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) scores. The criterion of Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) mean scores contributed to the validity of the participant’s self-identification of being a mindful leader. 15 statements of everyday experiences were presented to all twenty participants on a Likert scale to verify which participants demonstrated an increased sense of dispositional awareness in their day to day experiences. Statements presented to participants included; “I find it difficult to stay focused on what’s happening in the present,” I find myself doing things without paying attention,” and “I forget a person’s name almost as soon as I’ve been told if for the first time” (Appendix G). All statements required a response ranging from Almost Always to Almost Never on a 6-point scale. A 4.5 or better mean score was selected as the benchmark and indicated an increased consciousness of attention awareness (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

After qualifying, the initial and follow up semi-structured interviews took place in the spring of 2021. Each interview was conducted virtually during an agreed upon time. See Table 5 for details for the interview schedule for Phase II of the study.

Table 5

Interview Schedule

Case	Participant Pseudonym	Type of School	Recognition School Experience	Initial Interview	Follow up Interview	MAAS Score
1	Mrs. Pink	ES	4	March 10, 2021	March 23, 2021	4.60
2	Dr. Gold	ES	6–10	March 16, 2021	March 26, 2021	4.53
3	Mrs. Brown	ES	11+	April 7, 2021	April 9, 2021	5.60
4	Mr. Blue	HS	4	March 11, 2021	April 8, 2021	4.80
5	Mr. Black	HS	11+	March 8, 2021	March 12, 2021	5.00
6	Dr. White	HS	6–10	March 6, 2021	March 20, 2021	5.00

Sampling Procedure Summary

A purposive, criterion-based, case sample of principals who represented Recognition Schools throughout NYS was the selected sample used to conduct this study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposive sampling was used by the researcher because the intention was to study specific participants with similar profiles, backgrounds, and shared experiences (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). The researcher collected the emails and information on all 196 Recognition schools awarded by New York State for the 2019–2020 school year (NYSED, 2020). Principals, the designated building leaders of each school, possessed the potential to share their experiences and to identify themes that enhance student and school wide achievement in public schools. Of 196 superintendents emailed, a total of 25 Superintendents gave the researcher permission to reach out their principals, a total of 36 principals. Each eligible candidate was contacted via email a maximum of three times and called once. 20 principals accepted the study invitation and engaged in Phase I of the study.

A total of six principals became eligible to participate in the study, ($n = 3$) elementary and ($n = 3$) secondary. They each self-identified as a mindful leader, worked in the awarded Recognition school for three or more years, and scored a 4.5 or higher on the MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003) indicating that they operate with a generally higher sense of awareness than their peers. Criteria setting for purposeful sampling was employed to ensure that all participants were likely to have experienced a similar path to becoming highly effective school leaders making them eligible candidates for Phase II of the study, two rounds of semi structured interviews (Creswell, 2013).

The demographic data collected from the 20 participants were elicited via Google Forms and then transferred into an Excel file. Information gathered from participants were generated from four Google Forms; (a) the Permission to Conduct the Study Form—Superintendent (Appendix C); (b) the Voluntary Consent Form—Principal (Appendix E); (c) the Demographic Survey (Appendix F); (d) and the MAAS (Appendix G). Participant responses are represented in Table 6.

Participants

Additional background information is presented narratively in the subsections identified by case number, participant pseudonym, and professional title. The basic descriptions of the six study participants are illustrated in Table 4. Three participants are representative of the elementary school, grades K–5 criteria and three participants are representative of the secondary school, grades 6–12 criteria. This information was gathered through participants' responses to a demographic survey, and two semi-structured interviews that took place virtually via Google Meet.

Table 6

Total Participant Demographic Data

Case	Participant Pseudonym	Type of School	Gender	Age Range	Public Edu*	Recognition School*	Mindful Leader**	MAAS Score
1	***	HS	Male	40–49	16–20	5	No	3.86
2	***	HS	Female	40–49	16–20	1	Yes	4.06
3	Mrs. Pink	ES	Female	40–49	16–20	4	Yes	4.60
4	***	ES	Female	40–49	16–20	2	No	3.66
5	***	HS	Male	40–49	16–20	2	Yes	5.33
6	***	ES	Female	40–49	16–20	6–10	No	3.66
7	Dr. White	HS	Female	50–59	>25	6–10	Yes	5.00
8	Mrs. Brown	ES	Female	50–59	11–15	11+	Yes	5.46
9	***	HS	Male	40–49	16–20	2	Yes	4.66
10	***	HS	Male	40–49	16–20	5	Yes	3.66
11	Mr. Blue	HS	Male	50–59	>25	11+	Yes	4.80
12	Mr. Black	HS	Male	40–49	16–20	4	Yes	5.00
13	Dr. Gold	ES	Female	40–49	21–25	6–10	Yes	4.53
14	***	ES	Female	40–49	21–25	4	No	3.73
15	***	HS	Male	50–59	21–25	11+	No	4.20
16	***	ES	Male	40–49	21–25	11+	Yes	5.60
17	***	ES	Female	30–39	11–15	1	Yes	3.73
18	***	ES	Male	40–49	21–25	6–10	Yes	4.53
19	***	ES	Female	50–59	21–25	2	No	4.66
20	***	HS	Male	40–49	16–20	2	No	5.06

Note. Basic Description of all Respondents; * Total amount of experience in designated category; ** Self-Identified; *** Participants not selected for Phase II

Case 1: Mrs. Pink, Elementary School Principal

Mrs. Pink was among three of the participants who represented the middle age range, forty to forty-nine. As a Caucasian/White female building principal of a small, high performing elementary school in Westchester County New York, she was responsible for over three hundred students and approximately thirty faculty members. During all four years as building principal her school was awarded recognition school status each year. Prior to her Recognition School building principal experience, Mrs. Pink was building principal, an assistant principal, and a literacy coach spanning over seventeen years. When asked to describe why she thought her building operated so successfully, she explained that her major goal and expectation under her

leadership was to provide a safe and exciting experience for students and staff. When asked to provide three words that her personnel would likely use to describe her as a leader she responded with dependable, optimistic, and persistent. At the time of the study, Mrs. Pink shared that her primary goal was not focused on achieving Recognition School status. Instead, she focused all of her energy working to provide social emotional wellness and to make sure her students found a love for reading and writing before they left her school.

Case 2: Dr. Gold, Elementary School Principal

Dr. Gold represented the forty to forty-nine, middle aged group of participants. As a Caucasian/White female building principal of an intermediately sized, high performing elementary school in Westchester County New York, she was responsible for over six hundred and thirty students and approximately seventy faculty members. Her elementary school was awarded Recognition School status for three of seven years under her leadership as building principal. Prior to becoming building principal, Dr. Gold was an elementary classroom teacher and an assistant principal spanning over twenty-one years. When asked to describe why she thought her building operated so successfully under her leadership, she explained that her experience in schools taught her to focus on the strengths of people, and to always seek opportunities for progress and growth. She described finding a passion and interest for learning and promoting mindfulness to her teachers, students, and their parents. When asked to provide three words that her personnel were likely to use to describe her as a leader, she responded with unflappable, motivated, and caring. At the time of the study, Dr. Gold shared that she was aware of what it meant to achieve Recognition School status but never indicated to her staff, students, or community that it was her primary goal as building principal. Instead, her goal was to support the needs of the whole child by supporting the needs of the whole teacher by eliminating any

barriers that might stymie their abilities to teach relevant and meaningful lessons on a consistent basis.

Case 3: Mrs. Brown, Elementary School Principal

Mrs. Brown was among the three most senior participants in this study, representing an age range between fifty and fifty-nine. Dr. Brown, a Caucasian/White female, began her career as a special education teacher. After several years she became a general education teacher, transitioned to the assistant principal role, and then accepted the principal position she has held for fourteen years. Mrs. Brown's total public school educational experience spans over twenty-five years. Her leadership was responsible for approximately three hundred and sixty-five students and seventy staff in Suffolk County, New York. Mrs. Brown's school was awarded Recognition School status three times under her leadership. When asked to describe why she thought her building operated so successfully under her leadership, she explained that she made all decisions based on the needs of her students, hired very good people, and held high expectations for students, personnel, administration, and parents. Mrs. Brown described a major passion of hers was to involve parents in school happenings whenever possible. She explained the significance of school personnel, including herself, seeking any opportunity to model strategies, techniques, and language to parents so students would effectively transition from school to home with similar expectations. When asked to provide three words that her personnel were likely to use to describe her as a leader she responded with confident, electric, and loving.

Case 4: Mr. Blue, High School Principal

Mr. Blue was the oldest participant, a Caucasian/White male, who represented a very small high school of approximately two hundred and eighty-three students in Wayne County, New York. At the time of the study Mr. Blue was entering his twentieth year as a secondary

school principal, fifteen at the middle school, and five at the high school. Mr. Blue began his thirty-one-year career as an industrial arts teacher in Chicago, Illinois, spent time teaching in Canada, and then settled in the Northwest region of New York. Mr. Blue described his school being a special place for the town because it acts as the hub of the community. He explained that utilizing the school as a community center increased his connectivity to students, parents, and community members. Mr. Blue shared that the community school feel strengthened relationships, forced civic responsibility, and developed a deepened sense of school pride. When asked to provide three words that his personnel were likely to use to describe him as a school leader, he responded with several but indicated that he was most proud of likely being considered mindful, passionate, and student centered.

Case 5: Mr. Black, High School Principal

Mr. Black was among the three participants representative of the middle-aged group, forty to forty-nine. At the time of the study, Mr. Black had begun his fifth year as building principal to an extremely large high school in Saratoga County, New York. Mr. Black's high school had a school enrollment of approximately three thousand, one hundred and sixty-three students and he was responsible for two hundred and fifty-three faculty members. Before becoming a Recognition School building principal, Mr. Black was a high school principal for eight years. He began his career as a high school social studies teacher, transitioned to middle school assistant principal, and then accepted a position as an athletic director. Over a twenty-year career, Mr. Black expressed the most important concept he ever learned was the importance of building and sustaining meaningful relationships with students. He shared that his building and district administrative teams were hired and expected to provide the most exciting and rigorous learning experience for all students and faculty every day. When asked to provide three

words that his faculty were likely to use to describe him as a school leader, he expressed that he was most proud of being considered resilient, determined, and caring.

Case 6: Dr. White, High School Principal

Dr. White was one of two Caucasian/White female representatives of the fifty to fifty-nine age group and was one of two participants who had been in public education for over thirty years. Dr. White began her career as a social studies and English high school teacher who spent several years in the classroom before transitioning into administration. At the time of the study, she had begun her seventh year as building principal in a mid-sized high school of approximately six hundred students in Putnam County, New York. As building principal, she explained being most proud of establishing a culture of respect, rigor, and high expectations. She transformed the school community by holding her students and personnel to a higher standard, introduced advanced placement courses, and implanted an international baccalaureate program. When asked to provide three words that her personnel were likely to use to describe her as a school leader, Dr. White explained that they would say she was competitive, authentic, and caring.

Description of the Research Design

The research design for this study was a qualitative multiple case study that contained six cases used to understand the experiences of high achieving, Recognition School principals at the elementary and secondary level in New York State (Stake, 1995). Each case was bound by a principal of a Recognition School and was selected to explore and understand the complexity and activity associated with mindful leadership practices.

Data collected for this study occurred throughout two phases. In Phase I, twenty participants ($n = 20$) completed a researcher created Demographic Survey (Appendix F) and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Participants who scored a

4.5 or higher on the MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003), a score that would indicate a particularly high understanding of one's dispositional mindful awareness, were invited to participate in Phase II. Data collected in Phase II of the study included two semi-structured interviews with each selected participant. The Initial Interview was designed to explore and understand the primary roles and experiences of the six Recognition School building principals, three at the elementary level and three at secondary level. The second interview experience, or the Follow Up interview, was designed to elicit information about their contributions and perceptions to forming a mindful organization (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). A within-case and cross-case examination occurred through an iterative approach for data collection designed to focus on the individual case and the quintain (Stake, 2006). An inductive and deductive analysis of the information collected in the semi-structured interviews was used develop themes that emerged (Saldaña, 2006).

Instrumentation

To ensure a more comprehensive multiple-case study, five types of data collection tools were utilized for each case: a demographic survey (Appendix F), the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) Brown and Ryan (2003), two semi structured interviews; an initial and a follow up, and documents (i.e., pamphlets, speeches, presentations, articles, handbooks). These data collection methods were significant to the triangulation component of the study. The demographic survey and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) Brown and Ryan (2003) introduced to participants in Phase I of the study were utilized to establish a criterion that would determine eligible candidates to participate in Phase II of the study. The semi structured interviews served as the primary methods of data collection and the documents presented by each participant were artifacts used to demonstrate one example of how they demonstrated mindfulness through leadership.

Phase I

Demographic survey. The first instrument administered to participants was the 8-question, researcher created Demographic Survey (Appendix F). The survey was designed to identify 4 basic demographic and 4 descriptive data points of each participant. The participant's gender, age, years of experience working in a public school, and years of experience working as Recognition School principal in the same school were included to illustrate any experiential correlations between participants that would be later selected for Phase II of the study. The 4 descriptive questions were developed to identify their exposure and association related to mindful leadership; "Have you ever received professional development about mindfulness before becoming a principal?", "Have you ever received professional development about mindfulness as a principal?", "Do you self-identify as a mindful leader?", and "How often do you utilize mindfulness techniques or practices at work?" were included to strengthen the validity that each participant eligible for Phase II of the study was exposed to and considerably aware of leading mindfully (Appendix F).

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). Brown & Ryan's (2003) Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) was included in the study to strengthen the validity of each case and to ensure that each participant had a strong association with their own dispositional awareness. Each participant responded to 15 statements about everyday experiences and rated themselves using a Likert scale from one, "almost always," to six, "almost never" to determine their mindful awareness score. Everyday experience statements included "I find myself doing things without paying attention", "I drive places on automatic pilot and then wonder why I went there?", and "I snack without being aware that I'm eating" (Appendix G). The MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003) is used to identify personal presence or absence of attention

and awareness and to measure mindfulness as a single construct defined as the general tendency to be attentive to and aware of present-moment experiences. One overall mean score was produced for each participant. A perfect overall mean score of 6 would indicate the highest level of dispositional mindfulness, or one's ability to be most present in the moment or experience. Participants who obtained an overall mean score 4.5 or higher qualified for Phase II of the study. That score supported the dependability and confirmability of the study. The MAAS also demonstrated high test-retest reliability, discriminant and convergent reliability, and criterion validity (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Internal consistency was demonstrated with Cronbach's alpha levels ranging from .80–.90 (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Phase II

Semi-structured interviews. Participants who self-identified as a mindful leader and who received a mean score of 4.5 or higher on the MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003) were considered for Phase II of the study and were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview process. Participants selected for Phase II of this study, two semi-structured interviews, an Initial and Follow-up, represented one of two categories: elementary Recognition School principals ($n = 3$) and secondary Recognition School principals ($n = 3$).

Initial interview protocol. The researcher created an Initial Interview Protocol (Appendix H and Appendix I) consisting of 12–15 questions designed to understand each participant's perceptions of mindfulness and mindful leadership as it relates to (RQ#1) and (RQ#2). Participants were encouraged to answer questions such as, "Can you tell me about your role and primary responsibilities as a school principal?" and "What are some of the challenges or barriers you face as principal of a Recognition School?" Each Initial Interview was designed to explore and understand the phenomenon in question and lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Documents. To conclude the initial interview in Phase II of the study, participants were encouraged to reflect on their practice before the Follow-up Interview. Each participant was assigned to produce documents or artifacts that would demonstrate a mindful leadership initiative to which they contributed. Participants were expected to explain the ways in which the artifact represented a mindful leadership practice or technique. The contents associated with these documents or artifacts included presentations, articles, speeches, handbooks, and pamphlets used to increase achievement in the schools they represented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Follow-up interview protocol. The Follow-Up Interview Protocol (Appendix J and Appendix K) focused on each participant's understanding and perception of the school they represented as a mindful, learning organization. Weick and Sutcliffe's (2001) research characterizing High Reliability Organizations (HRO) identified five guiding principles that outline organizational mindfulness directly related to Recognition School achievement: 1. Preoccupation with failure. 2. Reluctance to simplify interpretations. 3. Sensitivity to operations. 4. Commitment to resilience. 5. Organizing around expertise. The researcher adapted Follow-Up Interview Protocol (Appendix J), originally created by Kearney, Kelsey, and Herrington (2013) and adapted with permission by Charles Youngs (2018), guided the follow-up interview experience to understand how the participant perceived the organization they represented (Appendix L). Interview questions like, "How do you support a culture that is aware, responsible, and reflective of their daily practice?" and "How do you improve rules and standard procedures based on new experiences or a change in the situation?" were presented to answer (RQ#3) and (RQ#4). The Follow-up Interview provided extra time for the participant to explain and share the documents and artifacts they brought with them to the experience.

Data Collection Procedures and Timeline

In November 2020, The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) provided written authorization for the researcher to conduct this study (Appendix M). Once IRB permission was obtained, the researcher sent 196 emails and consent forms to Superintendents who would provide approval for Recognition School principals to participate in the study. As digital consent forms were approved, the researcher identified a study sample of 20 participants. A timeline of the study is provided in the appendices (Appendix N). Data collection and analysis proceeded as detailed in Table 7.

Table 7

Research Timeline

Date(s)	Research Procedures
November 24, 2020	Received IRB approval via e-mail authorizing permission to conduct study.
December 7–January 1, 2020	Prepared consent forms and sent e-mails to the Recognition School superintendents.
January 4–February 4, 2021	Initiated Phase I of the study. Prepared and sent e-mails to the Recognition School principals who were given consent to participate in the study.
March 6–April 9, 2021	Initiated Phase II of the study. Conducted the Initial and Follow-up Interviews.
April 10–May 10, 2021	Conducted member-checking began cycle one coding.
June 1–November 10, 2021	Coded and analyzed data within-and-across cases.

Phase I

In December of 2020 Permission to Conduct the Study Letter—Superintendent (Appendix B) and Permission to Conduct the Study Form—Superintendent (Appendix C) were distributed electronically to 196 Superintendents who represented Recognition Schools throughout New York State. Principals who were given permission to participate from their superintendents were emailed Invitations to Participate Letter—Principal (Appendix D) and the Voluntary Consent Form—Principal (Appendix E). Principals who were interested and

consented to participate in the study began the Demographic Survey (Appendix F) and the MAAS (Appendix G; Brown & Ryan, 2003) immediately after they consented. Data were sorted by the researcher in a Google form and the desired sample, participants who served as a principal for three or more years in the building that received Recognition School status, self-identified as being a mindful leader and those who scored a 4.5 or higher on the MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003), had the option to proceed to Phase II of the study. Participants who fit the criteria and who selected to move forward were asked to produce documentation, presentations, handbooks, literature, or artifacts that could support how they considered themselves to mindfully lead in their positions.

Demographic survey. The first instrument administered to participants was the 8 question, researcher created Demographic Survey (Appendix F). The survey was designed to identify 4 basic demographic and 4 descriptive data points of each participant. The participant's gender, age, years of experience working in a public school, and years of experience working as Recognition School principal in the same school were included to illustrate any experiential correlations between participants that would be later selected for Phase II of the study.

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). Participants were encouraged to continue Phase I of the study and select to complete Brown & Ryan's (2003) Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). The MAAS is a self-report tool that measures an individual's ability to practice mindfulness in their day-to-day life. The items on the scale are designed to indicate how much an individual invest in the present moment by considering what extent they are engaging or observing or synthesizing in their surroundings at any given moment. The mean reflects their level of dispositional, or trait, mindfulness. Higher scores indicate higher levels of dispositional mindfulness, meaning these individuals more frequently live in a state of

presence and awareness. Higher scores also tend to report higher levels of autonomy, competence, positive affect, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The purpose of using this scale was to strengthen the profile of the participant by using the mindfulness score as a criterion to be considered for Phase II of the study.

Phase II

During March and April of 2021, data collected from Phase I was coded and analyzed. Participants who met the qualifying components for Phase I, a sub-sample of elementary Recognition School principals ($n = 3$) and secondary Recognition School principals ($n = 3$), were selected and invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The Initial Interviews and Follow-up Interviews were scheduled in between March 8, 2021, and April 9, 2021.

Initial interviews. All Initial Interviews were scheduled immediately after an analysis of their Phase I data. Selected candidates agreed to a virtual, synchronous interview experience via Google Meet. Initial Interviews with all six participants lasted approximately an hour. The Initial Interview was designed to examine each participant's perception and experience related to the principal role and leading mindfully in schools. Questions included; "How would you empower your personnel to become more mindful in their roles?", "How do you incorporate mindfulness or mindfulness practices into your role as principal?", and "Can you describe a situation where you might have utilized a mindful practice to solve a problem with staff, students, or families?"

Documents. To conclude the Initial Interview each participant was asked to produce an artifact and prepare an explanation about why they considered their work to be a demonstration of a mindful leadership practice. Participants referenced documents but focused more on how their interpersonal interactions were far more meaningful to each participant. Less than two

minutes of each Follow Up interview were dedicated to document review. Participants preferred to tell stories of practices or actions they were consistently facilitating that were particularly mindful.

Follow-up interviews. The Follow Up Interview was designed to examine each participant's perception and experience related to the principal role and experiences related to leading mindfully within a learning organization. The purpose of this experience was for the researcher to gain an understanding about the participant's perceptions of their role in the learning organization.

During and after each interview, notes, and observations were entered into a research journal to provide reflexive data used for respondent validation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Interviews were recorded and transcribed to support accurate data analysis. Member checking was used to ensure that participants' viewpoints were accurately represented (Krefting, 1991).

Data Analysis

Questionnaire Data

Data collected from the Demographic Survey (Appendix F) and the MAAS (Appendix G; Brown & Ryan, 2003) were analyzed to inform the sampling procedures for Phase II of the study and provided information to illustrate basic descriptive statistics. These data offered context and provided a rich description to support findings for the study. Frequency, mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and range were the only quantitative analyses used to describe the data from the questionnaire.

Interview Data

An iterative approach occurred simultaneously as data were being collected to inform the data analysis of each case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Initially, a within-case analysis was conducted to learn as much about the contextual variables represented by one case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Category construction during initial coding provided themes or typologies that offered an intergraded framework covering multiple cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The emergent themes and characteristics of each individual case were compared in a cross-case analysis to better understand the broader concepts that binds multiple cases together (Stake, 2006). Throughout this iterative process, balance between the individual case and the quintain was maintained. Data from each interview and documents were analyzed through qualitative coding.

The data analysis framework described by Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009) served as the overarching approach during this study. The initial phase in the process was first cycle open coding, in which the researcher remained open to all suggestions of emergent themes, patterns, and categories (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Handwritten journal notes were used in identifying terms and categories that were presented during interviews and that related to the literature associated with this study.

The next phase was second cycle analytical coding, a multi-iterative process in which the researcher focused on smaller units within the initial categories that led to renaming, compressing, and merging similar categories or themes to achieve deeper levels of meaning (Merriam, 2009). The key words and phrases grew and were gradually cut down and sorted into groupings of categories. Codes were applied to transcript excerpts and organized into sub themes associated with the research questions. During this recursive process, the researcher

continued to engage with his journal while keeping recorded of code naming and changes via Google Sheets. In alignment with Stake's (2006) multiple-case research design model, data were analyzed within- and across-cases. Within-case analysis supported development of a deep understanding of each individual case, and across-case analysis assisted in connecting the recurrent themes.

Statement of Ethics

The researcher obtained consent from each participating principal upon IRB approval. All Superintendents were provided an Invitation to Participate Letter describing the intention, scope of the proposed research, and the option of withdrawal. To respect and protect the confidentiality of the names of principals and Recognition Schools that participated in the study, the researcher used pseudonyms for both principals and schools when discussing results. All data were kept secure by password protected computers and user accounts. Coded data were available to the participants for member checking purposes and to an internal auditor for the purpose of data verification, coding, and analysis. IRB approval preceded all data collection, and the researcher was in possession of an authenticated Human Subjects Certificate from the IRB throughout the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF DATA AND EXPLANATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the roles and characteristics of Recognition School principals and how their mindful contributions to their faculty and schools create High Reliability Learning Organizations. This chapter provides an analysis of the data collection and findings that resulted from four research questions which guided this study: How do principals of Recognition Schools experience mindfulness or mindful practices in their schools? How are mindfulness-based leadership practices introduced, promoted, and sustained by Recognition School principals of elementary and secondary schools? What are the organizational norms experienced by principals in elementary and secondary Recognition Schools? What are the organizational barriers school principals experience working in Recognition Schools?

Description of Findings

Three tools were used for the data collection that supports this analysis: (a) a demographic survey, which included the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003); (b) a virtual semi-structured Initial Interview with each participant designed to address research questions 1 and 2; and (c) a virtual semi-structured Follow Up Interview with each participant designed to address research questions 3 and 4. In addition, as outlined in Chapter Three, a work sample that illustrated and supported the specific work created and facilitated by the participants collectively comprised a fifth tool, which was used by the researcher for the purpose of triangulation in checking for reasonable coherence between participant perceptions of reported experiences. Chapter Four presents the results of this study by identifying a finding resulting from the data analysis and the sub themes that emerged from the data to produce this finding. All participant quotations excerpted from the data and presented in this chapter are

accompanied by citations indicating line number from transcripts formatted by the researcher and retained in his password protected digital files.

Finding 1

Finding 1: Participants described their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools by metacognitively acknowledging specific character traits or perceptions of self and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques used throughout the building and district that contribute to student achievement. Three themes emerged from the data to result in this finding. The first theme was that study participants perceived themselves as having to be self-aware of the pressures inherently associated with the principal position and the importance of becoming a leader with a growth mindset, confidence, and the ability to reflect on their practice so their contributions to the system are meaningful and strategic. All six participants were identified by characteristics that were synonymous among the elementary and secondary sample. Being thoughtful, empathetic, and consistent were traits identifiable by all participants and determined to be integral components of a mindful school leader. Similarly, all participants indicated that to maintain a high standard in their school they needed to be confident, growth minded, and reflective. Participants emphasized the value of developing self confidence in the principal role and learning to trust and rely on their expertise and experience to effectively lead in their leadership positions. Participants also described the importance of reflection and taking time to think about their emotions, how processing time could contribute to potential strategies necessary to solve problems and contribute to future outcomes.

The second theme that emerged in relation to this finding statement was that participants demonstrated an increased understanding of how positive relationships with students and teachers throughout the building required consistency and transparency when it came to

communication, expectations, and sustained building wide achievement. Recognition principals who participated in the study indicated that all building decisions should be based on students and outcomes as they affect the achievement of the whole child. All participants described the importance of building positive and meaningful relationships with all personnel associated with the school (teachers, bus drivers, staff, etc.) to create a positive school culture. In all cases, all participants expressed the value associated with being explicit, direct, and deliberate with all forms of communication associated with introducing, promoting, and sustaining building operations. Similarly, these school leaders emphasized the significance of being authentic when creating, promoting, or managing systems that ultimately support high expectations and the building's mission.

The third theme produced by participants described the need for a balanced, reciprocal relationship between the leader, the needs of the building, and the vision of the district as it relates to creating and maintaining large and small systems designed to increase student achievement. Participants described the importance of building relationships with district personnel that promotes a commitment and contribution to sharing the district's goals, mission, vision, and strategic plans. Participants emphasized the implications associated with recognizing and developing appropriate, expressive, and receptive communication practices that supported the fidelity of leadership action and expected from stakeholders above and below the building leader. Each case expressed the value in having an expectation for the district to provide support, education, and to remove barriers that ultimately disrupts paths to student achievement systematically. Figure 1 represents the emergence of the three themes in relation to the first finding. A total of ten subthemes undergird themes one, two, and three of this finding and are presented in Figure 1.

<p>Finding 1: Participants described their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools by metacognitively acknowledging specific character traits or perceptions of self and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques used throughout the building and district that contribute to student achievement.</p>		
<p>Theme 1: Participants perceived themselves as having to be self-aware of the pressures inherently associated with the principal position and the importance of becoming a leader with a growth mindset, confidence, and the ability to reflect on their practice so their contributions to the system are meaningful and strategic.</p>	<p>Theme 2: Participants demonstrated an increased understanding of how positive relationships with students and teachers throughout the building require consistency and transparency when it comes to communication, expectations, and sustained building wide achievement.</p>	<p>Theme 3: Participants described the need for a balanced, reciprocal relationship between the leader, the needs of the building, and the vision of the district as it relates to creating and maintaining large and small systems designed to increase student achievement.</p>

Figure 1. Finding Statement 1 Development. This figure illustrates how the first finding statement was developed from the first, second, and third theme.

Theme 1: “Self”

Participants perceived themselves as having to be self-aware of the pressures associated with the principal position and the importance of leading with a growth mindset, confidence, and the ability to reflect on their practice so their contributions to the system are meaningful and strategic. Three sub themes emerged from the data: (a) Participants reported a need to have a growth mindset as it relates to how they view themselves as a growing, flexible, learning leader; (b) participants emphasized the value of developing self confidence in the principal role and to trust their expertise and experience in the position they hold; (c) participants described the importance of reflection and taking time to think about their emotions, strategic potential, outcomes.

Theme 1: “Self”	Subtheme
<p>Participants perceived themselves as having to be self-aware of the pressures associated with the principal position and the importance of leading with a growth mindset, confidence, and the ability to reflect on their practice so their contributions to the system are meaningful and strategic.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants reported a need to have a growth mindset as it relates to how they view themselves as a growing, flexible, learning leader. 2. Participants emphasized the value of developing self confidence in the principal role and to trust their expertise and experience in the position they hold. 3. Participants described the importance of reflection and taking time to think about their emotions, strategic potential, outcomes.

Figure 2. Theme Statement 1 Development. This figure illustrates how the first theme statement was developed from three subtheme statements.

Theme 1: Subtheme 1. Participants reported a need to have a growth mindset as it relates to how they view themselves as a growing, flexible, learning leader. Elementary and secondary participants collectively reported the significance of looking to grow as a learning leader by being flexible. Dr. Gold described the importance of paying attention to everything you do to support a learning organization: “I am very mindful of the things that I say and do” (Initial Interview, line 165); “You need to be aware of yourself and the actions you take and how they impact others. You need to be learning as lead and become flexible as necessary” (Initial Interview, lines 145–146).

Like Dr. Gold, Mrs. Pink described her leadership practices as being flexible and how modeling flexibility as a leader translates to giving teachers permission to take risks which ultimately trickles down to supporting how students learn and grow in classrooms:

So, I think anytime you try something new, you have to give like that window for approximation, potential, and error. So, we we’ve certainly talked about, you know, the safe place to take risks and to make your work messy. So, when balanced literacy was

new here in this district, it was a lot of like, this can be messy work at first. I mean, ultimately obviously you don't want student learning to suffer, but I think there's a place where teachers need to know that that's okay to fail and keep trying. Same with us as leaders. We need to keep learning and being flexible as we learn. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 84–88)

Ms. Brown brought an electric presence to both interviews and displayed an excitement for learning in the position as new challenges and situations presented themselves. She explained that her parents needed to demonstrate flexibility while discussing one of her artifacts, a letter to parents about an upcoming event. She shared that her thought process included having high expectations for her parents and that clear communication would encourage them to be prepared for any potential barriers:

In my letter [I wrote] Please be mindful. Parking has been an issue in the past. Come early, rather than late because we do not want you to miss the show. You're going to miss the start of the show if you do not plan to arrive early to find parking. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 551–555)

Ms. Brown continued her explanation of why she carefully used words that expressed a level of concern and assertiveness because the last time an event took place at the school parents were frustrated that parking was more complicated than they imagined and planned. Parking, if not organized properly could disrupt the orderliness of a planned event. Ms. Brown demonstrates her awareness and ability to anticipate what could be a potential pit fall to the effectiveness of her school function in the following description of being reflective,

I think being reflective, if I had to say, is very important. Everybody has to reflect good, bad or indifferent. And sometimes I'll say to myself, oh, maybe I should have gone the

other way. I do a lot of things. That reflection helps me with the next decision. (Initial Interview, lines 449–451)

Ms. Brown asserts that her ability to be self-aware ensures that she is proactive, so her contributions are effective according to the expectations she has for herself and what is expected of her by her constituents. She described how her contributions influenced the system, by stating,

I've done it because I've learned that if you put it out there early and clear they won't feel like it was a gotcha and they always want a gotcha. Right? I'm not a gotcha girl. But I have learned that if I put it in writing, in a nice way, that is direct. I can have high expectations, eliminate drama, and support families. It's about learning, and it is a nice way of doing it, trying to build responsibility. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 551–555)

Secondary Recognition principals expressed similar experiences regarding developing and operating a growth mindset, being flexible, and learning while leading. Mr. Blue described how the COVID 19 pandemic disrupted schooling, and how teachers perceived the learning loss associated with their curriculum through his attempt to share an experience with a teacher who was dealing with this issue:

I just had the discussion with one of my teachers in various details was like, you need to, you need to just stop and take a deep breath. I need to understand next years, we might or might not have all the kids in the building again, next year is not going to be normal. You're not going to teach all your applied algebra two curriculum. You're just not, you know what, you're going to teach. You need to be okay with that and be flexible with having to take some things as they come and make the best of it. You're going to prioritize. You're going to assess where the kids are at and learn from that. We all are

doing this. I am doing this in my position. What do they need to be successful here? What can I get through? And then if they have to go onto the next math class, then that is what I do. We need to focus on growing, learning, and adapting. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 762–769)

Dr. White, a self-described, no nonsense, progressive, mentor-coach, servant leader displayed serious passion about the specific responsibilities associated with leading a school. She demonstrated an understanding of being flexible, willing to learn, and fostering a growth mindset by associating with her building climate, as exemplified by this statement:

I need to have harmony at work. And I believe that people should come to work and find happiness, want to learn and not be afraid to learn. We need to have a growth mindset because who wants to come to work and have problems? We are always going to have problems. I feel like I always have something going on but it's how we learn from it that matters to me. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 519–524)

Dr. White returned to the importance of exercising a growth mindset when she explained how her own experience became a model for her teachers when she described an initiative intended to allow teachers to explore a new program in other schools:

So, before we committed to our own IB, I sent them [teachers] out on school visits based on where they lived. I either sent them to Red Hook or I sent them to Dobbs Ferry or Harrison or Long Island, like wherever they wanted to go, whichever school they wanted to visit, I gave them the day to do that. I wanted them to understand that this initiative could happen if we committed to it, if we were willing to learn about it, and prepared to be flexible when trying to make it work in our school. It was more and required us all to learn something we all unfamiliar with. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 610–618)

During the initial and Follow-Up Interview, Mr. Black, a 20-year public school veteran and former football coach, displayed a positive and energized vibe to the researcher. He shared a passion for learning and spoke candidly about the norms and constraints associated with public schooling. His association with growth mindset began with a comparison to self-improvement and continued as he discussed the importance of being an authentic leader, as these experiences assisted him in modeling expectations to his faculty:

I think if you want to grow, there is this this learning moment that has to happen. You have to fail, right? I don't think you can get better as a leader without that process. That the process of failure, the process of talking things through and being able to flex as things change. So, if the goal is growth, you have to be willing to do that. And that's what we tell our kids. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 591–601)

Like the other participants, Mr. Black identified the importance of being vulnerable when leading. The flexibility and adjustments made by leaders during the present moment seems to be an emphasis made by all participants considering the pace and volume to which things change and required decision making from leadership.

There has to be that culture where you're getting to try something and as long as it's in the best interest of the students. I think really creating that culture where, you know, growth and failing forward is important. I think that's first and foremost and then making sure people have the tools to do it. It's not just about saying it. It's not just about modeling. It's about really letting people know here's how you do it. Here's how you can get started. I think that's important that as the principal I show that by doing that myself. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 135–144)

Theme 1: Subtheme 2. Participants emphasized the value of developing self confidence in the principal role and to trust their expertise and experience in the position they hold. Elementary and secondary participants similarly described the significance of being confident and remembering the influence one possesses once selected to be a building principal in education. Being confident, trusting one's instinct, and being able to effectively operate within a system can happen because a mindful leader can recall an experience to support the next decision. At the elementary level Dr. Gold spoke to self-awareness to describe her ability to lead confidently by stating: "Being aware of... yourself and the actions you take and how they impact others comes from experience. You gain knowledge and learn to operate efficiently as you gain experience" (Initial Interview, lines 145–146); "I feel like have learned to understand people very well. I know their strengths and weaknesses. That makes me confident that I can utilize them as needed to support my initiatives" (Initial Interview, lines 225–227).

Ms. Pink emphasized the development of becoming a successful school leader takes time. She compared her first years of principalship similar to what the first few years of teaching are remembered as:

There are things that I've done where, you know, gosh, especially my first couple of years...as a principal where I had to let it go. I had to remember my experience as a teacher got me here. I have seen this before. I have made big decisions before. I sometimes need to remind myself, especially in the beginning, be confident and go for it. (Initial Interview, lines 82–86)

During a follow up interview with Ms. Brown, she clearly demonstrated an understanding of her own self-awareness as it relates to recalling experience to build and sustain self-confidence. Her responses were delivered intentionally, including deliberate facial expressions,

tone, word choice, and catch phrases to display confidence and expertise. The nonverbal delivery of her responses indicated self-confidence before the researcher could interpret her spoken words:

You mentioned confidence yesterday and I kind of mentioned it to you. I don't want the dog and pony show. I'm not a dog and pony girl. You'll walk in this building. You're going to see what I do every day at any given time. So, it is what it is, years and years of experience. So, I never worry about those little things or mistakes. I do have some colleagues that are much more nervous about everything. Listen, I've been tenured. General ed, special ed, assistant principal and principal. Tenure means nothing to me. I have been doing this a long time and there's still so much to learn. And I am learning. It's my job. It's who I am. I need to be confident because this is my building, and I am the leader. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 609–614)

Secondary school leaders demonstrated the same value associated with being self-confident. During the Initial Interview introduction, Mr. Blue revealed that he has served as a building principal for more than eleven years and has been in public education for more than twenty-five years. He describes his expertise as what makes him confident as a building principal:

So, I came in a long time ago and when I started right off with a building project....and building a middle school program which was really great. I spent 15 years down in the middle school. About five years ago, I got moved up to. We did some shifting within the district and I got moved up to the high school. It was because of my experience. They knew. I knew I could help build a better school. And so, this is my fifth year up here at

the high school. You know, I think it's been very good. I work hard. I know I do. We all do. (Initial Interview, lines 98–104)

It was made very clear that Dr. White knew she was a highly effective principal. She explained her experience with confidence and included body language and displayed facial cues that would typically indicate strength or assertiveness. She expressed confidence with her remarks and spoke about the importance of learning and growing from experience:

I can be very feisty because I have a lot of experience, you know, I have been in a lot of districts, a lot, I've been around the block. And so, if I think something is egregious, I'm going to say it right. I'm going to, I'll push back. Like, if you're talking about moving the fifth grade to a different building in the middle school, and there's no process in the middle school, the principal discusses that with me, then I'm going to speak up. Like, where's the process? What about this? You know, the good thing is because the superintendent and I were friends previous to them coming to the district, we did our doctorate together, actually same cohort. I have the expertise and I will use it. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 125–131)

The researcher asked a follow up question to elicit a response that would indicate if Dr. White was given autonomy to act and lead freely to support the vision of the school and district. Dr. White responded without hesitation and concluded her statement exuding self-confidence:

We don't have to ask for it. It's only because the AP and I are older and have experience that we just do our own thing because we have demonstrated we can because we have been successful. Like during this COVID thing it's been, I've come up with something, then the rest of the district does it. I have a job to do. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 191–194)

Mr. Black's response suggests his understanding of becoming or sustaining student achievement in schools is based on creating an experience for kids that is not necessarily focused on becoming recognized for high achievement. He demonstrated a level of confidence that was clearly attached to his experience working in schools and his ability or expertise working with kids:

My goal and it's easy to say that when the school is performing well, my goal is for the experience to be a positive one for our students. Right. And in my experience, my goal has to be for me to be in the hallways and kind of hear and see anecdotally some of the learning happening. Of course, then we'll get hard data. But the goal is not driven by recognition. Cause I think there's, there's ways to kind of play with that. Like at my last school, we were.... a blue ribbon school of recognition and we won the blue ribbon award which was kind of cool with getting to go to Washington and do that whole jazz. I know what it takes to get there. But when I presented it to the school board and a small school, so we were like real intimate and we knew the school board members, they knew us in you can adjust your numbers, right. If we're not doing well, chemistry, outlaw grade, a non-Regents chem section and chemistry Regents numbers will go up. I mean, there's, I think if you're driven just by that there's room for maybe make decisions that, that maybe benefit the numbers, but don't benefit all kids. In my experience it's hard to just be driven by that and other recognitions. It's Nice. But we want all students performing high levels, it's nice. (Initial Interview, lines 223–238)

Theme 1: Subtheme 3. Participants described the importance of reflection and taking time to think about their emotions, strategic potential, outcomes. During the Initial Interview, Dr. Gold described the need for principals to listen, to grow, and to build trust. In the follow up

interview, she referenced how feedback stimulated reflection and thinking about decision making and what needs careful analysis to achieve goals:

To be successful you need to believe in the power of listening. I think you have to listen often. To them, your people, and yourself. I think you have to connect with people and when you do that, they trust you. You learn from that, but you need to be mindful that you need to take time to think. (Initial Interview, lines 233–236)

I still remember the feedback that I got from that which was, to think about what you need to accomplish your goals and how it fits into what everyone else needs, to help you accomplish your goals. (Follow-Up Interview, line 246–248)

Similarly, Ms. Pink did not speak solely of how she chose to reflect on personal practice, instead she expresses what is needed for her staff:

For me, I think it's the quick answers that sometimes can get us in trouble, so I like to think it out. I can get quiet and focus on how to be better. I think it's the quick answers that sometimes can get us in trouble, so I like to think it out. (Follow-Up Interview, line 266–268)

If I slow myself down, take a breath, and I really try to..... I can put myself in their shoes, reflect a little bit on what they might be feeling or going through. This sort of thing is something I rehearse might happen before, just jumping and impulsively, acting on things that may come up in meetings, on the phone, in the hall....we're much more successful, whether it was a parent issue coming to me or a teacher coming with a situation if I reflect on what I have done before in my experience and/or with these people. (Initial Interview, lines 99–102)

Like Dr. Gold and Ms. Pink, Ms. Brown and her elementary colleagues shared that listening, learning, and being a student as much as a teacher is integral to the success of the school leader, the students, and the school. Ms. Brown confidently suggested that “[people] don’t move to [to this community] for the view. They come for the schools” (Initial Interview, lines 236–237) suggesting the work being done in and around the buildings is contributing to overall achievement.

Reflecting on self is important. I think that’s important. I think I need time when it’s daylight and I can do something for me. Sometimes I just need to think. I can take a walk with the dog or whatever. So, I think that’s my biggest reflection is to really practice what I preach. I always tell my teachers, no worries. We got this. And I do have, I am grateful that my staff, I can ask anyone on my staff. I really need you to do this for me. (Initial Interview, lines 555–558)

Secondary Recognition principals shared similar behaviors and experiences regarding the importance of reflection and taking time to think about their emotions, strategic potential, and outcomes when interviewed. Mr. Blue discussed his personal reflection has evolved over his career and now takes place in his car, to and from school. This decision is intentional because he learned the importance of keeping school business at school. In the morning he prepares, and, in the afternoon, he decompresses:

I have about a half-hour work ride back and forth from work every day. In the morning I have rituals. I’m in the morning I get myself prepared for what I need to do each day. What am I going to do when I walk in the building kind of run through my day, not necessarily my schedule, but really setting my mind in the right place that you know, I get up though. I just spend it by myself so I can get in the right mindset. So, when I

walk in that building, I'm walking in knowing even though it's going to be stressful and there's a lot going on, I am in charge, I have thought of strategies, and it's my lead. ...

On the way home I do the same thing. It is usually quiet, and I reflect on the day. I talk to myself. I say "We're going to walk in. I'm going to go up to the room and we're going to change. We're going to spend a few minutes talking. We're going to go downstairs. We're going to spend some time with the kids. We'll have dinner." (Initial Interview, lines 414–417, 419–421)

Dr. White mentioned the importance of reflection several times during both interviews. Several times she referred to her son passing away which completely transformed her approach to life and her work. Anecdotal notes collected from the Initial Interview demonstrated Dr. White's perspective on reflection was life changing, "I lost my son. Do you think I am going to feel bad for people that do not want to do the best they can while they are at work? I don't sweat the little stuff anymore. I like to have fun and I like to get things done." Dr. White's world view had drastically changed:

You know, I have been in this for more than 20 years. So, I know I need to keep growing and taking risks as I go, which a lot of educators don't do. ... I have learned to realize that the happiness of the building is not just on me, they [teachers] each have to take a role. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 245–247, 336–337).

I learned to blunt with folks. I'd be like, I just lost my kids six weeks ago. Do you think I give an F about that? So, I decided early I was going to be very direct with them. I was very blunt with them.

Dr. White shared a time where she heard of an incident and responded aggressively, so uncharacteristic compared to her former self:

You know, one time one teacher yelled at a secretary over something stupid. I actually went down to his room, pulled him out into the hallway and was like, really, really is this how you are going to treat people? Like in the scheme of life, was yelling at her really important? Embarrassing. And he was like, no and apologized later. My authenticity resonated with him. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 519–524)

Mr. Black was the most introspective of all the participants when he discussed reflection. He spoke to occupational experience in terms of longevity, and he included being a father of four, another leadership role outside of the school building:

I reflect on every single interaction I have every day. But not to the point to drive myself crazy. I think I might've drove myself crazy like 10 years ago, but after you've been doing it awhile, you know how to kind of compartmentalize? Also, once you have four kids, you realize this is easy compared to that. (Initial Interview, lines 291–297)

Outside of reflecting on his own emotions, Mr. Black explained how he learned to transform building relationships, an integral component of the principal position according to Mr. Black, but more as the person who shares or “sells” the mission:

I have learned that you can be the most caring person in the world, but if you don't know how to get that message out, if you can't sell it, then it doesn't matter. Like, people have to know you're caring, they have to know you mean well. But you also have to hustle. So that's how you have to be strategic. I learned to go see people. Be with people. Learn with and from people. They will support you and your potential if it's true, but you have to work it. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 438–441)

In summary, each of the excerpts cited above illustrate that participants reported their views and experiences as being associated with developing confidence in self, leading with a

growth mindset, and having the ability to reflect to produce and maintain practices that contribute to the development of self and the system.

Theme 2: “Building”	Subtheme
<p>Participants demonstrated an increased understanding of how positive relationships with students and teachers require consistency and transparency when it comes to communication, expectations, and sustained building wide achievement.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants described the importance of building positive and meaningful relationships with all personnel associated with the school (teachers, bus drivers, staff, etc.) 2. Participants indicated that all decisions should be based on students and outcomes as they affect the achievement of the whole child. 3. Participants expressed the value associated with being explicit, direct, and deliberate with all forms of communication associated with introducing, promoting, and sustaining building operations. 4. Participants emphasized the significance of being authentic when creating, promoting, or managing systems that ultimately support high expectations and the building's mission.

Figure 3. Theme Statement 2 Development. This figure illustrates how the first theme statement was developed from three subtheme statements.

Theme 2: “Building”

Participants demonstrated an increased understanding of how positive relationships with students and teachers require consistency and transparency when it comes to communication, expectations, and sustained building wide achievement. Four subthemes emerged from the data: (a) Participants indicated that all decisions should be based on students and outcomes as they affect the achievement of the whole child; (b) participants described the importance of building positive and meaningful relationships with all personnel associated with the school (teachers, bus drivers, staff, etc.); (c) participants expressed the value associated with being explicit, direct, and deliberate with all forms of communication associated with introducing, promoting, and

sustaining building operations; (d) participants emphasized the significance of being authentic when creating, promoting, or managing systems that ultimately support high expectations and the building's mission.

Theme 2: Subtheme 1. Participants described the importance of building positive and meaningful relationships with all personnel associated with the school (teachers, bus drivers, staff, etc.). Each participant spoke to the importance of building relationships with all stakeholders associated with the school. During initial and follow up interviews, participants explained the importance of being mindful when it came to building relationships and how it directly affects student and school achievement. Dr. Gold spoke specifically to authentic relationships with people create high achieving learning organizations:

You need to have leadership practices. The best thing you can do is win over your people. So, I'm going to go back to build strong relationships, foster, a positive mindful culture collaborate around curriculum and facilitate effective professional development strategies in order to move the school in the right direction. (Initial Interview, lines 363–366)

Ms. Pink suggested that to be an effective school leader you need to build relationships with people:

As educators that all went into leadership positions, we need to remember our number one strength, building relationships. Whether it was, you know, building programs or COVID or other crises ... ha you know, or helping kids calm down from a crisis, like all those types of things we got, you know, in real life situations, it is always our best tool to build relationships with people. (Initial Interview, lines 348–356)

Similarly, Ms. Brown expressed an understanding of the importance of relationship

building with stakeholders. She highlighted the effort and time that goes into working with people. As a self-identified mindful and servant leader, Ms. Brown shared a sentiment of making her faculty feel good and welcome in school:

So, I think it's truly about relationship building and guess what? It takes time. Cause you want to make people feel good, right? It is a skill. Imagine If [Ms. Brown] passes me in the hallway and I say nothing, or I just say hello...But, when I say, Hey, Joe, how's it going? What are you doing this weekend? How have you been? They like it. I have just changed that relationship so that when and If [Jake] was having a bad day, maybe he'll feel good and be able to come to me. (Initial Interview, lines 289–294)

At the secondary level, similar explanations about the significance of relationship building continued. Mr. Blue offered the most detailed description of his role as a leader has changed but his interest and understanding of creating positive relationships with students have not:

I always said, I take my position the same as I did as a teacher. I wasn't just a teacher of content. I was a...I was a teacher of kids and the whole kid and, and everything about them. And I thought it was important that I knew about them as a person that I built relationships with them beyond the classroom that I understood, you know, what their strengths and what their weaknesses were, and also gave them input in their thought and gave them ownership over what they were doing. (Initial Interview, lines 265–269)

When the topic of building relationships with students came up in either the initial or the follow up interview, Mr. Blue became visibly passionate, leaning closer to the screen or increasing the use of his facial muscles, displaying a dramatic but authentic depiction of the importance of building relationships. Even when he discussed experiences in the building when he directed

staff or shared strategies with faculty more focused on relationship building rather than academics, the researcher could tell SEL was his passion:

I always say to my teachers, I ask the question, “what’s the best thing you remember about school? Tell me your fondest memory of school.” You know, you know, no one’s telling me the test. No one says, “They took me to algebra.” One year they said, “I love my pre-calculus class.” I asked why. The said, “Cause I love math.” I said, “tell me why you loved math. What made you love that class?” Guess what they said? ...that Mr. [Smith], he was the greatest math teacher ever and that's what we measure., that’s what they remembered. That’s what I want to hear from my kids. And I said, if I can measure that, I know my kids are gonna learn. You know, ultimately high scores Those, those performance scores are going to come about with relationships. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 409–414)

Dr. White’s perspective of relationship building was very similar to her secondary colleagues, emphasizing the importance of creating harmony with people so that the system is harmonious and has the best opportunity to achieve. Dr. White did not demonstrate a need to pontificate on how positive relationships with all personnel foster achievement. The researcher perceived that to her, building relationships with people was expected. Instead, she essentially indicated that she does indeed know that she has positive relationships with people, and it is because she is responsible for doing her job:

How do I say this diplomatically? I let the, the share the official shared decision-making team die of its own death. Have such good one-on-one relationships with people that I have built enough trust with people and give the right people so much input and so much purview and so much freedom. ... I honestly do not need shared decision making from

parents. I don't need parents interfering about what we are doing. They trust me and it is because I have great relationships. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 796–799, 748–749)

Mr. Black represents a very large high school with over three thousand students, ten academic administrators, and eight assistant principals. He acknowledged that his experience in smaller schools proved the importance of building positive relationships with everyone however, in his current role he needed to be very strategic. He explained his role changed and his system is so large, that his major focus is to make sure his assistant principals are reaching everyone often because his school is so big that it's rare that he gets to see everyone:

Like it took me two years to have a conversation with every teacher in a building. And I was really trying. But I think, you know, some of the size, I think size has forced me to be really strategic where at my last school, if I had a new initiative, I go around the building and talk it up to everyone in a day or two. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 449–452)

So my role it's kind of unique in that really, I manage our high school building team, the AP's So each grade level has an associate principal and an assistant principal. So, there's two at each grade level for the total of eight. So really kind of working with that group and building capacity among them. And then our academic administrators are supervised by our deputy superintendent, yet they're housed in the high school, and they do primarily their six, 12, but a lot of their work is high school. So, it's kind of working with the deputy superintendent and working with that group. So, it's a little different than being a principal where I last was last when I would be responsible for direct student involvement. Now I am in charge of managing the administrators and that requires

building relationships as much as it does when working directly with kids. (Initial Interview, lines 42–55)

The excerpts cited above demonstrate that six Recognition School principals perceived building relationships as an integral part of their position and a contributing factor to creating high achieving schools. Each leader reported a different approach and emphasis on building relational capacity with stakeholders. However, each indicated that they find relationship development to be critical, expected, and necessary for the organization to be successful.

Theme 2: Subtheme 2. Participants indicated that all decisions should be based on students and outcomes as they affect the achievement of the whole child. Elementary and secondary Recognition School principals shared a similar purpose and primary goal, support student achievement. These principals explicitly expressed how all decision making was rooted in what is best for kids. Removing any barriers to achievement for kids, supporting the social emotional needs of the child, and leveraging relationships was of the top descriptions used to demonstrate developing an experience that a child would consider exciting and enjoyable was the main goal. Dr. Gold explained how her team is expected to work for kids:

We always take it back to the students, right? We talk about how, if we teach these kids these skills, they can use them themselves at the times when they need them. So, I think when you talk to teachers about, you know, the why, or like, you know, why is this important? And it's, it's all about, so the kids can be successful and in every way. And I think that my teachers are also very attuned to the social, emotional needs of...children because we worked hard to get on the same page. (Initial Interview, lines 155–159)

Ms. Pink spoke to how her primary role as an administrator is to coach teachers and provide teachers what they need to clear the way for kids to be successful:

My primary responsibilities are just making sure that every day that teachers have what they need to do their job well and that students are safe and thriving. Every choice we make is for the student. (Initial Interview, lines 47–49)

Ms. Brown's personal feelings towards student success had less of an emphasis on academics and more on the whole child. Similar to the other elementary school principals, Ms. Brown discussed the significance of the student's experience, and being responsible for fostering happiness in order to achieve growth:

The smiles on the kid's face when they enter, that's happiness. I don't think anything else matters. I don't care about the test. I think seeing the smiles, I think seeing the growth of staff and students together is what school is about. It is certainly what kindergarten is about. Right? I like to look at them [the students] as, I have them from K to two. So, although the year ends, when we meet with IST and our teams to talk about what is next, we focus on where the kid is on the continuum of personal growth. And we trying to teach the parents this year about that. Yes, I'm doing my job I am focused on kids and that is more important than any test on a paper or anything like that. (Initial Interview, lines 593–602)

During both interviews Ms. Brown emphasized her students being the priority in her school. Her body language changed when she discussed her passion for developing young people. Ms. Brown's tone would change, and she was observed using more than a fair share of hand gestures when expressing what she does for kids:

No, I do what I gotta do for my kids. Kids come far, my biggest line with my staff and parents and my superintendent knows it. We do what's right for kids, whatever that is, I'm going to do. What's right for kids. So that's where, and sometimes parents have a

hard time hearing that because it's not about the parent, right? It's about their kid.

(Follow-Up Interview, lines 627–630)

The secondary principals also referred to decision making, planning, and purpose to be completely student driven. Mr. Blue's statement was similar to Ms. Brown's when she spoke to the significance of starting young, in kindergarten, and maintaining a decision making process that extended year after year:

We're going to work two or three years out. So, if we don't stay cognizant and on top of that, that could have a real impact on our students' performance and where we're headed. ... I think that maintaining that decision-making process and getting more people engaged and involved is key to making our kids successful. I said to my staff, "you know, me being a recognition school principal or not, or us being a recognition school, it doesn't mean anything. It also doesn't just happen for these kids when they enter my building. That happens when they come into the kindergarten, and all decisions are made for them there, and that's where it starts. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 687–689, 648–654)

Dr. White shared the value in a team approach supporting the needs of each child. She described her interactions with counselors and teachers and assertive or firm when discussing what was best for kids. The tone delivered and received by the researcher was that Dr. White demanded success in all categories within her school, curriculum, instruction, assessment, etc. but not for power, recognition, or fame. At the heart of her charge was the whole child and what's best for students:

I think also one of the pieces that supports me, and my success is that I work really, really closely as a principal with the counseling team. And every three weeks teachers come together to give names of kids like an RTI process, but I'm really assertive with the

guidance, counselors and psychologist. I'll ask, "What's happening with this kid? What's happening with this kid? What about this? What about that? Do this, do that." I'm very, very proactive in that area where some principals just kind of sit back and let them do their own thing, but I push, push, push, push, push. And so that's really helped us as far as graduation rates, all those different things. I will continue to go back to what is best for our students. Sometimes that's going heavy on teachers and counselors.

(Follow-Up Interview, lines 677–683)

Like all the other participants, Mr. Black is primarily focused on creating an experience that is positive and productive for students as far more rewarding than only focusing on academic recognition. Mr. Black explained that it is slightly paradoxical that typically people set a goal and go after it to achieve that goal. He explained in education that it is a little different because in his school his goal was to achieve academic success, but his plan was to make school the best place to be rather than drilling more academics:

My goal and it's easy to say that when the school is performing well, but my goal is for the experience to be a positive one for all of our students. Right. And in my experience, my goal has to be for me to be in the hallways and kind of hear and see anecdotally some of the learning happening. Of course, then we'll get hard data. But the goal is not driven by recognition or assessments. It's driven by my kids...I mean, there's, I think if you're driven just by numbers, and there is room for some of those decisions, but it don't benefit all kids. In my experience it's hard to just be driven grades and other recognitions. It's nice, but we want all decisions to be focused on all students performing at high levels in all areas. (Initial Interview, lines 223–236)

In summary of this subtheme, it was made clear that students and their overall experiences are what is most important to high achieving principals. Targeted academic intervention or enrichment are certainly important and inform strategic decision making regarding student achievement. However, the ultimate goal seems to be to provide an experience at school that gets students excited about coming to school, teachers focused and determined to work sensibly with children while they are at school, and that the principal is encouraging a healthy and equitable blend of social, emotional, and academic engagement.

Theme 2: Subtheme 3. Participants expressed the value associated with being explicit, direct, and deliberate with all forms of communication associated with introducing, promoting, and sustaining building operations. All participants discussed the importance of effective communication especially when discussing their artifacts. During each of the interviews, the researcher noticed a particular seriousness and change in facial expression when describing the importance of being deliberate and specific when communicating. In both interviews with Dr. Gold expressed the significance of carefully crafting word use on any correspondence that people in the community would read:

Here is my artifact. This was the presentation that I made to the PTA on diversity, equity, and inclusion. And the reason I was so thoughtful about it was because of the controversy that's coming up around this topic within our community. This was reviewed over and over by several people before I made it live. (Initial Interview, lines 233–236)

It's not a river town. [This town] is very conservative. I know these parents and the social politics that are in play around here. So that's why I was so thoughtful with this

presentation. And so mindful about the language that we were using is because I'm aware of what happens if you are not. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 546–548)

Ms. Pink paid close attention to her language use as it related to her weekly correspondence that is sent out to the community. She was very mindful of what she chooses to say and spoke about being coached to be mindful about her communication by her superintendent. The researcher wrote, “cautious look. Must be hypersensitive. Very alert. Superintendent wants to make sure things are said correctly” (Researcher notes) next to Ms. Pink's response:

When it comes to communication, I send out my weeklies on Friday to teachers, I do the week in review and our district superintendent is on it. She also sees my weekly letter to the parents. Sometimes she writes to me on the side or brings it up in meetings with all the nice things we put out. Or, sometimes she reads them and writes back to me to be mindful of the language I am using reminding me to consider my messaging because once things are put out there it's hard to take them back. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 593–599)

Ms. Brown indicated the importance of being explicit when communicating to teachers and parents but her explanation during both interviews suggested that she did not pay attention to what others might consider as being sensitive or politically correct. Instead, her focus was on making sure that she was transparent about what is happening at the school and what she needs from families and teachers.

So, communication is key. I know my teachers really well and they know what they get with me. I will just tell them how it is. Because they know what I expect and that I communicate hard. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 502–503)

When describing communication with parents, Ms. Brown clearly identified with her role as being the building leader and acted assertively when describing her actions and intentions related to communicating with stakeholders:

We have something called backpack mail, that's the artifact that I had you looked at on the website. So, backpack mail is where all the important documents go home. So, parents might get this via hard copy, backpack mail. It is direct, it is clear, and all they need to do is read what we are doing or what we need from them for their kids to be successful. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 503–505)

Mr. Blue reported that even though his district is very small their communication with the public is critical. The high school was described as being essential to the town. It was explained that the high school was constantly used as a public forum for events, clubs, and activities. Mr. Blue shared that how he works closely with the district to craft messages to the community to clearly explain what, how, and when the building is being used:

We, as a district and as a leadership team, are really trying to make those connections to community forums. We are consistently sharing information on our website to let kids and parents know what's going on. You know community triathlons, clubs, boy scouts. We are the community, this school. It could be adults all the way down to kids that want to know what is going on. ... As a community we are always working on coming together. We spend a lot of time trying to eat with the kids, you know, trying to make connections with staff. And even though COVID has impacted everyone, we do two or three events a month that are aligned with our high school kids down and match them up with kindergartners. It is extremely important that we are clear with what is happening and where. Is this a sixth grade event? Or is this a kindergarten or a seventh grade

event? The staff and community need to know and so we, you know, we've done a lot to improve communication, really taking time to make sure what we say is correct, so we can bring that sense of community together. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 439–443, 448–456)

Similar to Ms. Brown, Dr. White displayed a demeanor that is very plain spoken.

During each interview she never held back. Her authenticity pushed through whether it was discussing the passing of her child or implementing an international baccalaureate program. Dr. White emphasized a need that the others did not speak of in such depth. Dr. White explained the importance of staff being able to communicate with each other. Before her arrival at the school, she learned that teachers were not allowed to call out to parents and could not call room to room. Dr. White displayed emotions during her interviews that would suggest that type of micromanagement from the administration prior to her was erroneous:

When I learned that people were being prohibited from communicating with themselves, I put my foot down. I'm like, okay, I put out an email and I'm like, we're using the phones. Period. Here's your extension. If it doesn't work, let me know. And I swear to God, it took months for people to be like, "I can use the phone?" I'm like, yes, you need to tell me you're running from the third floor to the first floor to find out whether you could give a task for so-and-so and that's how you communicate. It was bizarre. And then for months, people will be like, my phone doesn't work. No, your phone works. It's not plugged in. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 480–485)

She would continue to explain the importance of communication. When described what she thought was one thing that could lead to becoming a successful school she responded: "It's

constant, consistent, and clear communication to the kids, the teachers, and the community” (Follow-Up Interview, line 816).

Mr. Black’s description of effective communication brought attention to the multiple layers associated with communicating and how to communicate throughout a school district. Mr. Black shared that texting was the preferred, effective, and most used form of communication between administrators:

And we have a texting thread, myself, the AD, the deputy superintendent, and the superintendent. So that’ll be going off all the time. And a lot of it has to do with, staying in the loop and being informed. “Hey, we moved this game. We did this. We did that.” So that, you know, that keeps that open line of communication between the decision makers. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 490–494)

As it relates to communicating with the staff and community, Mr. Black emphasized the importance of being articulate and intentional with language use:

I think it’s our leadership that is expected to be responsive and recognizes the need to communicate with their constituents. Be it the faculty, staff, community, and students they need to be informed. I don’t know that it looks the same for everyone or every group or every day, but I think it’s being specific when being responsive and while communicating can support success in whatever you are trying to accomplish and decrease any potential problems or issues that can come from saying or writing the wrong things. (Initial Interview, lines 112–117)

Although each participant shared experiences associated with the importance of communicating effectively it seemed like at the secondary level principals were more likely to collaborate or rely

on input from their district colleagues. It was made clear that being mindful of what and how things are communicated supported success and prevented issues arising.

Theme 2: Subtheme 4. Participants emphasized the significance of being authentic when creating, promoting, or managing systems that ultimately support high expectations and the building's mission. At the elementary and secondary level, participants shared similar sentiments of leading in within dynamic or complex systems. Each participant explained that building, promoting, and maintaining positive relationships with all stakeholders provided the space to hold students, staff, family, and leadership to high expectations that support the district mission.

Dr. Gold's personality suggested a seriousness that supported her promotion of having a high standard. With aspirations to become a district leader, Dr. Gold emphasized one of her non-negotiables for creating a high achieving school was fostering a building wide maintenance of high expectations for all:

So, for me, a non-negotiable is having high expectations for all kids. This non-negotiable is for teachers also and is about teaching kids, having teachers know where kids are and having them target their instruction towards that and then collaborating around goals for students and goals for the school. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 453–456)

Dr. Gold continued to explain the importance of teaming, team building, and how positive relationships, modeled by her, were ways all school constituents can be held accountable to achieving school and district goals. Ms. Pink shared that as a practicing educator she was always encouraged to try new things and to look for learning opportunities when things do not work out as planned. She explained wanting to be part of the growth and would make herself available to come into her teachers' classes as requested. When describing her feelings towards needing her

staff to be resilient and creating spaces for them to take risks, especially during walkthroughs or observations, Ms. Pink’s facial expressions changed drastically. The physical orientation originally depicted was a relaxed brow in the face and a casual, comfortable recline in her desk chair. With the mention of expectations and standards her look quickly transformed into a laser focused, squinted stare that began with an index finger point directly into the camera and concluded with both elbows on the desk and her face much closer to the screen clearly indicating that this was a passionate claim of hers:

I have been saying to all the folks I work with, “feel free to invite me in when you’re trying something that’s new and unfamiliar. I want to let you know you have my support.” And I know it might be messy work because that’s an immediate place where we can support the work that I can physically see, and I know I would never give an ineffective or even a developing to someone trying something new. When people take that risk, do something new and creative, that is when I find myself giving people the most “highly effective.” That is how our school becomes highly effective. (Follow Up-Interview, lines 91–96)

Ms. Brown shared that she gives great advice and support to her staff however, she struggles listening to her own advice. When speaking about reaching high levels of school wide achievement, Ms. Brown broke it down to leading with her heart and learning from herself as much as she is learning from others. She discussed taking more time for self translates to being able to contribute more to others:

I need to practice what I preach and stop trying to do everything. I need to remind myself, like I remind others, to disconnect every once in a while, you know? COVID has been hard with us...I’m writing and filling out DOH reports at night and everything.

Saturday, Sunday, Christmas day, I was filling out a report. As I had a house full of people. My kids are like, “really Mom?” I’m like, “okay, I’ve got to say it. I’ll be right there.” (Initial Interview, lines 537–540)

Ms. Brown spoke to her ambition to succeed, and her high powered engine is what makes her leadership style hers. She shared that she has always been full of energy and that is what has made her successful. Ms. Brown spoke about that being one of her best attributes and why she feels so many people are drawn to her. She continues the explanation and dialogue with her kids on Christmas by trying to be silly:

“You can look at the turkey. It’s so good.” You know? I’m like, “I’m on my way.” So, I think that is my strength and my weakness but it’s what’s needed to keep us all achieving. (Initial Interview, lines 541–542).

Mr. Blue indicated that the success of a school begins with the standards the school sets forth for the students. He takes time to discuss what he says to his staff during observation interviews or at faculty meetings:

I will ask them, “What’s the most important thing that you need to teach next year?” And then I tell them to prioritize that. We started the school year out not sure what was going to happen. We said, “When you see your kids, I want you to prioritize those standards. Ask them where are they at? You instruct them to achieve, and they will.” (Follow-Up Interview, lines 324–329)

Mr. Blue shared a passion for addressing the needs of the whole child inside and outside of school. He talked about his counselors and advisors playing an integral role in childhood development and shared a little about what his advisors were doing to support students:

I mean, one of the things we’re doing right now, because we have been able to connect

with the kids is we've taken my class advisors and each group is planning events for kids to be involved in every month. Organizing fundraisers, supporting events, cleaning up. Kids and adults at school working together. Now that'll bring just a little something different to the building. So, they're getting to know each other. I'm...you know, I think it's a lot of modeling. If we want the standard to be high, we need to model it. We encourage a lot of just connecting with kids and talking to them. (Initial Interview, lines 308–312)

The school and family community are referenced repeatedly as a major contributor to school wide success throughout Mr. Blue's initial and follow up interview experiences:

We structure a lot of pieces that explain the expectations we have for our students when we are reaching out to families. We are doing the things with families; we are modeling the expectation that are for their kids that may address their association with trauma and ACEs and getting them to know their kids by having them doing different events within the building. (Initial Interview, lines 313–316)

Dr. White emphasized her observations with staff and their relationships with other colleagues. She indicated that these relationships could lead to increasing school wide achievement or discouraging it because of the way faculty acts towards each other. Dr. White described holding her colleagues accountable to treating each other with dignity and respect was important for morale and was an opportunity for an adult to model an expected behavior for a student or another adult, particularly the new hires:

You know, one time one teacher yelled at a secretary over something stupid in front of other staff and some students. I heard about it after. I actually went down to his room, pulled him out into the hallway and was like, "really, really is this how you are going to

treat people? Like in the scheme of life, was yelling at her really important?

Embarrassing. Have a higher standard for yourself. It is ridiculous how low this behavior is. You know what I expect here.” And he was like, “no... Ah...uhm... I am...sorry and apologized later to her. My authenticity resonated with him and then he knew. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 519–523)

Mr. Black revealed his need to balancing the pressure presented by his students and teachers from within the school, and the pressure presented by parents and district leaders from around the school. He displayed a serious interest in having the researcher understand that a reasonable amount of discomfort supported growth. He described what he admired about his superintendent:

He's privileged to have the pressure from within and around. High expectations mean higher performance. So, I sent [this] 42 second clip I found about football to our superintendent. We say that here all the time, like we're privileged to kind of have the right amount of pressure like, “oh man, I have the pressure to get this done.” The clip demonstrated being under pressure. My Sup and I love football. So, it was kind of funny that my favorite team's quarterback kind of said this stuff that we say all the time and high expectations, that's important. We gotta have them for all kids, but again, they can't paralyze you. So, our district administration ... I think they're phenomenal at kind of keeping just enough pressure on you. That the line is always tight. It's not too tight where it's going to snap, but it's not loose where it sags. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 201–210)

At the elementary and secondary level, it was noticed that Recognition School principals relied on being authentic when promoting and maintaining high expectations. Participants

explained the need for students, staff, and families to model the expectations they intend to achieve through action.

Theme 3: “Building”

Participants described the need for a balanced, reciprocal relationship between the leader, the needs of the building, and the vision of the district as it relates to creating and maintaining large and small systems designed to increase student achievement. Recognition School principals often referred to or spoke of their role in the system. They each explained the importance of their contributions to the entire system and district and explained their responsibility in team learning and the benefits of systems thinking.

Theme 3:“Building”	Subtheme
<p>Participants described the need for a balanced, reciprocal relationship between the leader, the needs of the building, and the vision of the district as it relates to creating and maintaining large and small systems designed to increase student achievement.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants described the importance of building relationships with district personnel that promotes a commitment and contribution to sharing the districts goals, mission, vision, and strategic plans. 2. Participants emphasized the implications associated with recognizing and developing appropriate, expressive and receptive communication practices supported the fidelity of leadership action and expected from stakeholders above and below the building leader. 3. Participants expressed the value in having an expectation for the district to provide support, education, and to remove barriers that ultimately disrupts paths to student achievement systematically.

Figure 4. Theme Statement 3 Development. This figure illustrates how the third theme statement was developed from three subtheme statements.

Theme 3, Subtheme 1. Participants described the importance of building relationships with district personnel that promotes a commitment and contribution to sharing the district’s goals, mission, vision, and strategic plans. Relationship building was referenced by every

Recognition School principal in each of the interviews. Elementary and secondary principals explained the importance of developing meaningful relationships with students and faculty supported a high achieving building. They also explained the similarities between building positive and meaningful relationships with district leaders that contributed to high achieving school districts.

Dr. Gold referenced her artifact, a *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Elementary School* PowerPoint presentation to her community. She emphasized the importance of collaboration between the buildings and the district to create a framework that follows state law and supports the interests of the district's mission and vision:

It was important to us that when we created our DEI framework that we connect it to the district's vision and then to state standards. Like that's all slide three is about, is what in New York state social studies standards say about DEI. So, I gave examples of what, you know, how that would translate into social studies. And then I went into the culture, responsive sustaining education framework. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 570–574)

She continued to explain the development of her presentation. Dr. Gold included her interest in making sure all efforts are aligned to the district's promise, vision, and mission:

Whenever we are building anything, we are always thinking of attaching whatever we're doing to the vision of that district. My [experience] has really shown me that my part on a team is what supports the connection to the promise and vision of the district. Being able to bring your work back to your vision is what's going to drive it forward. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 641–644)

Dr. Gold shared her interest and passion in becoming a district leader someday. She provided a focused perspective that highlighted her commitment to bringing all policy, planning, and

practice back to the mission, vision, and promise of the district.

Ms. Pink explained that coming from a small district collaborating and learning as a small administrative team creates a space to demonstrate leadership ability and build relationships with them:

We have our admin meetings every other week and we don't have APS in this district.

So, it's, again, it's just the four principals, the superintendent, the couple of the... assistant superintendents for instruction. So, it's very small. Yeah. So, it's like we wear multiple hats, and we rely on each other. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 132–135)

Ms. Pink illustrated the significance of working closely with her district administrators and how that helps to create meaningful relationships among the team and Ms. Brown offered a similar position with her response. First, Ms. Pink:

So, you know, when we come together for these administrative meetings, there's a combination of personal, as well as like work related stuff. We know, we certainly know each other's families, you know, at the holiday, she mails a card, you know, get a bottle of wine. Before board meetings on those late nights, she like sends us a menu, you know. So, we all put in our order, we go out to eat at a restaurant together. We often, you know, we used to go out to eat. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 343–350)

Similarly, Ms. Brown felt that solidarity supports the growth of a relationship between administrative colleagues:

We are four elementary schools, and we are a united front. So, we send out a primary principal school calendar for the month of June and list the field day dates moving up specifically to our K through two. We are solid. We trust each other. The reason we

communicate the way we do is because this district works really well with our superintendent. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 197–201)

Mr. Blue acknowledged his superintendent for making sensible moves to increase achievement throughout the district. He explained a situation that was unexpected but was designed to support the forward progress of the district:

I was told that I would be leaving my position to solve a problem. So, I unexpectedly left the middle school and came up here for a variety of reasons. My superintendent thought there needed to be a change up here, so he relied on me to lead it. (Initial Interview, lines 727–730)

Mr. Blue described the proximity of buildings contributing to the effectiveness of the team. He explained that the small campus atmosphere promoted tighter relationships among all stakeholders because everything was very close to each other:

I think we think we are on one campus. We're almost one campus, where my high school sits, the elementary sits down below it. The middle school sits over across the road from me. And so, we're within, you know, within a three minute walk of each other five minutes' walk, but we're, we're not, we're not all on the same campus, but, you know, it's close enough where when we do those activities, we just walk the kids over, you know? So, you know, as a leadership team, we've, we've tried to really build that sense of team and family between each other. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 458–467)

Dr. White shared that her relationship with district administration was very tight. She considered her former superintendent as a partner to her.

My former superintendent is dedicated to creating a successful school system. And so, when she brought me in, I was told what we were going to do. So, it's almost like her

and I were the partners in creating a really good school. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 84–87)

Dr. White continued to explain that the support she received from her mentor, this superintendent, directly influenced her to make sure all leadership decisions were informed by good data and that everything aligned to the mission:

She was very progressive. So, the two of us together, we're like a powerhouse. So that as a principal, you could, I could be that true visionary with ideals and the ability to change. ... So, you know, she was always, she would push me to do this and to do that. She would always, she kept pushing, pushing, pushing. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 107–108, 573–575)

Mr. Black felt the same affinity for his superintendent that Dr. White did. There was a noticeable level of respect given to both those leaders. Mr. Black described his interaction with district leadership and shared that he has tried to model his relationship with his superintendent for his building administrators:

So, our, our district administrators are very good leaders. And I think they know how to leverage their, their presence, their expertise, their ability. I mean, I think they really know how to build a leadership team. They encourage that we find interns to invite. I think that helps us kind of do the same thing. Like I'm trying to do the same thing with our assistant principals and our department administrators and kind of watching how they manage me and like, oh, he just got me to do this. This supports all of our goals as it relates to achieving the district's mission. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 330–334)

Several times throughout the interviews Mr. Black spoke of pressure, and how the right amount of pressure helps to keep all the leaders accountable to achieving the goals of the district:

Every interaction I have, I leave thinking we have district leaders that give the right amount of pressure where you kind of, you feel the pressure, but you don't break. Like, I feel just enough pressure. Like when a superintendent calls, I'm like, oh, I better get that, but it's not like, oh my God, I'm going to fall apart calling superintendents. I know that they expect me to pick up and contribute to my job, my... role. But at the same time, it's not like, ah, I'll answer it later. Like there's just enough pressure from our deputy superintendent and superintendent I think, to, to push us. So, I think that's, that's important. I think we have leadership that will let us lead our buildings. As long as it's going in the direction it needs to go. (Initial Interview, lines 314–321)

The excerpts cited above demonstrated that positive and meaningful district relationships create trust and build leadership capacity among the team. All leaders were responsible for modeling a certain expectation that would ultimately support the system in moving to achieving the vision and mission of the district. Each leader reported a similar collaborative experience that formed from creating a positive relationship.

Theme 3: Subtheme 2. Participants emphasized the implications associated with recognizing and developing appropriate, expressive, and receptive communication practices supported the fidelity of leadership action and expected from stakeholders above and below the building leader. Recognition School principals that represent elementary and secondary schools discussed the importance of collaboration, taking action, and expecting all stakeholders to be accountable to their own growth and contribution to the system.

Dr. Gold began with emphasizing the importance of building relationships but she did that so she could explain that collaboration has been the driver of distributive leadership and gathering input from stakeholders to increase achievement:

So, it's so important to build strong relationships and after, and during, I always utilize a collaborative process with my teachers, and I encourage it and expect it from my admin team. And I think that any teacher and leader at any level is going to respect that. And I, and I said, and I know good instruction and good instruction, you know, translates all the way from a kindergarten classroom up to 12th grade? I can go to any, any room and say what good instruction is. So, I am mindful about bringing this up and talking with my team about how to improve instruction. (Follow-Up Interview, 279–283)

Similarly, Ms. Pink is interested in meeting with her team to discuss, plan, promote, and manage all topics in education. She also referenced the importance of inviting the community to dialogue. During the Initial Interview, Ms. Pink referred to a quarterly event she calls “principals’ conversation” to discuss education. The administrative team members and teachers are also invited to attend:

Every few weeks I’m doing a principal’s conversation. I offer them typically four times a year. It’s just tea and talk with parents, teachers, admin team members. I just do 10 to 15 minutes of a curriculum presentation to start and to keep my parents in the loop. I also look to find anything that I think parents and colleagues would like or be interested in. Something contemporary with education. And then I just open it the flow. It’s always just Q and A. It is a form of communication to the community and my team, it goes to helping parents feel informed and having opportunity to, you know, have time with me, and see that my team members, who do attend, have similar expectations and understandings as I do when it comes to education. (Initial Interview, lines 462–466)

Ms. Brown focused on discussing the importance of leadership, particularly the superintendent, using consistent and explicit language to properly articulate what is expected when launching or facilitating initiatives and programs:

I think he has a vision for his administration and that is a must. And there is some language that's consistent with that, that he expects, and that is a must. Do you know what I mean? We are, you know, I've worked in other districts where, and it's funny, we were just talking about this but the fact that mine is consistent with language and what he expects is what I think is taking us to the next level. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 330–333)

Mr. Blue emphasized the significance of getting the entire leadership team together in the same room to solve problems, review expectations, and discuss anything affecting the system. He indicated that these times were sacred and supported leadership teams discussing building and district specific information to sustain progress:

We meet weekly as a district leadership team and building leadership team. It's... two, two pieces. We do what we call an, a meeting for all, and that includes transportation, food, service, and facilities, business manager, every building principal, superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, and around the table we go, that covers everyone. So that's the larger group. So, we have some of those bigger discussions and planning sessions. Then we have a smaller instructional group that breaks off, that's our instructional component. And that's building principals, director of curriculum, superintendent at those. You know, we talk safety, curriculum, the instructional component of it all and planning. The fact that we are meeting to discuss anything about the building and district is very important. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 359–366)

For Dr. White, collaboration is not always the best practice. She describes her new district administrative team as challenging to work with and very different from what she has been familiar with. Her body language and vibe changed when asked to describe her current practice with building and district administrators as it relates to meetings, communicating, and planning:

The new superintendent happens to be, he, he always has a, like a quick, like, he would never say, that's a great idea that let's talk about this. Let's just say he's not a collaborator. He's not a visionary either. That is up to us. He is very much into data. So, he's going to have a quick retort. He's great with numbers. He's great with a budget. He's great for this. COVID, he's doing a pretty good job because he is smart, but he's not necessarily an educator. The communication comes from the buildings, and it is probably because of our experience. Our ability to communicate with the community, teachers, and administration is probably more important now than ever. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 175–179)

Mr. Black was instructed to present information to the community about outperforming the narrative. He was charged with creating and facilitating a presentation that spoke to kids but was intended on spotlighting the need for parents to engage and contribute to their children's development. In doing so, the intention was that the school will be given more opportunities to connect and communicate with the families. The superintendent was impressed with Mr. Black and his presentation because he was specific and direct with his communication:

I was directed to do this presentation at a board meeting on how our students are doing. He explained to me that he wanted me to keep sharing a new phrase that I brought up during an admin meeting. And I kept saying, "I don't think I'm smart enough to coin any

phrase, but if you want me to, I will keep saying it is our duty to and we are outperforming the narrative.” So, my superintendent loves that and now he attributed that phrase to me in our partnership team meeting district-wide last night. So maybe I did get to coin that phrase, but because the narrative right now is “everyone’s failing,” and that’s not true. The amount of kids we have failing is like half a percent higher than our last three-year average and it was on me and my team to clearly explain that to an increasingly concerned community. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 539–556)

All six participants shared the importance of communicating with people in order develop or sustaining high performance in schools and school districts. The individual supports the smaller team, which supports the larger team, which supports the entire system. Each principal spoke to the significance of being clear and explicit when communicating to the community, to staff, students, and administration.

Theme 3: Subtheme 3. Participants expressed the value in having an expectation for the district to provide support education, and to remove barriers that ultimately disrupt paths to student achievement systematically. Developing and fostering relationships throughout the learning organization was reported as a priority and essential for increasing student achievement in elementary and secondary schools. Dr. Gold, Ms. Pink, and Ms. Brown refer to need for multi-levels of support, vertically and horizontally between administration, consistent collaboration, and recognizing the work life balance to become high performing in a school. Dr. Gold specifically referred to collaboration among administrative team members to provide support to school leaders:

Before I arrived, there wasn’t much collaboration among the team. So, I knew that was going to be a challenge in order for us to achieve...and.... this...Is something I can do,

you know, I've done this with teachers. I think that translates to doing it with principals and assistant principals also because people are people. And for people to be successful they need other people to work together to eliminate the things that get in people's way.

(Follow-Up Interview, lines 337–441)

During her explanation, she was referring to both how she interacts with her administrative colleagues and how she mindfully takes action to provide support for her colleagues. She continued to explain scenarios in removing barriers for teachers so they can support their students:

I feel like am constantly working to remove pitfalls for my staff. Like...the psychologist says something, and it might be one thing, or a special education teacher says something. And she pushes back against that a little bit because she thinks she's right. She thinks she knows her, her student. But after you do that, several times, people start to think that you're not open to suggestions. I sometimes need to make sure I am supporting the conversation so I can model behavior, so things run smoothly. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 469–472)

Ms. Pink and Ms. Brown discussed how they use their relationships to sometimes share how they need support from the district in order to grow. Ms. Pink discussed that as a smaller school she is expected to contribute to the system:

I have those relationships with everyone. Positive ones. And then I of my superintendent and I think she's also got a nice balance. So, you know, she knows we know that we're expected to be here. This isn't a district that you can take personal days or vacation days. Like we're, we're here and we are here to support each other. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 357–359)

Similarly, Ms. Brown demonstrated that she could expect more from her district because she is expected to contribute so much to the team. The increased expectation to achieve holds each other accountable for each expectation:

Our systems that the school district has in place amongst the administration have helped us to navigate very troubled times. They are smart because they were developed by all of us. I don't think you're an administration team of one. I don't think any in this country is relaxed and not fatigued right now. I think that I am expected to perform and so are they... and... Everyone else here at [school name]. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 213–216)

Like Dr. Gold, Mr. Blue explained the significance and importance of collaboration amongst the administrative team in a small school district. He indicated that the entire team relies on each other in critical ways to function effectively, particularly through conversations with each other and at all levels. He indicated that these conversations build connections and clear paths for success:

But it's...., it's just working with them directly and having those conversations that make us succeed. And we do it all over. We do it you know, we don't, when we talk about kids, we have grade level meetings every week. It, you know, they're geared about talking towards kids, successful kids, kids that are struggling. And part of those conversations is always about, are they connected? I will ask, "who, which one of you guys have connections with this student and can talk to them personally and know where they are." We do the same this as administrators when talking about teachers. We do a lot to make things run smoothly. We have a lot of emphasis, not just in my building, but as a district, to clear paths, we've had long range plans. (Initial Interview, lines 319–326)

Dr. White and Mr. Black shared that barriers to success are all around and if not removed

by administration at the district or building level, than parts of the system will not be successful. Dr. White's expectation was that problems are identified and directly dismantled so students can achieve:

I would say schools set up too many constraints for change, you know, oh, we want to do that. We have to set up a committee. Oh God, I hate committees. Too many people influencing the direction of the school. I expect to meet with my district colleagues to discuss next steps and then I will give direction. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 715–717)

Mr. Black also indicated how the role of an administrator removing barriers ultimately is what supports student achievement:

The barriers are, I think the barriers are faced everywhere. Sometimes there's contractual barriers. Sometimes there's barriers of resources. You know, we've had various barriers here in this district. Like our ENL populations increased like 600% in three years. So, trying to catch up with that when you can't even hire teachers teach that's been, been a little difficult. The expectation is that administration will remove them. Constraint after constraint need to be knocked down by administration in order for these kids to succeed. (Initial Interview, lines 278–282)

In summary, building relationships with administration and stakeholders, utilizing effective communication techniques, and expecting the district to remove barriers for students to be successful, will support and increase school wide achievement. Recognition School principals at the elementary and secondary level indicate that their action, contribution, and collaborative efforts have the potential to directly determine outcomes.

Finding 2

Finding 2: Participants suggested their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools contributed to organizational success because they established personal and system wide norms that directly influenced the growth, sustainability, and strategic decision making made by principals in schools.

Two themes emerged from the data to result in this finding. The first theme expressed by study participants was the importance of creating, promoting, and maintaining high expectations for themselves and making all decisions in schools directly connected to the needs and interests of the whole child. All six participants described the significance of establishing norms of themselves and throughout the organization that ultimately supported the interests of the whole child. Participants reported a need to build positive relationships with students and staff to create a healthy learning environment. Similarly, they shared the value of making strategic social, emotional, and academic decisions that directly supported students and contributed to increased school wide achievement.

The second theme that emerged in relation to this finding statement was that participants demonstrated the significance of developing an effective hiring process and the importance of strategically hiring personnel to ensure that they demonstrate qualities that are aligned to the mission and or vision of the district. Participants described the significance of hiring smart, finding the right fit, and onboarding people that represent the school's mission and who can positively contribute to teams. Participants emphasized the value associated with utilizing effective communication to increase collaboration and distribution of leadership efforts. Each case expressed the value in drawing upon experience to develop system wide norms that are strategic, growth based, and sustainable as it relates to developing high achieving schools.

Figure 5 represents the emergence of the two themes that develop the second finding. A total of four sub themes undergirds themes one and two of this finding and are presented in Figure 6.

<p>Finding 2: Participants suggested their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools contributed to organizational success because they established personal and system wide norms that directly influenced the growth, sustainability, and strategic decision making made by principals in schools.</p>	
<p>Theme 4: Participants expressed the importance of creating, promoting, and maintaining high expectations for themselves and making all decisions in schools directly connected to the needs and interests of the whole child.</p>	<p>Theme 5: Participants explained the significance of developing the hiring process and the importance of strategically hiring personnel to ensure that they demonstrate qualities that are aligned to the mission and or vision of the district.</p>

Figure 5. Finding Statement 2 Development. This figure illustrates how the second finding statement was developed from the fourth and fifth theme.

Theme 4: “Norms”

Participants expressed the importance of creating, promoting, and maintaining high expectations for themselves and making all decisions in schools directly connected to the needs and interests of the whole child. Two sub themes emerged from the data: (a) Participants described the significance of hiring smart, finding the right fit, and onboarding people that represent the school's mission and who can positively contribute to teams.; (b) participants emphasized the value associated with utilizing effective communication to increase collaboration and distribution of leadership efforts.

Theme 4: “Norms”	Subtheme
Participants expressed the importance of creating, promoting, and maintaining high expectations for themselves and making all decisions in schools directly connected to the needs and interests of the whole child.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants reported a need to build positive relationships with students and staff to create a healthy learning environment. 2. Participants emphasized the value of making strategic social, emotional, and academic decisions that directly support student achievement.

Figure 6. Theme Statement 4 Development. This figure illustrates how the fourth theme statement was developed from two subtheme statements.

Theme 4: Subtheme 1. Participants reported a need to build positive relationships with students and staff to create a healthy learning environment. The importance of building positive relationships with students and staff was discussed by every participant. Each participant referred to building relationships when asked questions regarding trust building, inclusion, and achievement. Each indicated that school achievement and positive relationships with and among the students and staff of a learning organization were directly related to each other.

Dr. Gold emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence combined with academic intelligence. During the initial and follow up interviews, she referenced how she mindfully utilized her own positive relationship with the school psychologist to help her create a community of relationships focused on emotional awareness after previously working with an organization that was trying to train her school members on how to increase achievement:

We have merged mindfulness with something we call, it’s called our CARE program. It stands for community awareness, relationships, and empathy. It’s taught by a school psychologist, it’s really a social emotional program that focuses on developing the whole child. (Initial Interview, lines 102–106)

Dr. Gold continued her explanation of the program and praised her faculty members because of

their evident buy-in to the program. She explained that her students understood the concepts and enjoyed their participation as well:

I would say a majority [staff and students] really believed, because it stands for community awareness, relationships and, and empathy. It's taught by a school psychologist, it's really a social emotional program, but we bring mindfulness into it every, every session which is about a half an hour long, every session begins with a meditation that we draw the children's attention to something focused. (Initial Interview, lines 101, 105–108)

When Social Emotional Learning (SEL) was mentioned during the follow up interview, Dr. Gold explained that her teachers had the confidence to bring mindfulness to children because she empowered her staff to learn throughout the year and has built rapport with them: "I think it's the time that I've taken to build strong relationships with teachers" (Follow-Up Interview, line 172).

Similarly to Dr. Gold, Ms. Pink indicated the importance of building relationships with her faculty. She explained that those bonds translated into building positive relationships with and among students. She described the significance of keeping her staff motivated and the importance of creating a classroom culture that demonstrates that a teacher can learn with their students. Ms. Pink emphasized the need for her teachers to try new things, so that their experiences do not become boring:

Let's continue to build upon the relationships. We have to make sure teachers are still motivated to, to learn new things and try new things. Take risks, be messy because I think the kids are benefiting from that tremendously. They see us as learners as well. So, I, I feel like it's just keeping, not letting it get stale. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 472–478)

Ms. Brown shared similar sentiments about the importance of relationship building. She described that highly effective teachers, students, and administrators need to be properly trained and should develop a mindset that allows them to seek the learning moment in every experience:

So, I think it's relationship building. That takes time. It's trust. It's, living through a crisis. Right? What's the line on that? Never let a good crisis go to waste. Right?

Never let something. That's terrible. Go to waste. So, I think that is really the strength of our team. I think that is huge. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 281–284)

During the initial and follow up interviews with Mr. Blue, he made several comments that included the importance of building relationships with students and teachers. He described how building partnerships with people and listening to what they need was some of his best followed advice. He explained the importance of focusing on the future and engaging opportunities to socialize with students and teachers, made the experience feel less about an assignment or achievement but more about the person and their overall wellness:

I try to stay focused on, on where we're headed. And I, you know, I set the bridge. I am the link. I feel the need to support their experience and expect to include them in the experience. I said, I listened. I don't interrupt. You know, so there is a big one. Listen.

It's amazing and its showing that you want to know the person who is in front of you, their personality. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 146–150)

Mr. Blue explained a situation he encountered with a teacher that was struggling with students who have experienced serious trauma in their lives. He shared how often he had to go back and remind teachers the significance of their roles as mentors and the importance of building relationships with kids:

I've had to go back to them a couple more times after that. And that's what it is. It's,

you know, it's just constantly, constantly building those relationships and, and moving forward. And, sometimes it's biting your tongue. It's... taken me a long time. It's taken, it, took me a few years to learn that. You gotta learn to swallow your pride sometimes to keep people moving in the right direction. (Initial Interview, lines 863–868)

He continued to explain that working with teachers is as challenging as working with kids. He described how sometimes he would need to go back and check on staff to ensure that they understood his expectations regarding building positive relationships with kids:

This goes back to relationships. I'll look right at him. I say, I get, you might not agree with it, but I'm asking you to do it. And I want you to do it to the best of your ability. And you know, and most of them, for the most part, Joe, some of them do it begrudgingly and I get it. (Initial Interview, lines 507–510)

Overall, Mr. Blue demonstrated a belief in the power of establishing relationships and the significance it had on his building environment and on student achievement:

I'm a real believer in whether it's a kid that's in trouble or a kid that's doing great that they should walk away with a learning from every experience. And knowing that regardless of what they do, we're still going to help them through. And we're still going to make sure that they, they get what they need out of us, regardless of, you know, they might screw up, but guess what? We all make mistakes. We're going to sit, we're going to talk about it. You know, so it's, it's, again, it's building those relationships and getting to know who they are. (Initial Interview, lines 355–363)

Dr. White demonstrated an increased focus on modeling expectations to staff and students. She explained the importance of developing her faculty and treating them the way she

expects them to treat their students:

I love to guide, I love to mentor, and I love to give. My teachers are expected to do the same. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 153–154)

She also described using language intentionally to cultivate a positive climate in the school. Dr. White described language choice as a critical component of school wide and student achievement to achieve transparency when delivering expectations to staff and students:

When I came, I've made a huge, huge effort to bring them [students and faculty] together. So, I, you know, I always use the word team. I always put those subtle messages about team. I always put messages about the PVH family, people who I know don't, didn't normally get along with each other. I would kind of socially engineer to bring them together. Kids saw and felt that. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 318–320)

Mr. Black explained his approach as a building leader revolves around being student centered. He shared that it starts with him finding ways to model and share with his staff. He said more than once that supporting school wide and student achievement in school begins with effectively educating personnel. He explained the importance of providing the space for his personnel to grow directly improves school culture which is deeply rooted in how school leaders promote relationship building:

There has to be that culture where you're getting to try something and as long as it's in the best interest of the students. I think really creating that culture where, you know, growth and failing forward is important. I think that's first and foremost and then making sure people have the tools to do it. It's not just about saying it. It's not just about modeling. It's about really letting people know here's how you do it. Here's how you can get started. I think that's important that as the principal I show that by doing that

myself. (Initial Interview, lines 135–144)

He explained the importance of developing and strengthening relationships between students and faculty as a serious measure of school success. Mr. Black described how he incorporated mindfulness practices during his faculty meetings and expected his faculty to share them with students:

This is a faculty stretching clinic. They probably love that also. Yeah. So, it's just meeting the needs of, of our faculty and our students. And we do a lot of community circles, which have a mindfulness aspect to it. You know, it seems to be a blend, a blurring of the lines with social, emotional learning and mindfulness now where it was like, hey, we're going to do mindfulness now. There's kind of like, they kind of go hand in hand. (Initial Interview, lines 135–144)

Throughout elementary and secondary schools high performing schools have school leaders that promote relationship building. Either through language or practice, Recognition School principals shared that they recognized the influence of expecting, modeling, and engaging in positive interactions with individuals and groups. The mindful creation and management of relationships throughout the school was intentional by each of these leaders.

Theme 4: Subtheme 2. Participants emphasized the value of making strategic social, emotional, and academic decisions that directly support student achievement. Making strategic social, emotional, and academic decisions throughout schools was referenced by each participant. Positive relationships with students and staff were discussed by every participant. Professional judgement, language use, planning, and partnering were mindful leadership moves or techniques that supported the development of a high performing culture and the whole child.

During the Follow-Up Interview, Dr. Gold shared her artifact, a PowerPoint presentation

on diversity, equity, and inclusion to the Parent Teacher Association. She described the importance of being strategic about how information is presented to the community. She transitioned from describing images intentionally chosen for her slideshow to a workshop she conducted for the same parents. She discussed the importance of purposeful and smart decision making as it relates to introducing parents to information that is aligned with what is being taught at school and that they can use to support children.

Parents are also interested in like book studies. We, this is sort of not really mindful, but kind of in the same realm. We just read how to raise an adult by Judith, like cut hams or something. We also wrote, what, what did we read last year at the what's it called? Empathy? Something. Oh, on selfie by Michelle Borba. So, parents are in the, in this game, like they'll, they'll, they'll read a book, the high attendant discussion we'll go to a workshop because they, they want strategies and tools to use with their kids and they, and they understand the importance of wellness. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 512–524)

Ms. Pink described her strategy to bring teachers closer together to meet and collaborate during school hours directly increased student achievement. She created team leaders to help organize grade level performance. This was described as a mindful action that was well received by the entire group.

I think most of the work sometimes is problem solving, but I feel like at least with the team leaders it's collective and how we've come up with the solutions, you know, I at least break there. I could say, well, what, what were you guys thinking? Or did you guys have any ideas for that? Or you know, we could collaboratively do it. So as much as possible I can do that. And then there are certain ones where they just want me to make the decision. Right. You know, like they just need somebody to make it. So I mean, it

happens, there's always a problem daily, but I feel like those types of conversations happen more through the structure of team leaders. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 210–216)

During those professional learning communities (PLC), Ms. Pink described the dialogue and action planning that took place supported the development of teachers and provided them strategies from each other to share with students. Ms. Pink explained the significance of students learning strategies to cope emotionally or to appropriately engage academically was teaching self-regulation and self-management strategy development which ultimately supported the development of high achieving students that are likely to be more prepared to succeed at the secondary level and beyond:

Certainly I think that's a direct connection, like anything, I mean, emotional intelligence, even executive functioning, I think when we're helping kids learn how to enter a space and read the room before they go barreling in coming in from like a speech session and asking what's going on and do it, and like teaching them to sort of slow themselves, be aware, thinking about, you know, what they might need. I found those strategies to be very successful in both my schools teaching teachers, how executive functioning, you know, what are the tools they could do in their classroom, visual timers, and things like that. And then around the emotional intelligence, having kids take the pulse of the room and where they're feeling or how others might be feeling, those are things that, you know, whether directly or indirectly are part of our conversations. I think that in both of my buildings, whether I meant to or not, we, I think I do always spend time with whether it's starting a faculty meeting with a read aloud that sort of important around some of the conversations we're having, and it slows teachers down. (Initial Interview, lines 123–

134)

During the Initial and Follow-Up Interview, Ms. Pink also shared her thought process behind a weekly parent newsletter she has made a part of her process. She spoke to deliberately including pictures of her students, descriptions of their work, and providing strategies, tools, and reminders for parents to use to support students at home. To develop confidence and to create exposure to real world experiences in school, she decided to include students into her daily announcements that are recorded and played for the entire school:

We're going to talk about, you know, we definitely, we, we purchased books. Like we have this one mindful game here. But maybe in your artifact question, but we do morning announcements where they're recorded every day. I have second graders come down with me in the library and we record something we blast out and they watch it in the rooms. And sometimes we just find one of these and we just remind everybody of one of them. And we just, with the kids, we practice it and we, we share it out in a video, and it just puts it fresh again for teachers. (Initial Interview, lines 389–395)

Ms. Brown explained the importance of starting the year off with a plan. She indicated that the principal position was very challenging before having to work through a pandemic. She described how difficult it was to always be reacting to problems instead of being strategic and planning for them which can disrupt learning consistency and momentum when working with students:

You have so many decisions and it takes time to plan. I need September guidelines now. Cause I need to get ready because it'll make a difference with these kids and informing their parents and with the task force meetings to see who's on board. Who's not, are we having a remote school or is everybody all hands on deck? You coming back? And if

you want a remote, you're homeschooling, do you know what I mean? (Follow-Up Interview, lines 37–42)

Mr. Blue often referenced how he interacts with students and staff to ensure the community and school environment is always learning. He discussed how the school views grading, how they collaborate to develop curriculum, how they decide to facilitate events, and how opportunities are accessible to kids:

We looked at, you know, we're looking at grades we're looking at attendance, we're looking at behavior. And I said, one of the things I want to measure is, are kids connected. I want to know if our kids are connected in the fall at school are the experiences we do. You know, we do surveys for our strategic plan. I take a look at it.

(Initial Interview, lines 729–732)

During each interview, Mr. Blue would refer repeatedly to supporting staff, students, and the community. He mentioned requirements from the state and how they related to expectations from the district and ultimately what can be expected from students, staff, and the community.

So, maintaining, you know, having our curriculum council where we, you know, we have representation across every building, every subject area, sitting in a room together, making decisions about who can, who can write curriculum when to wait curriculum. What's the most important thing we have to tackle? Now what's our biggest need we have to address? What are the, what are the demands we're getting from the state? You know the NGSS, our new ASSA, what are all these things coming together? We, we talk about that. K–12 and these meetings with our, with our teachers and staff, where we decide what new courses we're going to offer at the high school. They go to our curriculum council K–12, and we present there, and they say, does it fit? What we want

to do does it fit our whole big picture as a fit our big goal of what we want to accomplish with our kids. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 655–659)

Mr. Blue continued and spoke specifically how collaborative decision making and distributive leadership can directly support students even when quick decisions must be made. He explained the significance of including all stakeholder input as a mindful approach to reaching a compromise:

Now we've made decisions quickly. Based on what we knew and what we were doing, come to find out juniors, we usually do a junior, senior prom numbers. Aren't going to be able to dictate that. Cause we can't have that many kids and guests. So, juniors aren't going to be able to come to the prom. That's okay. Share that out. Juniors can't get, but we couldn't have that bigger dialogue picture where we could bring everyone together and say, guess what? We all can come. Let's all sit down and talk about how this is going to play out because we couldn't, we had to make those quick decisions. So, I think what came from that was the junior class advisor said, I'd like to do something for the juniors, you know, cause they can't go to prom, great plan it, go ahead. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 637–641)

He also explained the importance of educating staff appropriately if they are expected to increase student achievement in the classroom and across the school:

I think is most important. I think that continuing to provide opportunities for the staff to grow and be part of the decision-making process is key to that. It's, it's going to get back into that routine, because again, this COVID, there's been, it's been very tough to, we've been forced into making decisions very quickly, very fast. And so that process doesn't always feel like you've been able to get that voice from everyone. There's been some

decisions we've had to made about certain events, you know, little things, that come along, like I just happened, we got prom coming up. There's always certain things that always happened with prom. So, we're planning prom. We gotta get it done. We tried to wait as long as we could, you know, and then, so we waited to see how many kids would we get to go and open it as, as much as we could, we had to hit it. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 624–633)

During the Initial and Follow-Up Interview, Dr. White indicated that she has seen school wide improvement because of how she interacted with her staff. She explained the importance of providing freedom and autonomy to staff, so they can be creative and develop ways that fit their style that directly support students. She shared the importance of creating an environment that supports open communication as school norms and a component of schooling that directly increased student achievement:

I can't even tell you when I first came, I'm like to the secretary, why are you sending out everybody's emails? Well, they're not allowed to send out their own. Oh my God. I'm like, people send out your own freaking emails to the, like, if they had a group thing they needed to say, like, let's say national honor society applications are going out. The secretary would have to do it because it had to be approved by the administrator. Whoa. Fran knew this was going on. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 489–493)

Mr. Black emphasized the importance of strategic decision making throughout the learning organization that is directly representative of the mission statement, which is what ultimately increases and maintains student achievement:

So, him and I met, met our superintendent. It was very clear. This situation is going to be an announcement to teachers, not what do you want to do? It's going to be here is

what we're doing. We thought it was best for kids. It makes the most sense. We can, we can pull it off. It puts kids in the best situation. So, in that situation, it wasn't like shared decision. Like, hey, what do you want, want to do? Because we got like 26 teachers that teach AP with all the different sections. Like they're not all gonna come to something. And since they're going to make all these different decisions, it's going to be inequitable for our students. So, this is what we're doing. So that situation was more, here's how it is now a different situation. We switched our schedule to block. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 243–250)

Mr. Black also indicated the importance of ensuring that all students have access to opportunities so that they can achieve and described shared decision making as the technique used to facilitate a situation that required the support of all personnel:

Our music department has some concerns. Like we used to have kids, we didn't get a lunch and they would take a ninth class and it would be orchestra or chorus or whatever is now, those kids in an eight block are having to make a decision between AP chem or orchestra. That's only like 1% of our students, but it could be 25% of the orchestra. So, we met with them. That was completely shared decision making, like, hey, we gotta fix this. And you know, now we're looking at the lunch block and creating skinnies that we could put orchestra opposite jazz band, like it works and takes care of 99% of those students. When we mapped it out, that was strictly shared we're partners in this, we're going to figure this out the outcome. And we started with the outcome. What's the outcome? All these kids get to take the class understanding you're gonna have an outlier kid wants to take 13 classes like, okay, that could camp, but that was happened regardless of schedule. So, I think it's situational. Sometimes its personnel depend on the outcome

you want to get how that works. So, there are two different examples that just happened.
(Follow-Up Interview, lines 251–264)

The examples presented in support of this sub theme illustrate the value associated with highly effective principals making strategic decisions throughout the learning organization to directly support student achievement. Participants at the elementary and secondary level indicated experience, professional judgement, language use, planning, and modeling were mindful leadership moves or techniques that supported the development of a high performing school culture and the whole child.

Theme 5: “Norms”

Participants explained the significance of developing the hiring process and the importance of strategically hiring personnel to ensure that they demonstrate qualities that are aligned to the mission and or vision of the district. Two subthemes emerged from the data in relation to the second theme: (a) Participants described the importance of highly effective learning organizations establishing and fostering a hiring process that produces the best candidate for the position; and (b) participants explained the significance of hiring personnel that have the desirable characteristics, the potential to grow, and give the impression that is related to the district’s mission and vision.

Theme 5: “NORMS”	Subtheme
Participants explained the significance of developing the hiring process and the importance of strategically hiring personnel to ensure that they demonstrate qualities that are aligned to the mission and or vision of the district.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="641 275 1408 384">1. Participants described the importance of highly effective learning organizations establishing and fostering a hiring process that produces the best candidate for the position. <li data-bbox="641 422 1408 560">2. Participants explained the significance of hiring personnel that have the desirable characteristics, the potential to grow, and give the impression that is related to the district's mission and vision.

Figure 7. Theme Statement 5 Development. This figure illustrates how the fifth theme statement was developed from two subtheme statements.

Theme 5, Subtheme 1. Participants described the importance of highly effective learning organizations establishing and fostering a hiring process that produces the best candidate for the position. All six participants referenced the importance of having a process that produces hireable candidates for positions within the school. At the elementary level, Dr. Gold, Ms. Brown, and Ms. Pink emphasized the importance of being creative when creating hiring practices. At the secondary level, Mr. Blue, Dr. White, and Mr. Black explained the significance of utilizing effective structures to making decisions, particularly while hiring potential candidates, and processes already in place proved to hire good candidates in the past.

Dr. Gold suggested that the hiring process should incorporate practices that look for diversity, people with different experiences, and perspectives. She explained how diversity can positively contribute to a learning organization:

I’m also really thinking about diversity in the hiring process and trying to expose who people really are. I think that if someone’s going to really strengthen that school, we need to get people from various backgrounds in it and get different opinions. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 502–504)

Ms. Pink also reported the importance of diversity. She described the significance of being creative with the hiring process and supported opportunities that allow the candidate to have fun while demonstrating who they are and their lived experiences. She indicated this would support the development of school culture:

We did a lot of activities where you put yourself in quadrants, you know, people, self-assessed and are you this type of listener or this type of communicator? And I can't think of the names of them now, but we do a lot of exercises when we are hiring and with our staff. I brought in, at one point I had to hire like 11 new teachers one year. It was something big. Yeah. So, we brought in an improv company. That was a fun way to learn about people and to start the year. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 365–370)

Ms. Brown did not speak directly to a specific or a deliberate hiring process but did indicate its importance and how much it matters to the learning organization:

The process matters. But just explain that you have expectations, I have high expectations. Then you will know what you have. (Initial Interview, lines 367–367)

At the secondary level, Mr. Blue described and explained several systems, practices, and structures that exist within his learning system. When the researcher asked, “which is the most important system or process you have in your building?” He paused for a moment and spoke to the hiring process:

Hiring is a, is a key one. I lost a key math teacher, had to hire another science teacher and some shifting around. And so, I think that, you know, when you're hiring the right people is... key to what you're doing.... I looked at it all the way down to where I'm hiring a teaching assistant, right? Down to my guidance secretary, you know. I, like my secretaries, they might be greeting some of our most high needs kids coming in most

times and I need them supporting them. So that's the first face they might see when they come into a place where they're looking for support now. And so, they're building part of that learning environment that we have here, as well as supporting our teachers through, you know, making corrections in grades, not a grading time, but balancing all of those things. When we look to hire here, we put them through a long process to find the right person for the job. (Initial Interview, lines 613–622)

Dr. White and Mr. Black demonstrated respect for the hiring process that existed before their arrival to the schools they received Recognition School Status in. They explained that when the right people are hired, they stay for a long time and contribute to the community. Dr. White explained that she was lucky to work with great people who were hired before her:

And he hired good people, but he hired everybody at the same age, and he put them through a tough process. He didn't just hire regular people. He made sure they were good. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 307–309)

Mr. Black explained that the school's success came from their leadership team. He indicated that quality candidates were hired and with their support and counsel he was able to continue the tradition of strategically bringing effective administrators on board:

I think it's our leadership team, and since I've been here four years, we've we have four new folks. So, I inherited eight and now four of them I was able to hire. So that's always beneficial. But I think we made them explain their strengths so that we can recognize the potential. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 192–195)

Each participant referenced the importance of utilizing a process that supported hiring quality candidates. Without heavily describing each stage a candidate might experience during a

hiring process, the actual incorporation of a process to reveal human potential was aligned to each participant's intent to enhance the learning organization.

Theme 5, Subtheme 2. Participants explained the significance of hiring personnel that have the desirable characteristics, the potential to grow, and give the impression that is related to the district's mission and vision. Each participant reported the importance of hiring quality personnel that have the potential to contribute towards and increase the effectiveness of the learning organization. All six participants shared a similar interest in finding candidates that were good in nature, reflective, brave, vulnerable, and willing to learn.

Dr. Gold suggested that characteristics of being reflective and being vulnerable were two distinct traits she looks for in potential candidates. She expressed that it is necessary for an employee or team member to have or develop the ability to collaborate and instruct.

I'm wondering when you think about hiring, is it better to hire? Like, of course you want to hire someone who's going to collaborate well with others is going to be reflective, going to be open, going to ask for support. But also knows good instruction, but I feel like if one of those is going to be lacking, I would rather have it be the good, like little like inexperience on the instruction side, because I don't know how much of the other stuff you can teach. Like, if I know that you're a good person who cares about kids, who's gonna work well with the faculty. You're going to put yourself out there, take risks, be persistent. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 475–481)

Ms. Pink had a similar perspective as Dr. Gold in that instruction is important to her. She identified instruction as a method to create independent students. Ms. Pink explained her ideal candidates for teachers as being able to create a classroom that can manage itself:

Like, it's only really beautiful teaching if the students are learning and if they're independent, you know, so it's like take away all the resources in the room and what can the kids really do without that teacher standing in front of them. That is actually created by the teacher. So, I guess this idea, that classrooms, where you go in and kids, kids know what they're doing, that's what I want, kids know what's expected of them, but they're also happy. (Initial Interview, lines 180–184)

Ms. Brown shared her interest and ability in developing hired candidates into great teachers. She indicated that sometimes you get candidates with undesirable characteristics, or you quickly learn of them once they are hired and that it is her job to develop and support them into great hires who contribute to the learning organization:

A question I always ask when I'm talking about a staff member and if there is tenure involved or not, are they able or unable to do it or are they unwilling? Right. Because I'm willing to deal with an unable to over an unwilling person. This is a little difficult compared to when I'm dealing with an unable, right? Like if they're unable to do it because they're a hot mess or they have not learned it yet, then there's practices and parameters that I can put in place for them here. If they are unwilling, they probably have always been that way. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 475–479)

Mr. Blue explained that he expects all stakeholders to contribute to the school community. He shared the importance of celebrating staff and recognizing students, which is directly related to their school mission and is an expectation in the community. He shared several times throughout each interview that he loved his staff and students because they are good people:

I just got to say, it's just the sense of the people we've hired. That they're just good people and they support each other and they, they rely on each other, you know, we have, you know, right down to birthdays too, you know, we, my secretary, great job, every staff member, and every student's birthday gets recognized, every single one of them it's up on announcements and they get read on announcements. So everyday announcements, happy birthday to whoever. You know, so we do a lot of those things like that, but a lot of it comes down to is I, you know, that it's just the people you hire and then you're there. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 474–479)

Mr. Blue explained the importance of working closely with new hires and how he relies on his relationships with other staff members when he encourages them to introduce themselves to new hires. He shared how he is always looking at tightening the community within the school:

They just rely and depend on each other. They, you know, when new teachers are hired here, my staff, you know, I got staff that just goes and visits them, tell you how you're doing. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 481–483)

During the Follow-Up Interview, he explained the importance of developing staff so that they can expose their true potential:

I want to provide my teachers that opportunity to grow with and learn and do what they need to do. And they're just kind of in the students are just another level down. And, you know, as you look at it, you can look at the kids you had in your classroom, and you can look at your staff and you can kind of resemble who's who can be a pain or who's by contributor. When I hire, I am always looking to see who can contribute. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 592–595)

Dr. White consistently reminded the researcher that she was looking for quality teachers who care about students. During the hiring process and among the staff that were already hired, Dr. White explained that her progressive way of thinking and exposure to students, modeled expectations for staff to follow and to increase their own professionalism. She shared that her upper administration confided in her to take their school to the next level because of how she worked with staff and developed systems:

I'm not a micromanager. I trust teachers and I let them do what they need to do. And if, you do something wrong, I'm going to really come down on you. Because if you do something unprofessional that it's just unacceptable. Right. But everybody is so professional there. And so, everybody has a vested interest because its expected and modeled. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 465–470)

When discussing how she got hired, Dr. White shared that she was empowered by her previous administrative colleagues and current upper administration to take their school to the next level. She believed it was her progressive way of thinking that got her recruited for the job:

I love being progressive and thinking outside the box and let's do something that nobody else is doing. I think that's what they liked and what they needed. ... It was always advertised as bringing the school to the next level. I know they had a search firm to find the principal. So, when I'm right away in talking to the two people who were leading the search, I knew it was the right position for me. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 158–159, 796–798)

Mr. Black's position on developing personnel was similar to the other participants, in that they needed to be trained. He explained how he looks for people with a willingness to learn, and

growth mindset because he believes that everyone can get better and then they can teach someone else:

I think you have to not, you can't have an ego and say like, well, listen, I can, I know how to do that. I know how to do it best. Like, I think it's important to give people again, they have to match up with your values, so right. You could be the best grading practices, but they're not, it's not really the principles and values of the organization. That's problematic. So, recognizing, leveraging, because you can't do everything, you can't be everywhere. And if you don't use good people, the growth is going to be minimal. Right. I think the growth grows exponentially when you really use good people and put them in a place to succeed whether it is teaching or learning. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 621–627)

The descriptions and excerpts presented in support of this sub theme illustrate how effectively hiring and developing personnel can positively contribute to building a productive learning organization. Participants at the elementary and secondary level indicated that developing a hiring process that increased opportunities for candidates to demonstrate desirable characteristics supported school improvement and achievement.

Finding 3

Participants explained there are several barriers that exist in Recognition Schools that can negatively impact student achievement, limit professional development, and weaken the learning organization's alignment from its vision, mission, and practice if not strategically dealt with. One theme emerged from the data to result in this finding. The first theme expressed by study participants was the significance of not promoting and fostering a growth mindset throughout the school, between and among students, personnel, and the community can reduce the effectiveness

of the learning organization. Each participant explained the importance of teaching, promoting, and sustaining flexibility, open mindedness, and collaboration between and among students and personnel.

Finding 3: Participants explained there are organizational barriers that exist in Recognition Schools that can negatively impact student achievement, limit professional development, and weaken the learning organization's productivity and alignment from students the district's vision, mission, and practice.

Theme 6: Participants explained the significance of not promoting and fostering a growth mindset throughout the school, between and among students, personnel, and the community can reduce the effectiveness of the learning organization.

Figure 8. Finding Statement 3 Development. This figure illustrates how the third finding statement was developed from the sixth theme.

Theme 6: “Barriers”

Participants demonstrated the importance of identifying and addressing people and systems that exhibit or condone a fixed mindset in approach and conduct can limit the effectiveness of the learning organization. Two subthemes emerged from the data in relation to the first theme: (a) participants expressed the variety of challenges associated with personnel, such as professional development and keeping the right staff to carry out the vision and mission of the Recognition School; (b) participants described how the establishment of poor, outdated, or ineffective systems, policies, and protocols can negatively influence student achievement in Recognition Schools.

Theme 6: “Barriers”	Subtheme
Participants demonstrated the importance of identifying and addressing people and systems that exhibit or condone a fixed mindset in approach and conduct can limit the effectiveness of the learning organization.	<p>1: Participants expressed the variety of challenges associated with personnel, such as professional development, and keeping the right staff to carry out the vision and mission of the Recognition School.</p> <p>2: Participants described how the establishment of poor, outdated, or ineffective systems, policies, and protocols can negatively influence student achievement in Recognition Schools.</p>

Figure 9. Theme statement 6 Development. This figure illustrates how the sixth theme statement was developed from two subtheme statements.

Theme 6, Subtheme 1. Participants expressed the variety of challenges associated with personnel, such as professional development and keeping the right staff to carry out the vision and mission of the Recognition School. Without exception, each participant indicated the importance of developing and maintaining a curious, interested, mindful staff dedicated to supporting kids and families of the community. At the elementary and secondary levels, each Recognition School principal indicated specific behaviors that represented a fixed mindset which required a lot of time and support from administration.

Dr. Gold discussed how her district has the resources to carefully select personnel to work in their schools. She described that the barriers that most directly affect achievement typically comes from families, students, and personnel striving to be perfect. Dr. Gold explained how much personnel were extremely talented but struggled monitoring their own emotions: “The big barrier is that these teachers are good, highly anxious, very tightly wound, overachievers, Type A people” (Initial Interview, lines 249–250).

Ms. Pink spoke about personnel in any school being the number one contributor to school achievement. Similar to Dr. Gold’s district, Ms. Pink mentioned that resources were consistently provided as needed but that finding the right faculty to achieve the school’s mission was

extremely challenging. She explained her interest in seeking and developing staff who are passionate about students, school, and education:

I do have people that are mediocre, you know, like you go in and it's good, but it doesn't like, wow, you so in those situations first, it was about what's, what's their passion, you know, what's my in with them. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 148–151)

She expressed frustration about colleagues who operate too quickly when dealing with issues and who claim to be making mindful decisions but instead are perceived by the team as perfunctory and lackluster:

So, I feel like sometimes, you know, an issue comes, and people just want to say we got it, we got it. And I think we probably should slow down a little bit and acknowledge when we're, we don't have it. Like, you know what, that's an important topic. That's something we need to look closer at. We do really thoughtful things, but it's an area we probably could grow. And we look forward to doing that over the coming months. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 247–256)

Ms. Brown demonstrated a particular understanding and expectation that her personnel would be professional, prompt, dedicated, and able to develop meaningful relationships with students and colleagues. She described those challenges associated with personnel required a lot of time and if not redirected could jeopardize the success of a high achieving school. Ms. Brown mentioned three barriers that directly impacted her school and that were immediately addressed:

Lateness is a pet peeve of mine. Don't be late. Don't we don't start till nine. Don't be late. So, they know. And I had a social worker chronically late. So, she came one day and the door was locked. ... I can teach you the curriculum. I can't teach you people skills. ... If you go in saying, hey, I'm the guy and I know it all. You're dead in the

water. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 441–443, 724–726, 764)

Mr. Blue expressed that potential barrier to a school's success can and should be addressed throughout the hiring process. During each interview, Mr. Blue emphasized the importance of selecting the right faculty to hire. He spoke to relationship building and the need for adults to have strong connections with their students for the school to be successful:

We went through the hiring process. There wasn't any valid candidates. So, we didn't hire. You need to find a fit or you will be paying for it the entire time. ... I've also been in a classroom where I've seen a teacher put together the best, the best lesson in the world and in the flops, because you know what, they don't have any connection with the kids. They're not, the kids aren't engaging; they're not buying into it. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 248–251, 924–928).

Dr. White described a variety of barriers that can negatively affect student achievement. During the Follow-Up Interview, she started explaining her experience being part of a regional principal's network. The network was designed for building leaders to discuss problems and brainstorm solutions. Dr. White felt that not having enough women in school building leadership could be a barrier to school success that's known, hard to prove, and often never dealt with:

I never noticed sexism as a teacher, but boy, is it still prevalent in administration. Now, you're starting to get more female, secondary principals, but at least [where I am] there weren't a lot. I think I was like the only one until maybe two or three years ago. And you go to these principal meetings and it's just all men and they're all braggadocious and it's just so disheartening and it's a problem. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 856–861)

Like Mr. Blue and Dr. White, Mr. Black indicated the importance of relationship building, and selecting the right people to hire. He spoke about being mindful about each staff

member's personality when working with individuals, in small groups, and in large group. Mr. Black discussed the importance of recognizing behaviors and then responding accordingly to have a successful experience:

We have a couple of those people that every faculty has that are just going to say things like, "Hey, listen, I'm giving everyone a thousand dollars today." And the one this person's going to say, "well, now I've got to pay more in taxes." Right? So, we have some of those naysayers, they are kind of silenced when I put them in positions like presenting or discussing in front of their colleagues. I know who I can and need to do that to. (Follow-Up Interview, lines 553–557)

The examples presented in support of this subtheme reflect the need for the Recognition School principal to be aware of how personnel are selected, developed, and incorporated in the mission to succeed. Building principals expressed the need to build relationships but to also be strategically thinking about how to operationalize each relationship in ways that support student and schoolwide achievement.

Theme 6: Subtheme 2. Participants described how the establishment of poor, outdated, or ineffective systems, practices, policies, and protocols can negatively influence student achievement in Recognition Schools. Each participant indicated that being a building leader was very challenging. They all referenced the importance of approaching their positions with a growth mindset so they can improve themselves to face challenges. They then spoke about the importance of growing a team of people that learned from and with each other to achieve a goal.

Dr. Gold admitted that she felt her school was and should be considered a Recognition School because of how hard her and her team worked to develop functional systems within the

school. She explained when she first arrived at her principal position as principal the team before her left a poor culture and mismanaged systems:

I first got here, I was really trying to kind of, lessen the anxiety, but at the same time, bring a new curriculum and fix other systems. So those don't always work together. And there was, there was some pushback there, like I said, in year three we started taking off once things were back in place. (Initial Interview, lines 255–257)

Ms. Pink emphasized the importance of creating experiences for students that were meaningful and delivered by good teachers through effective instructional strategies. She described a potential barrier to student achievement relied heavily on the role of the educator being mindful of how to incorporate fun and maintain a harmonious, enjoyable educational experience. Like Dr. Gold, Ms. Pink shared that her school struggled with maintaining effective practices which ultimately affected a positive school culture:

There was not enough play there. Wasn't enough time to wonder and just ask questions. Teachers felt like they needed a little bit more of their units of study and reading and writing. (Initial Interview, lines 220–221)

Similarly, to Ms. Pink, Ms. Brown expressed the need to improve instructional protocols and practices as inconsistencies have become barriers to school wide success: “You need to have some level of consistency or else when it hits the fan, where do you go? Right” (Follow-Up Interview, line 156). She described how her school struggled transitioning to a one to one, student to technology device before the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Brown explained how she realized she needed to influence the expectations and the execution of the transition to remote learning:

So, the teachers do everything on Google classroom. They're all prerecorded. So, I have

certain teachers that run them in the classes for the kids. And that was really hard because then you have to, as you know, you have to be part of everybody's Google classroom. Who is sharing what who's posting, when how do you post it so that parents don't see the actual meat of the lesson than they only see the recording? It was so inconsistent. Don't assign it because you don't want the kids to have to do something. All that. Our kids just got Chromebooks this year. So, it has been a growth year. (Initial Interview, lines 66–67)

At the secondary level, Mr. Blue spoke about how pressure and an overwhelming, wide range of responsibilities associated with the principal role can distract and disrupt the effective management of a school building:

I think sometimes when, when the, when we get under stress and pressure in things that get done, I will sometimes push to get things done and not really think, and not stop and engage as much as I should in the actual process or what the policy is. (Initial Interview, lines 649–650)

Dr. White described a time as a new principal where she noticed that ineffective systems can negatively impact student achievement. When she was hired, she learned that the previous administration had a reputation of micromanaging all school personnel. She explained how shocked she was to learn that teachers did not have access to the phone lines, ultimately limiting their ability to communicate more effectively with each other as needed.

There, there was a lot of paranoia because of how they were led. So, a silly example would be, I'd say, can you call so-and-so down in 214? And the secretary would be like, no. And I'm like, what do you mean? They don't know the number? We don't know the phone extensions, they're confidential. What? And then she pulls out a folder that

says confidential with all the phone extensions, because they've never been allowed to share them. It's so bizarre. I can't even explain it. And I'm like, that is the stupidest thing I've ever heard of in my whole life. That is why this school has not improved.

(Follow-Up Interview, lines 475–480)

When asked to explain his thoughts on the major barriers affecting school wide and student achievement, Mr. Black chose to discuss the teacher union and the observation process. He explained that once teachers are tenured, he has noticed that they are more likely to care less about preparing for their announced observations. He expressed the stress associated wasting time utilizing systems that do not yield results:

Some don't care about the observation process, "I've been here 20 years, I'm tenured."

And "you can give me a one." So, what are you gonna do? Like you have that too. And then I've always had a focus on a system that takes up time and doesn't mean much.

Like, I don't care what your reading exam scores are. Are you bringing it every day for kids? (Follow-Up Interview, lines 166–169)

In summary, Finding 3 has been supported by the experiences and descriptions of each of the Recognition School principals representing elementary and secondary schools. The principals described the importance of being mindfully aware of what could potentially become a barrier to student achievement and school wide success. A fixed mindset, constraints bounded by labor union contracts, and working in isolation represented the main contributors to disruptive barriers in schools.

Synthesis of Research Questions

Data elicited from six Recognition School principals and twelve total interviews were used to examine four research questions that guided this study: (a) How do principals of

Recognition Schools experience mindfulness or mindful practices in their schools? (b) How are mindfulness-based leadership practices introduced, promoted, and sustained by Recognition School principals of elementary and secondary schools? (c) What are the organizational norms experienced by principals in elementary and secondary Recognition Schools? (d) What are the organizational barriers school principals' experience working in Recognition Schools? The six participants who engaged in this experience identified similar factors that support the three findings of this study: (a) Participants described their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools by metacognitively acknowledging specific character traits or perceptions of self, and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques used throughout the building and district that contribute to student achievement; (b) Participants suggested their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools contributed to organizational success because they established personal and system wide norms that directly influenced the growth, sustainability, and strategic decision making made by principals in schools; (c) Participants explained there are several barriers that exist in Recognition Schools that can negatively impact student achievement, limit professional development, and weaken the learning organization's alignment from its vision, mission, and practice if not strategically dealt with immediately.

The researcher learned that each participant struggled explaining their experiences with mindfulness practices or making mindful, strategic decisions, in isolation. Instead, the six Recognition School principals described how they experienced mindfulness and or mindful practices in their schools in three categories, self, building, and district. Throughout these categories each participant indicated several ways in which they introduce, promote, and sustain mindful leadership practices in Recognition Schools.

Participants spoke repeatedly about the importance of being reflective, the need to develop a growth mindset, being confident, learning how to learn, and having fun while at work. They explained when those characteristics were exercised, they increased the effectiveness of themselves which promoted the development of the building, student achievement, and ultimately the district.

Mindful practices throughout the building became the second category that was revealed during discussion about experiencing mindfulness in schools. Principals expressed the significance of having the capacity to build relationships with personnel and students, the need to look for opportunities to distribute leadership, publicly displaying authenticity, and always being direct and specific with language.

The third category that emerged from the data were the interactions and expectations building principals had for district administration. Building principals explained that in order for a school to become high achieving, district leadership would need to reciprocate and contribute to all parts of the whole system. The culture, vision, and expectations of the school would ultimately need to be modeled throughout all departments to ensure systemic success. District and building leaders would need to work collaboratively to demonstrate what they expect is necessary to operate an effective learning organization. Pulling in stakeholders and building capacity within them to contribute to the system increases the effects of productive and positive leadership. Building principals expressed that demonstrating a commitment to listening and learning, sharing, being clear, explicit, direct, prompt, and flexible while interacting with other complexities associated with public schooling needed to be a growing and shared practice throughout the organization.

Participants revealed experiences that established, specific personal, and system wide

norms directly influenced the growth, sustainability, and strategic decision making made by principals in schools. Decisions based on the interest of, hiring personnel strategically, collaborating with district leadership, being clear with written and verbal language, supporting the vision, having high expectations, and building meaningful relationships with all stakeholders were discussed by each participant as key factors and expected norms throughout their learning organizations.

The leaders in this study were unanimous in expressing that all schools have barriers and potential barriers that can compromise student achievement if not mindfully addressed. Findings emerged revealing that highly effective building principals are aware of and are prepared to mitigate particular barriers that disrupt student achievement like hiring personnel with a fixed mindset, personnel or policies that do not focus on the specific needs of students, the many constraints bound by collective bargaining agreements, not providing targeted professional development, and any weak, ineffective personal, building, and district wide system. Each principal expressed that effective leadership required knowing what the barriers were, where they are coming from, and getting the right people involved to manage them.

Summary of Chapter Four

Themes one, two, three, and four led to the identification of the first finding of the study; participants described their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools by metacognitively acknowledging specific character traits or perceptions of self and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques used throughout the building and district that contributed to student achievement. Analysis of the fifth theme resulted in the second finding of the study; participants suggested their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools contributed to organizational success because they established

personal and system wide norms that directly influenced the growth, sustainability, and strategic decision making made by principals in schools. The analysis of the sixth theme resulted in the third finding; participants explained there are several barriers that exist in Recognition Schools that can negatively impact student achievement, limit professional development, and weaken the learning organization's alignment from its vision, mission, and practice if not strategically dealt with. In Chapter Five the implications of the themes and findings of this research study are discussed as well as limitations, recommendations, and conclusions.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides the summary and conclusion of this research study. The chapter consists of an overview of the study, and the research questions are addressed in four sections: (a) review of the results, (b) discussion, (c) implications for building leaders and aspirants, and (d) implications for future research. Trustworthiness and a final summary conclude this chapter.

Overview of the Study

The aim of this study was to understand how the leadership practices of principals in Recognition Schools, determined by the New York State Education Department, contribute to developing, managing, and sustaining mindful learning organizations. Specifically, the researcher explored the perceptions of six Recognition School principals, three at the elementary level and three at the secondary level, through their self-reported experiences as mindful leaders and examined the factors that have affected them while they lead high achieving schools. Senge's (2006) Systems Theory, Weick and Sutcliffe's (2015) High Reliability Organizations (HRO), Hoy et al.'s (2006) Mindful Leadership, and Kabat-Zinn's work with Mindfulness formed four foundations for accomplishing the purpose of this study.

First, Systems Theory provided awareness that schools have small, large, and complex interdisciplinary parts of systems operating simultaneously that contribute to the larger whole system. Secondly, HRO's provided the five principles that are used to mindfully organize and manage the unexpected that occurs in complex systems to sustain high performance. Thirdly, research exploring organizational mindfulness and mindful leadership outlined the responsibilities, perceptions, and practices of mindful school leaders. Lastly, examining mindfulness as a practice and theory supported understanding how school leaders functioned, experienced, and led while being faced with overwhelming challenges as high performing school

leaders. Systems Theory, HRO's, Mindful leadership, and Mindfulness literature were critical to the researcher's ability to connect the mindful leadership practices of high performing, Recognition School principals who built high reliability learning organizations.

The researcher used criterion based, purposive sampling to select six public school building principals from New York State for this study. Self-identification of being a mindful leader, having worked in the Recognition School for three or more years, and scoring a 4.5 or higher on the MAAS (2006) were the predetermined criteria used to guide the participant selection process.

Participants engaged in two phases of the study. Phase I included the following: (a) demographic survey, and (b) the MAAS (2006). Phase II included (a) an initial, semi structured interview, and (b) a follow up, semi-structured interview. In addition, documents were collected and discussed for the purpose of triangulation. Data were gathered with multiple approaches between January and May of 2021.

A qualitative multiple case study research design was utilized for this study (Stake, 2006). Data were analyzed as a within-case analysis for each of the individual cases and followed by an across-case analysis. Reiteratively occurring processes throughout the various stages of the analysis were deemed necessary by the researcher to provide consistency and confirmation to emerging codes and pattern development.

In preparation for the first-cycle of coding, the researcher divided the research questions into two conceptual components, the individual and the system. The researcher then referred to the peer-reviewed research studies, theories, and concepts that were introduced in the review of literature. Terms and concepts from these studies were grouped under the research questions and served as the foundation to development of a codebook (Saldaña, 2016). The codes that emerged

were arranged by the researcher into domains, categories, and characteristics, and served as the foundation of the researcher's code book.

During the first cycle of coding, the researcher analyzed each participants' words from the Initial and Follow Up Interview transcripts and terms and concepts were added to the codebook (Saldaña, 2016). Analysis continued throughout the study as emergent patterns and themes were identified, codes collapsed or connected to more patterns that were frequent, sequential, similar, or different (Saldaña, 2016). Visual models of emergent theme categories were constructed using Google Sheets, analytic memos, reflective journaling techniques, post it notes, access to the participants, and adhesive whiteboards throughout the data coding and analysis process (Appendix O and Appendix P). Code frequency reports were analyzed consistently at several times during the process through member checking, collection of documents or artifacts, and through an internal audit of the coding and analysis by the researcher's dissertation chair to confirm findings.

This study produced six emergent themes: (a) Participants perceived themselves as having to be self-aware of the pressures inherently associated with the principal position and the importance of becoming a leader with a growth mindset, confidence, and the ability to reflect on their practice so their contributions to the system are meaningful and strategic; (b) participants demonstrated an increased understanding of how positive relationships with students and teachers throughout the building require consistency and transparency when it comes to communication, expectations, and sustained building wide achievement; (c) participants described the need for a balanced, reciprocal relationship between the leader, the needs of the building, and the vision of the district as it relates to creating and maintaining large and small systems designed to increase student achievement; (d) participants expressed the importance of

creating, promoting, and maintaining high expectations for themselves and making all decisions in schools directly connected to the needs and interests of the whole child; (e) participants explained the significance of developing the hiring process and the importance of strategically hiring personnel to ensure that they demonstrate qualities that are aligned to the mission and or vision of the district; and (f) participants demonstrated the importance of identifying and addressing people and systems that exhibit or condone a fixed mindset in approach and conduct can limit the effectiveness of the learning organization.

An analysis of six emergent themes produced three findings of this research investigation. Firstly, Finding 1 emerged from Themes 1, 2, and 3 as follows: Participants described their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools by metacognitively acknowledging specific character traits or perceptions of self, and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques used throughout the building and district that contribute to student achievement. Secondly, Finding 2 arose from Themes 4 and 5, as follows: Participants suggested their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools contributed to organizational success because they established personal and system wide norms that directly influenced the growth, sustainability, and strategic decision making made by principals in schools. Lastly, Finding 3 surfaced from Theme six, as follows: Participants explained there are several barriers that exist in Recognition Schools that can negatively impact student achievement, limit professional development, and weaken the learning organization's alignment from its vision, mission, and practice if not strategically dealt with immediately.

Review of Findings

Research Questions

Data elicited from six Recognition School principals and 12 total interviews were used to examine four research questions that guided this study: (a) How do principals of Recognition Schools experience mindfulness or mindful practices in their schools? (b) How are mindfulness-based leadership practices introduced, promoted, and sustained by Recognition School principals of elementary and secondary schools? (c) What are the organizational norms experienced by principals in elementary and secondary Recognition Schools? (d) What are the organizational barriers school principals' experience working in Recognition Schools? These questions were designed to elicit detailed accounts from Recognition School principals about their mindful leadership practices and how they directly experience and contribute to the learning organizations' ability to develop systems that produce effective, highly reliable, high achieving schools.

The first question, "How do principals of recognition schools experience mindfulness or mindful practices in their schools?" supported the emergence of three themes that developed Finding 1. The literature and work produced by Kabat-Zinn, & Senge directly align and contribute to Finding 1 in that Recognition school principals have demonstrated increased levels of self-awareness. They acknowledged what behavior and response is necessary to problem solve, make decisions, and lead effectively. Being able to reflect, operating a growth mindset, and being confident were categories that supported the development of subthemes and themes for this finding. The MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003) scores of all Phase II participants revealed their capacity to be mindful through explanations of how they contribute, lead or manage experiences in their current positions as principals which includes the active ability to produce

mental models of success, expectations, and/or to develop a personal mastery of skills and behaviors that will contribute to the efficacy of small and large systems. Table 8 demonstrates how research question one was connected to the themes associated with Finding 1.

Table 8

Findings and Themes Related to the Research Question 1

Research Question	Finding	Theme
1. “How do principals of recognition schools experience mindfulness or mindful practices in their schools?”	1. Participants described their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools by metacognitively acknowledging specific character traits or perceptions of self and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques used throughout the building and district that contribute to student achievement.	<p>1. Participants perceived themselves as having to be self-aware of the pressures inherently associated with the principal position and the importance of becoming a leader with a growth mindset, confidence, and the ability to reflect on their practice so their contributions to the system are meaningful and strategic.</p> <p>2. Participants demonstrated an increased understanding of how positive relationships with students and teachers throughout the building require consistency and transparency when it comes to communication, expectations, and sustained building wide achievement.</p> <p>3. Participants described the need for a balanced, reciprocal relationship between the leader, the needs of the building, and the vision of the district as it relates to creating and maintaining large and small systems designed to increase student achievement.</p>

The second research question, “How are mindfulness-based leadership practices introduced, promoted, and sustained by Recognition School principals of elementary and secondary schools?” And the third research question, “What are the organizational norms experienced by principals in elementary and secondary Recognition Schools?”, supported the emergence of two themes that developed Finding 2. The literature and work produced by Weick

& Sutcliffe (2006) & Youngs (2018) directly align and contribute to Finding 2 in that Recognition school principals develop, improve and sustain strategic systems that lead to student success and school wide achievement. Recognition school principals rely on the use, development, and promotion of practices and techniques that improve communication, collaboration, and innovation (Youngs, 2018). During the semi-structured interviews, personal and system wide quality assurance principles were explained to be taken into consideration when working to create, manage, and sustain high performance in schools. Finding and themes related to research questions two and three are illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9

Findings and Themes Related to the Research Questions 2 and 3

Research Question	Finding	Theme
2. “How are mindfulness-based leadership practices introduced, promoted, and sustained by Recognition School principals of elementary and secondary schools?”	2. Participants demonstrated an increased understanding of how positive relationships with students and teachers throughout the building require consistency and transparency when it comes to communication, expectations, and sustained building wide achievement.	4. Participants expressed the importance of creating, promoting, and maintaining high expectations for themselves and making all decisions in schools directly connected to the needs and interests of the whole child.
3. “What are the organizational norms experienced by principals in elementary and secondary Recognition Schools?”		5. Participants explained the significance of developing the hiring process and the importance of strategically hiring personnel to ensure that they demonstrate qualities that are aligned to the mission and or vision of the district.

Research question four, “What are the organizational barriers school principals experience working in Recognition Schools?” was addressed with the emergence of Theme 6 and Finding 3, regarding organizational barriers that limit individual and systemic achievement. Langer (1989) and Ramalho et al. (2010) uncover the effects of what happens when leaders do not practice mindfulness. Essentially there is always opportunity to demonstrate leadership

through action, decision making, and conscientious engagement. Similar to the findings of Langer (1989), participants in this study utilized behaviors, techniques, and strategies to receive and interpret new information to avoid experiences that could limit the success of the individual and organization.

Table 10

Findings and Themes Related to the Research Question 4

Research Question	Finding	Theme
4. “What are the organizational barriers school principals’ experience working in Recognition Schools?”	3. Participants explained there are organizational barriers that exist in Recognition Schools that can negatively impact student achievement, limit professional development, and weaken the learning organization's productivity.	6. Participants explained the significance of not promoting and fostering a growth mindset throughout the school, between and among students, personnel, and the community can reduce the effectiveness of the learning organization.

To assist in the thoroughness of the discussion provided in this chapter, the review of findings will be organized into four subsections aligned with two conceptual components that were extracted from the research questions. These two components of the research questions divide the experience into part and whole, the individual and the system.

The individual components referred to the mindful development of the leader themselves. Each individual’s experience of self-development and growth is foundational to the impact on the people around them and within their leadership. The components and contributions that determined the performance of the system, the success of its students and teachers, the practices, procedures, and policies established directly affect the totality and functionality of the learning organization. The four components of the research are labeled and sequences accordingly as headings, to guide the resulting discussion as follows: (a) mindfulness, (b) mindful leadership, (c) systems thinking, and (d) high reliability organizations (HRO).

Mindfulness

Participants described their experiences with mindfulness, mindfulness practices, and growth mindset to be quite similar. Every case self-identified as being mindful, demonstrated a considerable dispositional level of overall awareness determined by the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), expressed their understanding of needing to be mindful, present, and aware. Participants reported their understanding of what mindfulness is and how active mindfulness practices like deep breathing, stretching, being still, and focusing on attention are useful and necessary techniques to regulate the human body (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Participants across the quintain expressed the importance of having confidence to be a highly effective building leader. It was encouraged by each participant to approach each situation with regulated emotions, to always be thinking of the present situation, how the situation came to be, and any of the implications that may be associated with the next decisions. Being empathetic to self, confident and reflective were represented as key factors to support self and the development of a highly effective leadership identity.

Participants also shared that their own exposure and understanding of mindfulness is directly connected to their mindset. Fostering a growth mindset was suggested as being a major factor in the success and achievement of a school. Each case explained the significance of being a leader or working with leaders who exhibit a growth mindset as being pivotal to the success of the organization. The school and its people all operate differently but within a larger system, the building, and the district, and it is the responsibility of the principal to support the systems by learning from and with them. Distributing leadership, being communicative, positive, and supportive while modeling expectations that support the mission and vision of the district were

referred to as necessary attributes a Recognition School principal must have, develop, and share to be considered high achieving.

Mindful Leadership

Participants reported that creating a high achieving learning organization required an awareness of self and then the leader's interest and ability to expand the importance of having an awareness of self so it can contribute to the small and large systems that the individual is connected to, the culture. Across the elementary and secondary level, Recognition School principals indicated the importance of being cognizant of the emotions, sensations, and thoughts experienced metacognitively. Learning, listening, and understanding necessary leadership attributes were described as key contributors that determine the principals' fitness to lead.

Many of the excerpts cited in Chapter Four exemplified the participants' lived experiences as determining an awareness of what needs to be done to support the learning organization and a responsibility of the principal to apply what is known to develop the coordination of the larger system. It was shared that when building leaders, principals, intentionally work to build positive, and meaningful relationships with all students, and personnel, the culture is positively enhanced. All participants referred to the communality of the system being established by the principal, and they introduced, promoted, and sustained shared responsibility, and received distributed leadership opportunities that determined the excellence of the school.

Systems Thinking

In reporting how they experienced, promoted, and sustained mindfulness-based leadership practices all participants explained that their first step was to develop themselves. This type of self-awareness refers to the ability of being able to take deeply ingrained

assumptions or generalizations that influence how they understand the work they are entrenched in and turn the mirror inward to reflect and grow. By continuing to be open minded, supporting a growth mindset, and establishing an expectation to have for themselves, their own personal mastery and development of mental models, would determine the effects of their contributions to the larger system (Senge, 2006). Participants expressed that goal setting, listening, and learning, and being reflective supported the congruence between mindful leadership techniques and the potential of a learning organization.

Although every participant described the importance of first developing or understanding self, they all discussed the importance of distributing leadership opportunities among students and staff, building leadership capacity among workers and teams, and directing all attention and resources to the mission or vision of the school. Each participant spoke about the school as a learning organization and that at every level among every team people had to support the mission and vision of the district. Participants also explained that there were many norms or characteristics schools should demonstrate to be considered high achieving. Clear and constant communication, putting people in the right positions to succeed, sharing learning experiences, and contributing while creating a culture dedicated to achieving high expectations were described as essential characteristics of a high achieving school community.

High Reliability Organization (HRO)

Participants shared that their experience in developing and sustaining high achieving Recognition Schools aligned similarly with the five principles guiding sustained performance in complex learning organizations like hospitals, nuclear power plants, and financial institutions. Participants discussed norms and barriers that ultimately determined the success or the reliability of the organization.

Norms like shared alertness within and among smaller and larger systems can positively enhance the productivity of that division. Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) consider shared alertness as their first principle in managing complex systems, Preoccupation with Failure. Each participant referenced at least one norm that would support the other four principles Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) use to describe HRO's. Reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise were all illustrated by Recognition School principal's descriptions of the techniques, practices, and policies used to sustain high achieving schools.

Participants also reported several barriers that are continuously encountered while leading a high achieving school. Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) suggest an HRO is not disabled by the potential barriers, errors, or pitfalls that may arise. Participants explained the importance of being alert, working as a team, committing personnel to being professionally developed to appropriately handle the unexpected when it occurs within the learning organization. Participants explained the significance of being transparent with personnel, reflective as it relates to establishing sensible practices, protocols, and policies, and making sure the hiring process can select the very best candidate for the position. Many of the same principles associated with HRO's directly apply to establishing a high achieving Recognition School.

Discussion of the Findings

This section provides a discussion of the three findings that emerged from the present study in relation to the literature presented within Chapter Two, the Review of Literature. Considered together, the published research and this study's findings are presented to assist the reader in understanding the basis of this researcher's answers to the four research questions that framed this investigation: (a) How do principals of Recognition Schools experience mindfulness

or mindful practices in their schools? (b) How are mindfulness-based leadership practices introduced, promoted, and sustained by Recognition School principals of elementary and secondary schools? (c) What are the organizational norms experienced by principals in elementary and secondary Recognition Schools? (d) What are the organizational barriers school principals' experience working in Recognition Schools?

Youngs (2018) conducted a mixed methods study to obtain survey data from professional employees, including teachers, principals, and department leaders that represented high achieving high schools in Pennsylvania. Of the total of 784 employees that fit the criteria, 490 were able to provide their perceptions and complete the survey. Of the 490 participants, 9 department leaders provided deeper input through semi structured interviews. The purpose of this study was to understand the relationships between organizational mindfulness of effective high schools and the mindful organizing of teachers by the decisions and actions taken by department leaders. Results indicated department leaders and principals perceived school personnel to act more mindfully than teachers did. Data presented in this study indicated that department leaders rated their schools' mindfulness higher than teachers did but not as high as principals. Youngs (2018) indicates that due to the sample size it was difficult to determine definite trends about the differences by role but felt it was important to identify those differences did occur.

During semi structured interviews of 9 department leaders representing 3 different high achieving schools, it was revealed that although department leaders shared leadership responsibilities with the principal, they more closely identified with being a teacher than anything else. All department leaders, including the three that were interviewed, indicated that they relied on three common practices to sustain success, communication, collaboration, and

innovation. These techniques were recurrent in the interviews and were visually represented in Youngs' (2018) study to demonstrate the interconnectedness of themes and the synergy of practices directly related to Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) work with HRO's and Hoy et al.'s (2004) school mindfulness theory. The conceptual model of mindfulness in school leadership roles is represented in Figure 10 and indicates the necessary, and interwoven components that drive organizational learning; communication, collaboration, and innovation.

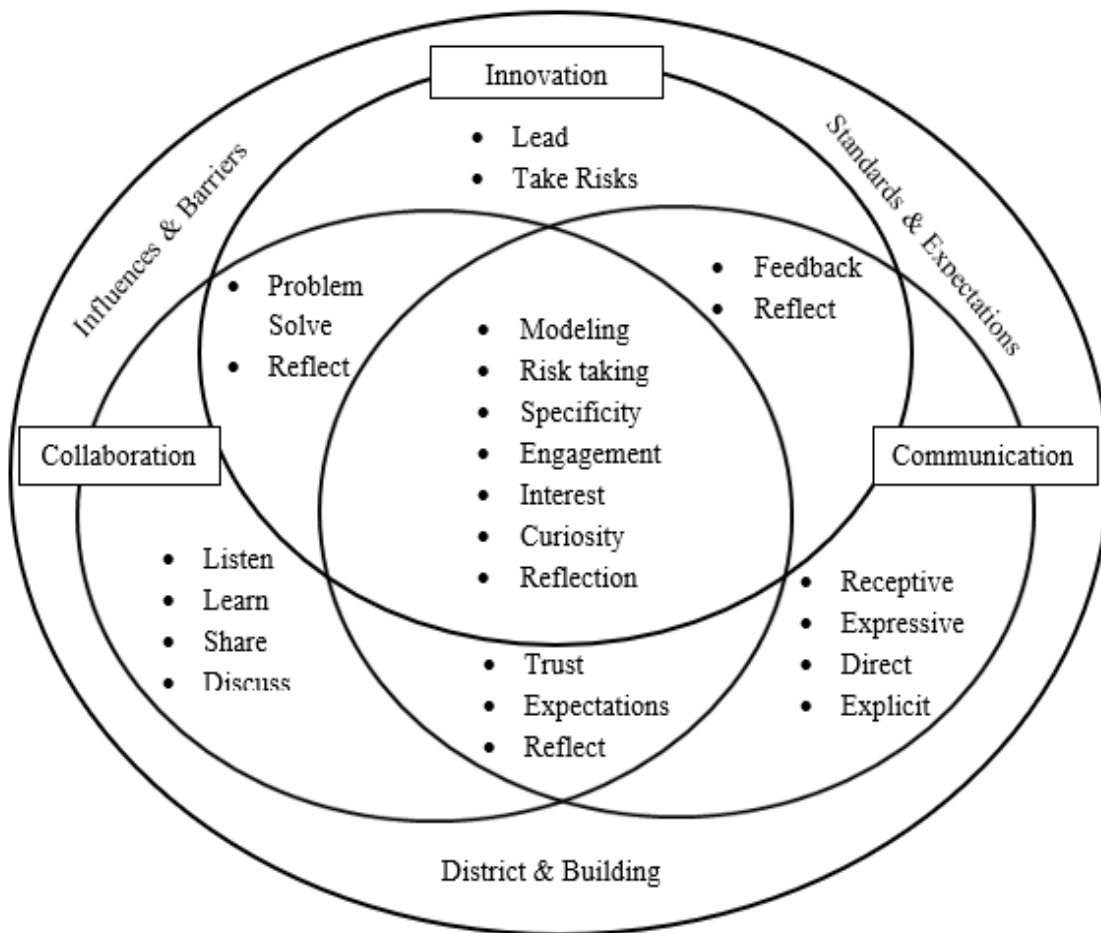


Figure 10. Conceptual model of mindfulness in school leadership roles adapted from Youngs, (2018) with permission.

Youngs' (2018) findings align with this present study because participants reported the importance of modeling clear and consistent communication, sharing information with people and teams to build capacity among personnel in the school and throughout the district, and the significance of providing the space and giving the permission for people to innovate and contribute to the learning organization. Young's (2018) study differs from this present investigation because of the number of participants included in his study. Many of his participants were teachers and school faculty. Their perspective should be considered; however, their perspectives may not accurately display the veteran experiences and intentions of seasoned Recognition School principals.

Sharp Rodriguez (2015) conducted a quantitative study of 505 public school principals to learn about mindful, instructional leadership practices within K–12 public schools. This study was designed to support those principles associated with HRO's were applicable and relevant to educational organizations. Principals were given the opportunity to self-assess their own mindfulness and ability to lead mindfully with the use of the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R) and the Principal Resilience for Educator and Student Success (PRESS). Principals from Washington State were randomly drawn from the Department of Education's school list and were sent both assessment tools by a two-wave survey mailing process. Sharp Rodriguez's (2015) findings align with this present investigation's participant reporting as it discovered that principals needed and did employ an above average awareness to the cognitive process in their leadership roles. As it relates to HRO principles, principals reported the highest degree of mindfulness in the category of deference to expertise. This correlation indicated that principals demonstrated mindful, instructional leadership practices that supported their conscientiousness to what students, parents, and faculty were experiencing and

expressing to increase student achievement. In the current study, Recognition School principals reported the importance of listening and learning from all stakeholders to make strategic decisions that support high achievement. Principals also reported a high degree of mindfulness for the cognitive process of commitment to resilience and a moderate degree of mindfulness regarding emphasizing a sensitivity to operations. Almost universally, principals reported actively seeking signals that would indicate students and staff were struggling, not feeling great, or needing coaching. In the present study, this finding correlates to Recognition School principals' discussion of the significance of modeling, promoting, and sustaining a positive school culture underpinned by the mission, vision, and high expectations. Similar to the present study, principals reported that they frequently relied on the collaboration and communication of students and teachers to improve their educational experience. The sample groupings and size of Sharp Rodriguez's (2015) study differed from the present investigation. The schools included in her study were not considered high achieving and did reflect a diverse population of achievement including increased percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunch, special education students, and almost increased percentages of minority students (Sharp Rodriguez, 2015).

Steele (2008) conducted a quantitative, correlational study of 4,016 teachers and principals representing 112 elementary schools across Texas. The researcher defined elementary schools as serving student populations ranging from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Schools in this study were selected by means of convenience sampling and represented large and small districts, a wide range of socioeconomic statuses as determined by the number of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch, and elicited participation from certified teachers, principals, and other school personnel. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived attitudes of teachers and principals regarding their professional behaviors within the school

particularly related to mindfulness and collective efficacy. Surveys were administered during regularly scheduled faculty meetings and administered by trained researchers who utilized a predetermined protocol. Approximately half of the faculty representing each school were administered the School Mindfulness Scale (M-Scale) which included the following variables: (a) collective efficacy, (b) trust, (c) organizational justice, (d) mindfulness, (e) powerlessness, (f) commitment, (g) organizational citizenship, and (h) principal loyalty (Hoy et al., 2004). The other half of the faculty were given the Collective Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CE) which included questions related to the following variables: (a) organizational climate, (b) principal influence, (c) change orientations, and (d) organizational flow.

Steele's (2008) findings indicated that there was a positive relationship between the dimension of school mindfulness and collective efficacy that contributed to the growth and sustainability of organizational mindfulness. Data analysis indicated that the higher levels reported of teacher mindfulness, the higher the level of collective efficacy in a school. This finding supports similar findings in the present study. Recognition School principals reported that through a mindful hiring process highly qualified candidates are selected for positions in the school. Candidates that embody growth based, preferred, and congruent characteristics that support the mission and vision of the school directly contribute to the sustainability of high performing schools according to the perceptions of Recognition School principals. One of Steele's (2008) research findings differs from this present study and suggests that principal mindfulness had a weak effect on collective efficacy. This could be associated with the number of inherent differences associated with school size, and the socio-economic status of the school, and how long principals have been leading the school. Overall, Steele (2008) focused on two corresponding constructs that predicted the positive perceptions of certified personnel in schools,

school mindfulness and collective efficacy. She also suggests that her research leads her to believe that mindfulness, and awareness of mindful techniques promotes high levels of collective efficacy and that efficacious schools find ways to promote mindful behaviors.

Implications for Leaders and Aspirants

The implications for leaders and aspirants in relation to the finding of this present study are rooted in the literature. Although this study's participant size consisted of 20 Recognition School principals in Phase I and then six of the 20 in Phase II to engage in a deeper investigation, the findings uncovered and implications on leadership are anticipated to be relevant to instructional leaders, aspirants of contributing or producing high achieving learning organizations, or any other stakeholder seeking to improve their own personal practice in the field of education. These implications are presented contextually with the participant's association with the research questions. Specific topics that surfaced and were examined appear in the following order within this section: (a) the interest and ability to develop oneself, (b) the impact an instructional leader has on their building, (c) the relationship developed and expected throughout the district and the entire learning organization, (d) the congruency between developing, changing, or established norms that exist at all levels throughout the learning organization, and (e) the barriers and challenges associated with creating, promoting, and maintaining high achieving Recognition Schools.

Participants who were selected to engage in the Phase II of the study, two semi-structured interviews, demonstrated an increased level of dispositional mindfulness determined by the MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003), described themselves as mindful leaders, and had several years of experience in the field. The criteria selected was purposeful as the researcher intended to elicit information from participants who were experienced and could display a sense of

vulnerability that would provide a space for the participant to deeply reflect on their personal practice.

Findings indicate that participants in this study were mindful of the organizational barriers in their school and district. Therefore, implications of this research for aspirants include understanding the importance of modeling mindful leadership practices to foster the growth and sustainability of high achieving learning organizations to impede barriers. Acknowledging specific character traits or perceptions of self and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques required to manage the present moment then behaviors like displaying confidence, being reflective, listening and learning, and respecting personal authenticity will support behaviors necessary for principals to lead high achieving schools. Those characteristics were immediately identified by the researcher during most introductions of the initial interview and were clear character traits discussed in Senge's (1994, 2006) work. Each participant demonstrated an attention to what they considered to be necessary leadership attributes, such as allowing oneself to have fun in school and reminding oneself to be equitable as it relates to their contributions. Being visible and holding high expectations for all members of the school community were also unanimously mentioned by the study participants. Participants described that personal growth was a key component to school achievement and that it stemmed from fostering a growth mindset.

Participants in the present study and those referenced in published studies herein explained the importance of clearly communicating, including staff in decision making, distributing leadership, having high expectations, and building meaningful relationships with students, families, and personnel. It was reported that establishing a level of mindfulness for oneself, or as Senge (2006) refers to as developing personal mastery, supports the development

of teams and other micro systems that exist within the larger, macro systems of the learning organization. Participants of the present study explained the significance of expecting stakeholders to contribute to the mission and vision of the school which corresponds with Weick and Sutcliffe's (2006) principle, commitment of resilience, that sustains high levels of success for HRO's.

Developing experience as a professional was revealed to be an important contributor to the achievement of a Recognition School principal. If participants suggested that the accumulation of their experiences in the field and in high achieving schools contributed to the growth of the organization then the aspirant can expect to demonstrate commitment to the position and the field. Participants revealed the importance of utilizing learned experiences and allowing those experiences to contribute to self-growth directly supported the improvement of the organization over time. The establishment of routine and processes were created by trial and error and a desire to avoid failure by having an attitude that insisted continuous improvement. Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) emphasized feedback loops of information and actions constantly being revised by the organizational leader was a demonstration of mindful leadership and protected the system from drastic failure.

Having standards and high expectations for the people above and around you were discussed as supporting the development of high achieving learning organizations. Recognition School principals reported the significance of collaborating with all colleagues to support the mission and vision of the district. Youngs's (2018) conceptual model of department leaders' mindfulness illustrates the effects of mindful contributions to the system by people in leadership roles. Participants in all the published studies referenced herein share a similar sentiment of assuming the position as coach or mentor while simultaneously being receptive to that same

experience as the learner. Shared learning and distributed leadership opportunities were referenced by each participant in this study as a necessary characteristic by building leaders to support high achieving schools.

Findings in this study were that principals were mindful about building trusting relationships in the schools. Therefore, implications for aspirants include building relationships through trust to sustain high performing organizational cultures. Participants in the study reported how critical the hiring process is to the school culture. Therefore, focusing on specific building systems such as the hiring process and teacher mentoring programs could be explored. All participants of the present study indicated the importance of establishing norms that are all deeply connected to the needs, interests, and potential betterment of the whole child. Selecting employees that fit the needs of the organization were described as major contributors to school wide success. Collaboration and communication were identified as integral components that sustain effective systems that directly support the achievement in public schools throughout this study, and among research associated with systems thinking and HRO's (Senge, 2009; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006).

Participants of this study identified several barriers that challenge and compromise the potential success of high achieving schools. Creating and maintaining effective policies, practices, and procedures emerged as significant, potential barriers to school effectiveness if not carefully preserved on a consistent basis. The hiring process, the discipline process, and the ways in which principals promote professional development among colleagues and employees directly affect school culture, constituent morale, and ultimately student achievement.

Participants also described isolated silos of information, direction, and learning facilitated by

principals, constraints embedded in collective bargaining contracts, and the modeling of a fixed mindset all have the potential to limit or decrease student achievement in public schools.

In summary, implications for leaders and aspirants that have been described in this section are rooted in the literature that was presented from and in accordance with the present study. As this study found principals drew upon their own experiences as educators and administrators, therefore, recommendations for aspirants include that they develop mindfulness by drawing upon their experiences to lead. Principals need to have experience in the field to be confident, and/or fit to lead, and to recognize the specific actions and techniques that contribute to sustained achievement. These implications have been outlined to address the specific perceptions and experience of six Recognition School principals that have demonstrated sustained achievement in their schools, with students and faculty alike.

Implications for Future Research

The implications for the future research that are presented below are supported by the findings of this research study regarding the four research questions: (a) How do principals of Recognition Schools experience mindfulness or mindful practices in their schools? (b) How are mindfulness-based leadership practices introduced, promoted, and sustained by Recognition School principals of elementary and secondary schools? (c) What are the organizational norms experienced by principals in elementary and secondary Recognition Schools? (d) What are the organizational barriers school principals' experience working in Recognition Schools? The researcher gathered data for this study by utilizing the virtual platforms developed by Google including: (a) Google forms, (b) Google meets, (c) Google docs, and (d) Google sheets. Demographic surveys, semi-structured interviews, participant provided documents, member checking, and a dissertation chair's audit were all used in combination for the purpose of

triangulation. This researcher recommends that future studies on this topic would benefit from increasing the sample size, incorporating perspectives from leaders who represent HRO's across industries, the perspectives of the constituents under the leadership of the participants, and demographic data identifying specific subgroups such as gender, race, age, certification, and detailed experience.

Participants for this study were all Caucasian and in rural/suburban districts, therefore, implications for further research include increasing the diversity in the sample size to explore a wide variety of perceptions and experiences in the education leadership field. This study used the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale as there are limited instruments for school leaders in this area. Therefore, further research should also include the acquisition of more instruments to determine the accuracy of someone's base level mindfulness in leadership roles. It is recommended that future research include a larger sample size of high achieving principals to conduct a larger analysis as it relates to specific mindful leadership techniques used in schools. Including more principals would increase the diversity of subgroups and potentially provide an additional area for the researcher to analyze relationships.

This study provides a limited scope as it displays the perception of an all-white perspective of educational leadership in the promotion and sustainability of high performing schools. A thorough investigation of the affects relative to ethnic and cultural experiences are limited due to the lack of diversity of the school leaders who were examined. Including more diversity in the participant pool could increase the variability and analysis of how leadership styles are reflected by culture, race, and ethnicity.

Although the six participants that experienced Phase II of this study represented schools of different sizes, socio economic demographics, regions of New York, and experience in years

of leadership, a correlational analysis between women in leadership, or black and Hispanic male leaders, or the experiences of first year administrators responsible for replacing Recognition School principals, may bring more attention techniques and strategies that sustain high achieving schools.

As Finding 3 in this study focused on mindful leadership practices in regard to organizational barriers, implications for further research include understanding how the needs of diverse stakeholders affect the decisions made by principals as they relate to creating and implementing systems throughout the school. It is recommended that future research include the perspectives of high performing leaders across industries. Incorporating experiences and descriptions from air traffic control directors, nuclear power plant directors, and general managers of highly reliable hospitals could provide deeper insight to how their complex organizations are managed and operated. Also, including more ways to retrieve information like site visits, observations, additional interviews, perceptions from constituents, customers, patients, and benefactors could create a clearer picture of how high achieving, mindful leadership practices and techniques can create and sustain high performing learning organizations.

Trustworthiness

This study's trustworthiness has been established through four categories credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All efforts intended to support trustworthiness within each of these categories are described in the paragraphs that follow.

Credibility

Credibility is the truth value established by the researcher and is based on research design, criteria that determined the study participants, and overall context of the study (Krefting,

1991). Through utilization of several data collection tools, the demographic survey, two semi-structured interview protocols, and participant documents the researcher was able to create themes, sub themes, and summarized data suggested by the data. The researcher used a reflexive journal to position himself within the study which eliminated biases or preconceptions related to the study (Krefting, 1991). Member checking supported the accuracy of representing each participant's truth by having asked each participant to review the data collected from the demographic survey and interviews to determine the reliability of the researcher's analysis (Saldaña, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent that the results of the study can be applied to other contexts and settings (Krefting, 1991). Transferability could be a limitation because this research examined the experiences of highly effective leaders in the field of education and used complex management concepts from other fields to support high reliability leadership practices. Purposeful sampling was selected as the means of determining the candidate pool and the pre-defined selection criteria was used to select candidates that could support the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013).

Dependability

Dependability determines whether the findings would be reliable or consistent if the study was repeated in the same or similar context (Krefting, 1991). Dependability could have been a limitation to the study because of the small sample size being researched. It was not likely that participants of this study would be able to explain experiences and perceptions that run the risk of catastrophe or death, realities and potential outcomes that are associated with HRO's like hospitals, nuclear power plants, and air traffic control towers. To address this, cases

were sampled from similar contexts in the same profession representing two categories, elementary and secondary schools. Analyzing similarities and differences across the quintain, maintaining interview protocols during observations, and document review supported dependability (Bowen, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 2006).

Confirmability

Confirmability scrutinizes the researcher's ability to remain objective and maintain a neutral position during the research study (Krefting, 1991). Due to the potential limitation to this study, triangulation of methods was built into the data collection and data analysis procedures through demographic surveys, interview protocols, and document review according to each case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking and primary advisor audits of the transcripts, data, data coding, and meaning making process, as well as an internal audit were utilized to confirm the findings of this research study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore organizational mindfulness and mindful leadership practices of Recognition School principals. Specifically, the researcher examined the perceptions and lived experiences of six Recognition School principals, three representing the elementary level and three representing the secondary level. In this study, data were collected using a demographic survey, which helped determine participant criteria, and two semi-structured interview protocols that guided two interviews that were conducted digitally via Google Meets. For the purposes of triangulation, the researcher requested each participant share and review documents that were relevant to their leadership experiences in their principal positions.

Six themes emerged from the data: (a) participants perceived themselves as having to be self-aware of the pressures inherently associated with the principal position and the importance of becoming a leader with a growth mindset, confidence, and the ability to reflect on their practice so their contributions to the system are meaningful and strategic; (b) participants demonstrated an increased understanding of how positive relationships with students and teachers throughout the building require consistency and transparency when it comes to communication, expectations, and sustained building wide achievement; (c) participants described the need for a balanced, reciprocal relationship between the leader, the needs of the building, and the vision of the district as it relates to creating and maintaining large and small systems designed to increase student achievement; (d) participants expressed the importance of creating, promoting, and maintaining high expectations for themselves and making all decisions in schools directly connected to the needs and interests of the whole child; (e) participants explained the significance of developing the hiring process and the importance of strategically hiring personnel to ensure that they demonstrate qualities that are aligned to the mission and or vision of the district; and (f) participants demonstrated the importance of identifying and addressing people and systems that exhibit or condone a fixed mindset in approach and conduct can limit the effectiveness of the learning organization.

The three findings of this study were determined from an analysis of the six themes. Finding 1 emerged from Themes 1, 2, and 3, and is presented as follows: participants described their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools by metacognitively acknowledging specific character traits or perceptions of self and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques used throughout the building and district that contribute to student achievement. Finding 2 surfaced from Themes 4 and 5 and is presented as follows:

participants suggested their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools contributed to organizational success because they established personal and system wide norms that directly influenced the growth, sustainability, and strategic decision making made by principals in schools. Lastly, Finding 3 surfaced from Theme six, as follows: participants explained there are several barriers that exist in Recognition Schools that can negatively impact student achievement, limit professional development, and weaken the learning organization's alignment from its vision, mission, and practice if not strategically dealt with immediately.

In conclusion, the researcher explored the mindful leadership practices of six Recognition School principals that contribute to, promote, and maintain complex, high reliability learning organizations through their self-reported perceptions and experiences. These Recognition School principals, three at elementary level and three at the secondary level, represented high performing schools which differed from studies reviewed in the existent body of mindful leadership and mindful learning organizations. This research is intended to contribute to the existing body of literature on mindful leadership, systems learning, organizational mindfulness, and the development of High Reliability Organizations (HRO). In addition, this research is intended to inform aspirants, school leaders, directors, coordinators, facilitators, and schools dedicated to training future principals of how to create, develop, and maintain high achieving learning organizations.

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Appendices

Appendix A:
Recognition School Identification Criteria

Table 11

Elementary/Middle School Recognition Identification Criteria

Scenario	Composite Performance	Growth	Combined Composite Performance & Growth	English Language Proficiency	Progress	Chronic Absenteeism
1	Both Level 4		Level 4	None* or \geq Level 2		No indicator is Level 1
2	Either Level 4		Level 4	None*		Any One of Two is Level 4; No indicator is Level 1
3	Either Level 4		Level 4	Level 4		No indicator is Level 1
4	Either Level 4		Level 4	Level 3		Anyone of Two is Level 4; No indicator is Level 1
5	Either Level 4		Level 4	Level 2		Both Level 4

Table 12

High School Recognition Identification Criteria

Scenario	Composite Performance	Graduation Rate	Combined Composite Performance & Graduation Rate	English Language Proficiency	Progress	Chronic Absenteeism	College, Career, & Civic Readiness
1	Both Level 4		Level 4	None* or \geq Level 2		No indicator is Level 1	
2	Either Level 4		Level 4	None*	Any One of Three is Level 4; No indicator is Level 1		
3	Either Level 4		Level 4	Level 4		No indicator is Level 1	
4	Either Level 4		Level 4	Level 3	Anyone of Three is Level 4; No indicator is Level 1		
5	Either Level 4		Level 4	Level 2	Any Two Level 4; No indicator is Level 1		

Appendix B:

Permission to Conduct the Study Letter—Superintendent



Dear Superintendent of Schools:

My name is Joseph W. Sullivan and I am a doctoral student at Western Connecticut State University. I am seeking district permission to perform a study with the building principal(s) who represent Recognition Schools in your district. This qualitative, multiple-case study is designed to examine the practices and perceptions of principals who represent Recognition Schools. The researcher seeks to understand and interpret how these building principals create, manage, and sustain high performing schools. An individual may withdraw from the study at any time. Participation or non-participation in this study is unrelated to any type of review of the individual or of their school program. The data collected will be coded to ensure that all responses, participants, and schools remain confidential. The results of this study will be disseminated through a dissertation, presentations, and publications.

The proposed study will be implemented in two phases to understand and uncover the practices and perceptions of Recognition School principals throughout New York State. During Phase One principals will be asked to complete two questionnaires; (a) Researcher created demographic survey, 8 questions, (b) the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003), 15 questions. This should take approximately ten minutes to complete. If the participants agree to contribute, they can select to participate in Phase Two of the study, two virtual, semi-structured interviews. Phase One of the study should take approximately 15 minutes and each interview in Phase Two should last approximately 60 minutes.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by Western Connecticut State University's Institutional Review Board. It is my intention to produce findings that will support

building leaders in schools who are trying to transform their schools into highly effective learning organizations.

Please click the [Permission to Conduct the Study Form](#) in order to accept or deny this invitation for your building principals to participate. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Joseph W. Sullivan, Ed.D.
Candidate
Instructional Leadership
sullivan165@wcsu.edu

Catherine O'Callaghan, Ph.D.
Professor, Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership
Dissertation Committee Chair
ocallaghanc@wcsu.edu

Appendix C:

Permission to Conduct the Study Form—Superintendent

Permission to Conduct the Study (Superintendent).

This qualitative, multiple-case study is designed to examine the practices and perceptions of principals who represent Recognition Schools. The researcher seeks to understand and interpret how these building principals create, manage, and sustain high performing schools.

The data collected will be coded to ensure that all responses, participants and schools remain confidential.

Email *

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

CONSENT: I have read the information attached to and associated with this hyperlink. I voluntarily agree to allow the building principals of this school district who represent Recognition Schools to participate in this qualitative, multi-case study. *

Yes

No

Appendix D:

Invitation to Participant Letter—Principal



Dear Recognition School Principal,

Congratulations!!! Your school has been awarded Recognition School status by NYSED for the 2019-2020 school year. My name is Joseph Sullivan and I am currently a practicing middle school assistant principal in Dutchess County, NY and a doctoral student in the Instructional Leadership program at Western Connecticut State University. Please accept this letter as an invitation to participate in a research study that is designed to highlight mindful leadership practices of principals who represent Recognition Schools throughout New York State.

Only 582 schools across New York State meet the criteria for this study. Your participation in this multiple case study will begin in Phase One, a series of demographic questions on a Google form and will only take about 7 minutes to complete. One of the questions will ask, “Would you like to participate in Phase Two of the study?” Phase Two of the study includes two interviews, an initial interview in the spring of 2021 and a follow up interview in the fall of 2021. Each interview is designed to last 45 to 60 minutes. An individual may withdraw from the study at any time and without any type of penalty. Participation or non-participation in this study is unrelated to any type of review of the individual or of their school program. The results of this study will be disseminated through a dissertation, presentations, and publications.

Uncovering the practices and perceptions of Recognition School principals may directly influence the development, improvement, and sustainability of Recognition Schools in New York State. This research study has been reviewed and approved by Western Connecticut State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB# 2021-45). There are no foreseeable risks

involved in participating in this study other than the use of your time. Your identity and the identity of your school will not be revealed throughout the study and all information collected will be kept on a password protected file on the researcher's personal computer. The only other person that will be able to see the data collected will be my dissertation committee chair as she will act as an external auditor of my study.

Please click the [Voluntary Consent Form](#) to accept or decline this invitation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Joseph W. Sullivan, Ed.D.
Candidate
Instructional Leadership
sullivan165@wcsu.edu

Catherine O'Callaghan, Ph.D.
Professor, Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership
Dissertation Committee Chair
ocallaghanc@wcsu.edu

Appendix E:
Voluntary Consent Form—Principal (Google Form)



Voluntary Consent

The collected data will be coded to ensure that all responses will be held strictly confidential.

* Required

CONSENT: I have read the information hyperlinked to this survey and voluntarily agree to participate in this qualitative, multi-case study. *

Yes

No

Next

Appendix F:
Demographic Survey—(Google Form)

Demographic Survey

1. With which Gender do you most identify? *

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other: _____

2. Age: *

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- >69

3. Number of years working in public education at any position (include this current year): *

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- >25

4. Number of years working in the building as building principal (include this current year): *

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- >25

5. Have you ever received professional development about mindfulness before becoming a principal? *

- Yes
- No

6. Have you ever received professional development about mindfulness as a principal? *

- Yes
- No

7. Do you self-identify as a mindful leader? *

- Yes
- No

8. How often do you utilize mindfulness techniques or practices at work? *

- | | | | | | | | |
|-------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
| Never | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Always |

Thank You!!!! Would you like to finish Phase One of this study?

The next session is comprised of 16 questions and should take approximately 10 minutes.

Would you like to finish Phase One of the study? *

Yes

No

Back

Next

Appendix G:

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003)

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) Day-to-Day Experiences

Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-6 scale below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

- 1= Almost Always
- 2= Very Frequently
- 3= Somewhat Frequently
- 4= Somewhat Infrequently
- 5= Very Infrequently
- 6= Almost Never

1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

3. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

4. I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

5. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

6. I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

7. It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

9. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

10. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

11. I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

12. I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

13. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

14. I find myself doing things without paying attention. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

15. I snack without being aware that I'm eating. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Almost Always	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Almost Never

Would you like to be considered for Phase Two of this study? Phase Two consists of two, semi-structured interviews, an initial interview & a follow up interview.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe, but send me an invite anyway, just in case.

Appendix H:
Initial Interview Protocol

Name:

School name:

Primary/Secondary:

1. Can you tell me about your primary role and responsibilities as a school principal?
2. What is your understanding of mindfulness or mindfulness practices?
3. What is your definition of mindfulness & mindful leadership?
4. How would you empower your personnel to become more mindful in their roles?
5. How do you incorporate mindfulness or mindfulness practices into your role as principal?
6. What types of behaviors or practices do you contribute to successful programs or initiatives in your school?
7. What are some of the challenging barriers you face as principal of a Recognition School?
8. If you could provide any reflective feedback to yourself what would it be?
9. Can you describe a situation where you might have utilized a mindful practice to solve a problem with staff, students, or families?
10. Think back to your teacher preparation program were you ever exposed to any pre-service mindfulness trainings or classes? How about during your graduate school or your educational leadership program?
11. What professional development opportunities are available or provided to you or your faculty about mindfulness & mindful leadership?
12. How would you measure success or achievement in your school?
13. Do you feel that the established accountability system is a reliable measure of your school's success?
14. Do you have any documents or artifacts that support your work as a mindful leader? What are they and would you discuss them at our follow up interview?

Appendix I:

Request for Use and to Adapt Interview Protocol

Joseph W. Sullivan

Mon 10/5/2020 2:50 PM

To: wowek.kearney@tamusa.edu <Wowek.Kearney@tamusa.edu>;

cherylkelsey@tamusa.edu; dherring@wakehealth.edu

Cc: Catherine O'Callaghan

Dear Dr. Kearney, Dr. Kelsey, & Dr. Herrington,

My name is Joseph W. Sullivan and I am a doctoral student at Western Connecticut State University. I am seeking your permission to use your interview protocol created to elicit information regarding leadership in HRO's (Youngs, 2018) to support my study titled, **ORGANIZATIONAL MINDFULNESS IN RECOGNITION SCHOOLS: MINDFUL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF PRINCIPALS THAT BUILD MINDFUL LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS**. This qualitative, multiple-case study will focus on the building principals who represent Recognition Schools to understand their experiences in creating, managing, and sustaining high performing schools. Selected principals who score a 5 or higher on the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003) will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Permission to use your protocol would be very helpful.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Joseph W. Sullivan

Doctoral Student

Western Connecticut State University

845-661-4248

Appendix J:
Follow-Up Interview Protocol

PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL MINDFULNESS

©Kearney, Kelsey, & Herrington (2013).
Adapted form by Charles Youngs (2018) with permission.

PARTICIPANT NAME: _____

1. Can you tell me about your primary role(s) and responsibilities have changed since we last spoke?
2. How and in which ways do you the incorporation of mindfulness practices with people throughout the building you represent?

Preoccupation with Failure (Accountability measures)

1. How do you encourage teachers in your school to use mistakes and failures as learning experiences?
2. How do you encourage the teachers in your school to be creative, take reasonable risks, and feel free to make mistakes without the fear of failure?

Reluctance to Simplify (Shared decision making)

1. How do you negotiate differences among the teachers in your school without destroying the diversity of opinions?
2. How often do you refine routine rules and standard procedures based on new experiences or a change in the situation?

Sensitivity to Operations (Teaching & Learning)

1. How do your actions as a principal support your values and beliefs?
2. How do you maintain a close relationship with the personnel in your building when supporting the teaching-learning process?

Commitment to Resilience (Culture)

1. How do you support a culture of openness and trust so that personnel are willing to admit and discuss mistakes, correct them, and learn from them?
2. What structures or processes do you use to identify and correct concerns or problems before they worsen or become critical?

Deference to Expertise (Development/Sustainability)

1. How have you cultivated an atmosphere that encourages the personnel to challenge each other's thoughts and behavior?
2. How have you involved teachers in your (school or department) in creating and implementing solutions to problems?

Wrap-up: These questions have considered how you, the building principal and other teachers work on a day-to-day basis in school. They consider topics like ensuring success, averting failure, reluctance to simplify or jump to conclusions, being sensitive to teaching and learning, being committed to resilience, and the degree to which expertise is deferred to.

Thinking about the day-to-day activity of your (school or department) in light of these topics, what more can you tell me about how you and your colleagues do your work?

Preoccupation with	Reluctance to simplify	Sensitivity to teaching and
Failure/Success		learning
Commitment to resilience	Deference to expertise	

Appendix K:

Request for Use and to Adapt Interview Protocol—Follow-Up

Wowek Kearney <Wowek.Kearney@tamusa.edu>
Wed 10/7/2020 10:42 AM

To: Joseph W. Sullivan; cherylkelsey@tamusa.edu; dherring@wakehealth.edu
Cc: Catherine O'Callaghan

Please be cautious
This email was sent from outside of your organization

Mr. Sullivan,

Thank you for reaching out with this request. Yes – you are certainly welcome to utilize this interview protocol.

Good luck in your research endeavors. I will be looking forward to reading your findings.

In service,
Sean Kearney

W. Sean Kearney, Ed.D.
Professor, Educational Leadership
Texas A&M University-San Antonio

Appendix L:
Charles Youngs Approval Email

 This sender chasyoungs@gmail.com is from outside your organization. Block sender



Charles Youngs <chasyoungs@gmail.com>
Thu 4/21/2022 8:11 PM



To: Sullivan.joseph2050@gmail.com <sullivan.joseph2050@gmail.com>; Joseph W. Sullivan

You don't often get email from chasyoungs@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Please be cautious

This email was sent from outside of your organization

Hello Joseph,

I'm happy to support your doctoral research and glad to hear that you've found value in mine. You have my permission to adapt the conceptual model developed in my research and reported in my dissertation for your project.

If I may, the only condition I would ask, beyond attribution, would be to receive a copy of your finished dissertation. Based on your title, I can see that I would be most interested in your methodology and findings. It sounds as if your project is coming together nicely and will be an important contribution to the high reliability educational field. I especially like the focus on action implied by "practices" and "build" in your working title.

Best wishes and I look forward to your final research. By all means get in touch if you have other questions along the way.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Youngs, Ed.D.

Appendix M:
IRB Approval Email

Carol O'Connor
Tue 11/24/2020 1:24 PM

To: Joseph W. Sullivan
Cc: Catherine O'Callaghan

WCSU IRB;

Hello Joseph Sullivan,

I am pleased to inform you that your I.R.B. protocol number 2021-45 has been approved by expedited review. This email is documentation of your official approval to start your research. If you need a copy of this official approval for funding purposes, please let me know oconnorc@wcsu.edu. The WCSU I.R.B. wishes you the best with your research.

You have 1 year from the date of this email to complete your research; if you are still conducting that date, you will need to fill out a renewal application. When are you finished with your study please fill out and return via email a Termination/Completion Report (available here: <http://wcsu.edu/irb/forms.asp>) so we know your study is complete.

Finally – and most importantly! – we have recently learned that current BOR technology policies do *not* guarantee privacy of *any* info stored on work computers physically, remotely, or otherwise (i.e., laptop, Dropbox, etc.). As such, to maintain the truth of any anonymity or confidentiality promises you make to participants (consent form, for example), you will need to store all electronic data obtained from those human subjects on a system/computer/file *not* connected to any CSU system. It is your responsibility as the primary researcher to make sure personal data of participants remains securely private – something not guaranteed in the currently existing CSU system. Rest assured, (because it's ridiculous to expect faculty to store work-related research on non-work-related systems and/or to conduct research where participants are not guaranteed anonymity/confidentiality), we are working to gain an exception for research purposes to this policy. But until then, it's technically and legally possible for anyone in the system office to access your participants' data at any time – *without* your consent or knowledge before doing.

Thanks,

Jessica Eckstein, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Western Connecticut State University
www.wcsu.edu/irb

Carol O'Connor

Secretary Psychology Department
C.E.L.T.
I.A.C.U.C.
I.R.B.
Western Connecticut State University
181 White Street
WA 304
Danbury, CT 06810

Appendix N:
Timeline of Study

Fall 2020

- Proposal submission to dissertation committee.
- IRB submission and review.

Winter 2021

- Send invitations and consent forms to Recognition School District Superintendents.
- Send invitations and consent forms to Recognition School principals for Phase One.

Spring 2021

- Begin data collection for Phase One.
- Analyze data to select participants for Phase Two.
- Schedule initial interviews with the selected participants.
- Begin interviews with participants for Phase Two

Summer 2021

- Code and analyze data from Phase One.
- Begin coding for Phase Two.
- Schedule follow up interviews for Phase Two.
- Begin interviews with participants for Phase Two.

Fall 2021

- Continue interviews with participants for Phase Two.
- Review and continue data analysis from Phase Two.
- Complete dissertation chapters one, two, and three.

Spring of 2022

- Complete dissertation chapters four and five.
- Finalize and defend dissertation.

Appendix O:
Illustrations of the Coding Process

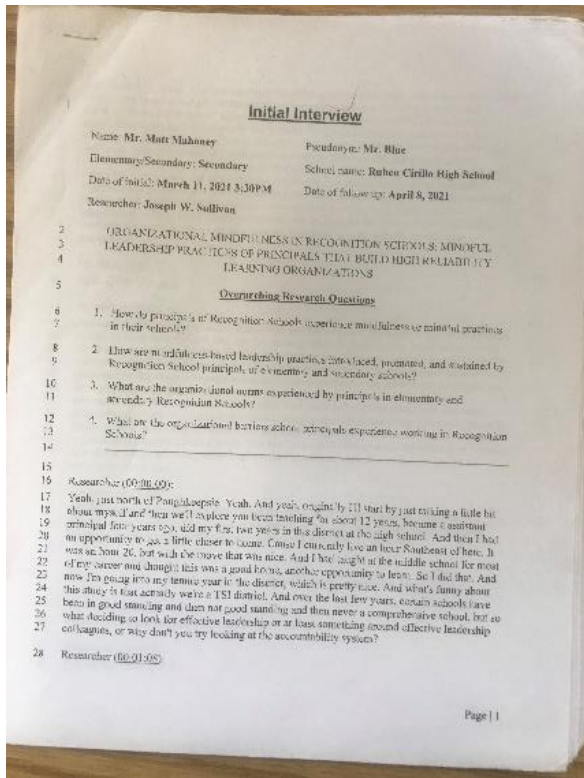


Figure 01. Title.

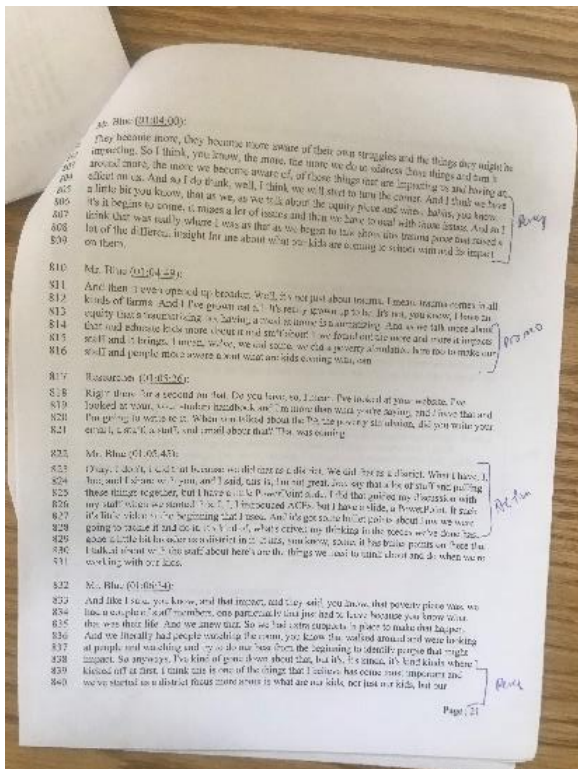


Figure 02. Title.

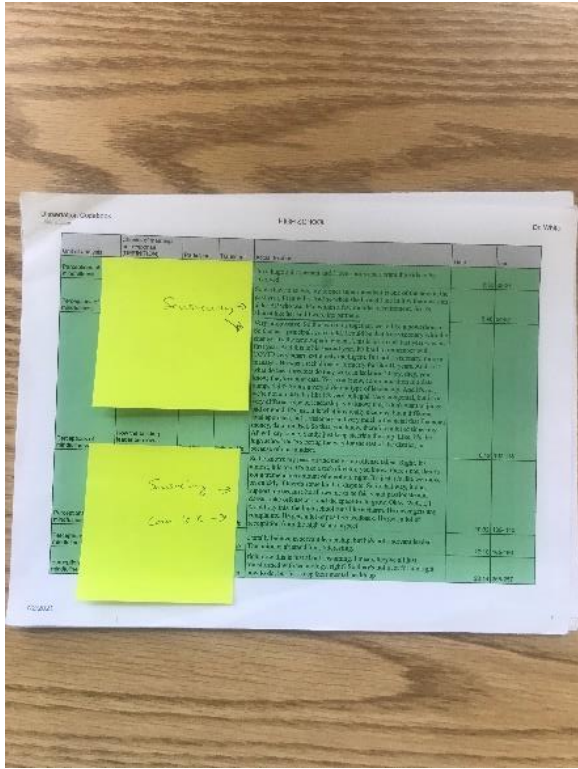


Figure O9. Title.



Figure O10. Title.

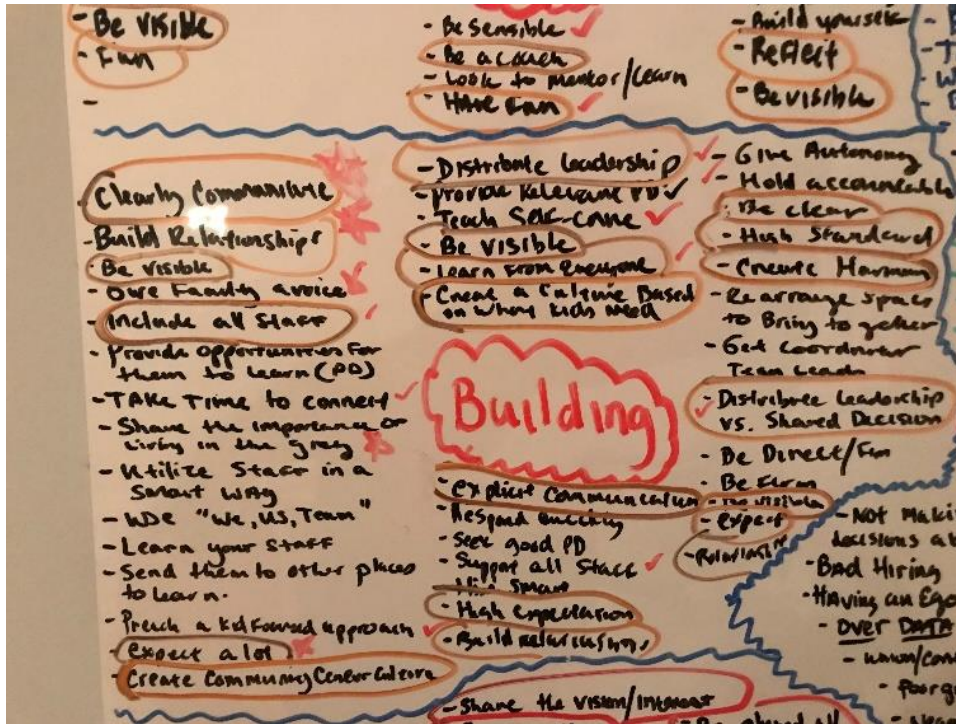


Figure O11. Title.

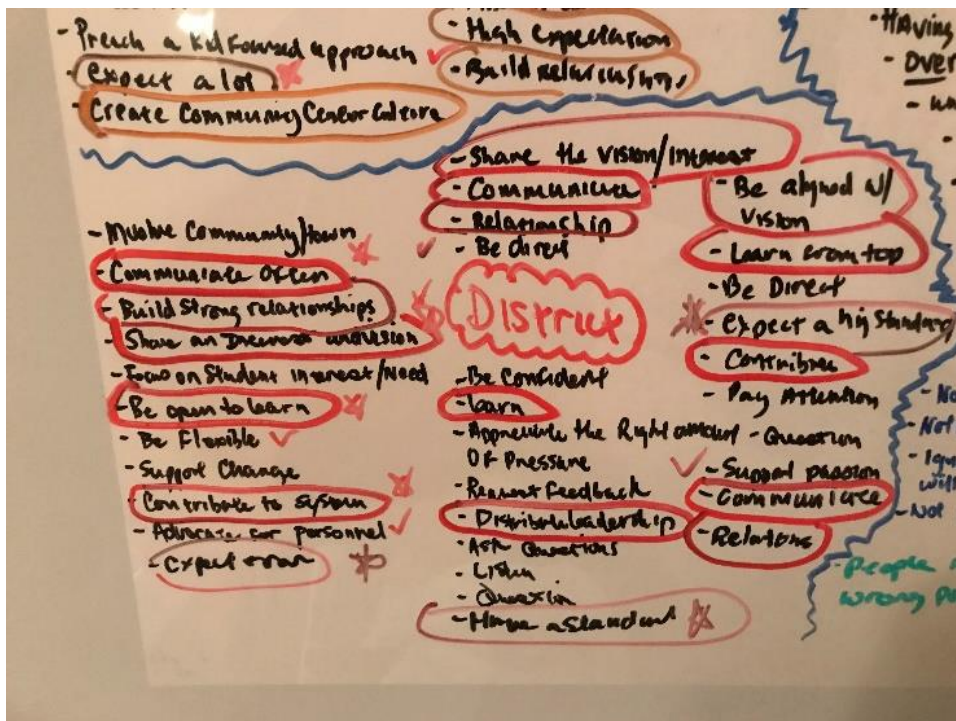


Figure O12. Title.



Figure O15. Title.



Figure O16. Title.

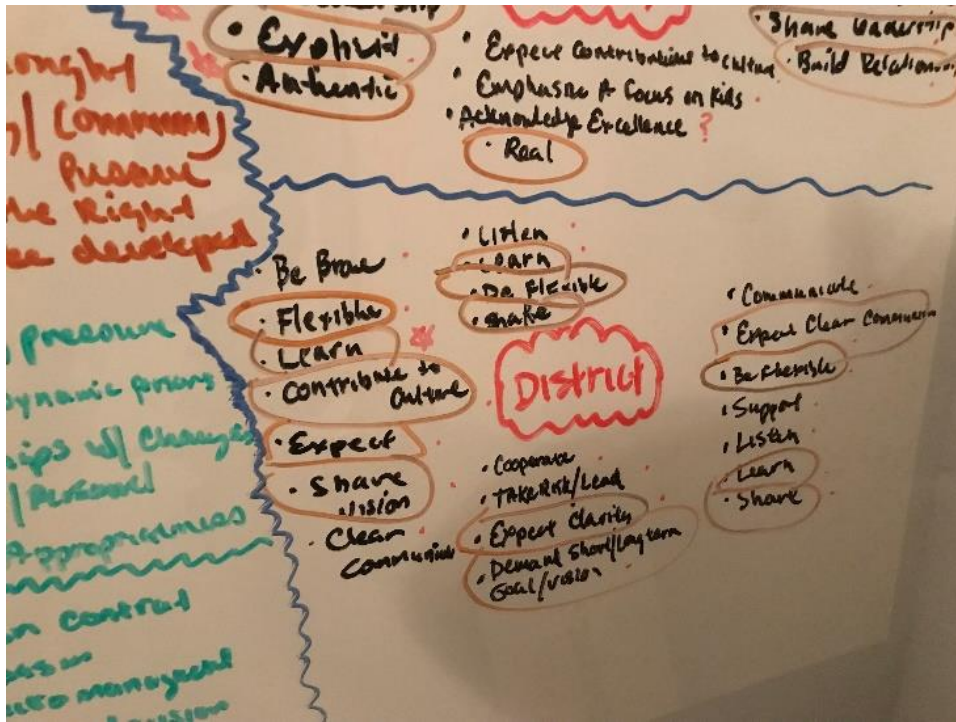


Figure O17. Title.

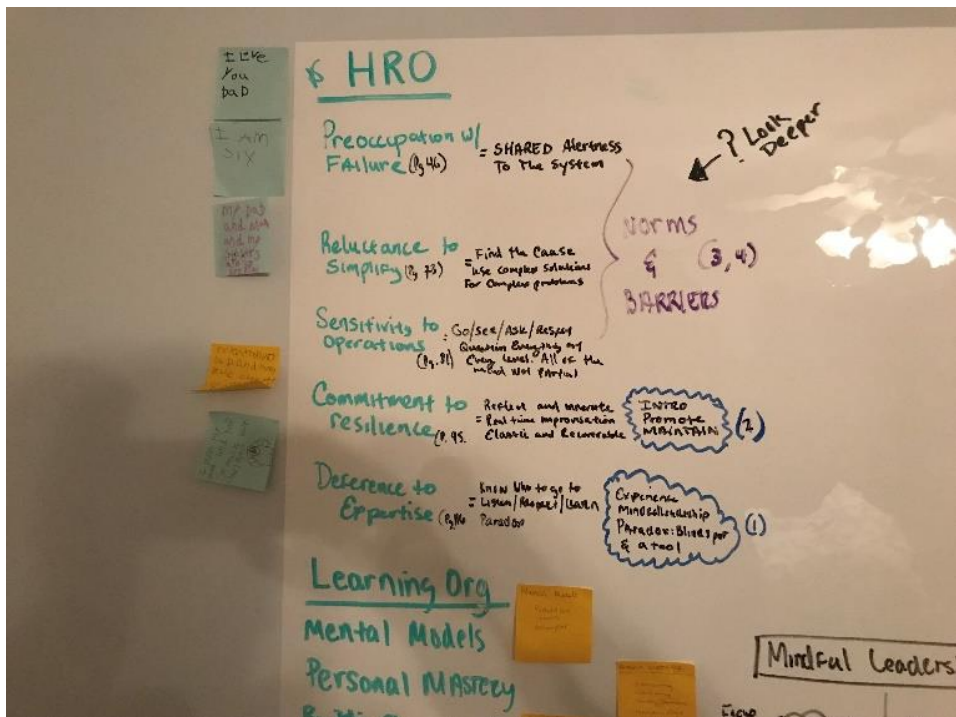


Figure O18. Title.

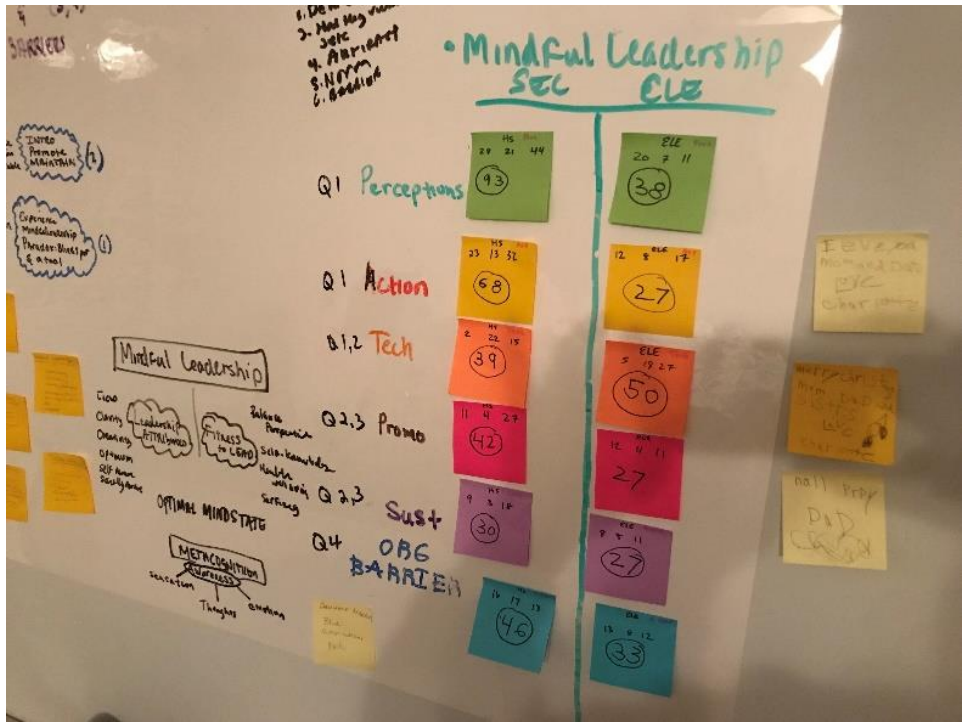


Figure O19. Title.

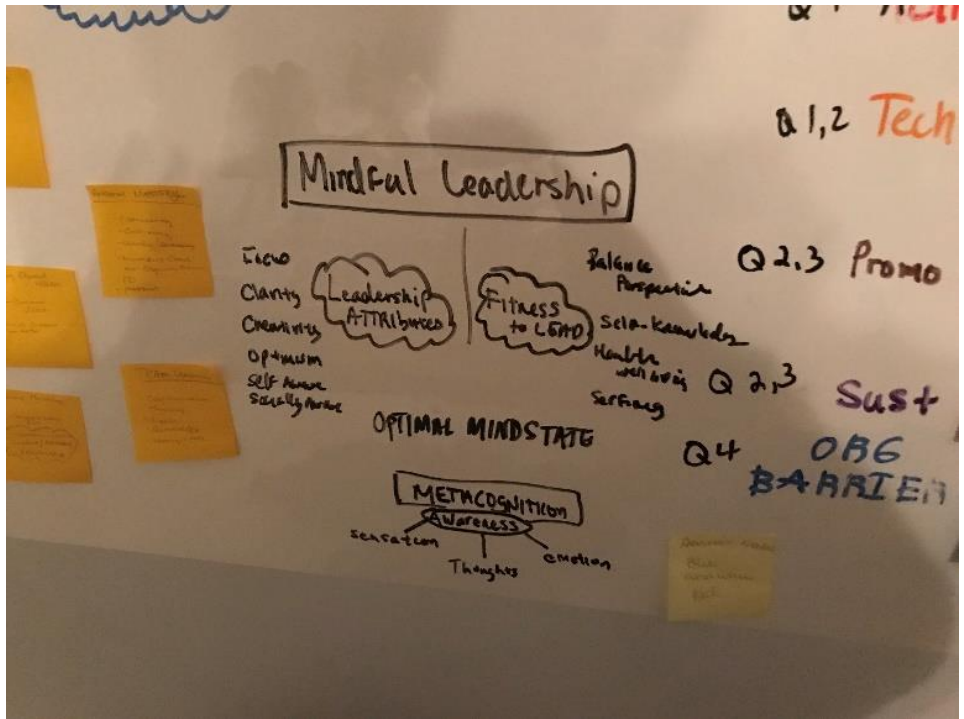


Figure O20. Title.

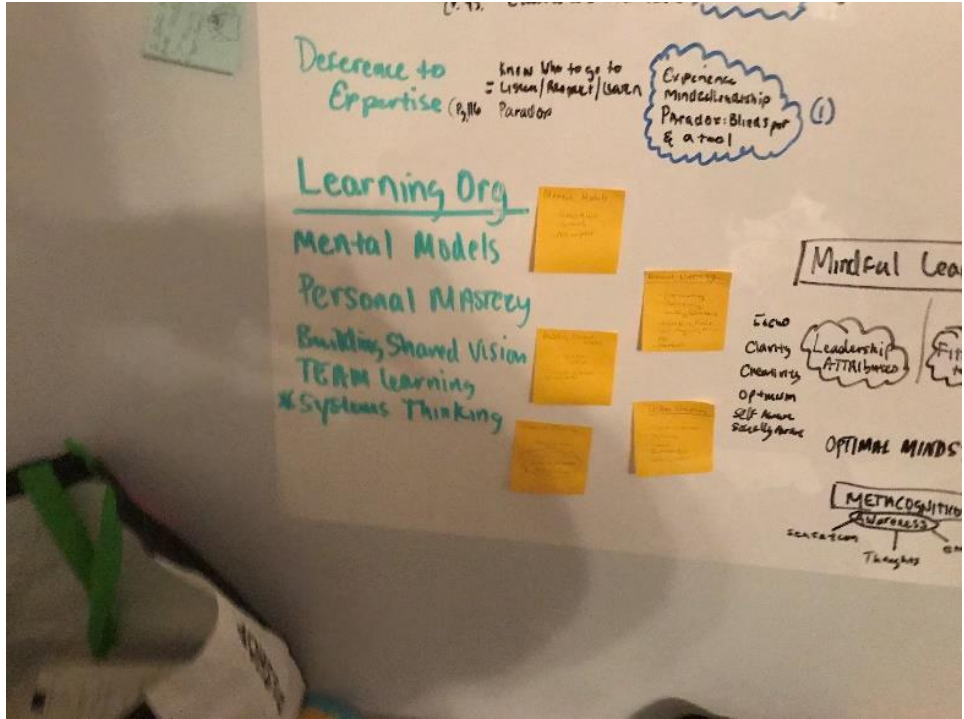


Figure O21. Title.

Appendix P:
Qualitative Coding and Analysis

Findings Statement 1	Participants described their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools by metacognitively acknowledging specific character traits or perceptions of self and identifying necessary leadership actions or techniques used throughout the building and district that contribute to student achievement.										
Theme 1	Participants perceived themselves as having to be self-aware of the pressures inherently associated with the principal position and the importance of becoming a leader with a growth mindset, confidence, and the ability to reflect on their practice so their contributions to the system are meaningful and strategic.										
Theme 2	Participants demonstrated an increased understanding of how positive relationships with students and teachers throughout the building require consistency and transparency when it comes to communication, expectations, and sustained building wide achievement.										
Theme 3	Participants described the need for a balanced, reciprocal relationship between the leader, the needs of the building, and the vision of the district as it relates to creating and maintaining large and small systems designed to increase student achievement.										
Subthemes	Theme 1, Subtheme 1: Participants reported a need to have a growth mindset as it relates to how they view themselves as a growing, flexible, learning leader.	Theme 1, Subtheme 2: Participants emphasized the value of developing self confidence in the principal role and to trust their expertise and experience in the position they hold.	Theme 1, Subtheme 3: Participants described the importance of reflection and taking time to think about their emotions, strategic potential, outcomes.	Theme 2, Subtheme 1: Participants described the importance of building positive and meaningful relationships with all personnel associated with the school (teachers, bus drivers, staff, etc.)	Theme 2, Subtheme 2: Participants indicated that all decisions should be based on students and outcomes as they affect the achievement of the whole child.	Theme 2, Subtheme 3: Participants expressed the value associated with being explicit, direct, and deliberate with all forms of communication associated with introducing, promoting, and sustaining building operations.	Theme 2, Subtheme 4: Participants emphasized the significance of being authentic when creating, promoting, or managing systems that ultimately support high expectations and the building's mission.	Theme 3, Subtheme 1: Participants described the importance of building relationships with district personnel that promotes a commitment and contribution to sharing the districts goals, mission, vision, and strategic plans.	Theme 3, Subtheme 2: Participants emphasized the implications associated with recognizing and developing appropriate, expressive and receptive communication practices supported the fidelity of leadership action and expected from stakeholders above and below the building leader.	Theme 3, Subtheme 3: Participants expressed the value in having an expectation for the district to provide support, education, and to remove barriers that ultimately disrupts paths to student achievement systematically.	
Categories	Mindset	Character	Reflection	Relational Capacity	Philosophy	Communi- cation	Mission	Systems	Systems Thinking	Vision	
Sub Categories	Perceptions		Actions		Techniques		Promotion	Sustainability		Barriers	
Code Categories	Self			Building			District				
Codes	Visibility Confidence Reflections Having Fun Listening Consistency Learning Coaching/Mentoring			Distributing leadership Building Capacity Inclusivity Explicit Communication Relationship Building Shared Decision Making Modeling			Vertical/Horizontal Alignment Learning Specificity Communication Vision High Standard High Expectations Relationships				

Findings Statement 2	Participants suggested their mindful leadership experiences in high achieving, Recognition Schools contributed to organizational success because they established personal and system wide norms that directly influenced the growth, sustainability, and strategic decision making made by principals in schools.						
Theme 4	Participants expressed the importance of creating, promoting, and maintaining high expectations for themselves and making all decisions in schools directly connected to the needs and interests of the whole child.						
Theme 5	Participants explained the significance of developing the hiring process and the importance of strategically hiring personnel to ensure that they demonstrate qualities that are aligned to the mission and or vision of the district.						
Subthemes	Theme 4, Subtheme 1: Participants reported a need to build positive relationships with students and staff in order to create a healthy learning environment.	Theme 4, Subtheme 2: Participants emphasized the value of making strategic social, emotional, and academic decisions that directly support student achievement.	Theme 5, Subtheme 1: Participants described the importance of highly effective learning organizations establishing and fostering a hiring process that produces the best candidate for the position.	Theme 5, Subtheme 2: Participants explained the significance of hiring personnel that have the desirable characteristics, the potential to grow, and give an impression that is related to the district's mission and vision.			
Sub Categories	Perceptions	Actions	Techniques	Promotion	Sustainability	Barriers	
Code Categories	Suggestions						
Codes	Focus/Whole Child Hire Smart Service Leadership Love of work/Love of people Distributive leadership Work hard Resilience High Expectations Maslow/Bloom Self-care Healthy Relationships Take Risks Service Communication						
Findings Statement 3	Participants explained there are organizational barriers that exist in Recognition Schools that can negatively impact student achievement, limit professional development, and weaken the learning organization's productivity and alignment from students the district's vision, mission, and practice.						
Theme 6	Participants explained the significance of not promoting and fostering a growth mindset throughout the school, between and among students, personnel, and the community can reduce the effectiveness of the learning organization.						
Subthemes	Theme 6, Subtheme 1: Participants expressed the variety of challenges associated with personnel, such as professional development and keeping the right staff to carry out the vision and mission of the Recognition School.	Theme 6, Subtheme 2: Participants described how the establishment of poor, outdated, or ineffective systems, policies, and protocols can negatively influence student achievement in Recognition Schools.					

Categories	Preoccupation with Failure	Sensitivity to Operations	Reluctance to Simplify	Commitment to Resilience	Deference to Expertise
Code Categories	Barriers				
Codes	Admin Rollover Weak Systems Collective Bargaining Contracts Not Hiring the Right Fit Not Including Stakeholder Voice Silo Leadership Poor Communication Fixed Mindset Impulsivity Micro Management				



**Edd in Instructional Leadership
Department of Education and Educational Psychology
Dissertation Registration Form**

Student Joseph W. Sullivan Date 4/28/2022

Dissertation Title:


**ORGANIZATIONAL MINDFULNESS IN RECOGNITION SCHOOLS:
MINDFUL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF PRINCIPALS THAT BUILD
HIGH RELIABILITY LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS**

Dissertation Committee Members: See attached Dissertation Approval Page

For Office Use Only.

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Dissertation Committee Chair Signature Date

Marcia. A. B. Delcourt, PhD Marcia. A. B. Delcourt 4/28/2023
Program Coordinator Signature Date

Joan S. Palladino, EdD  7/23/2025
Dean, School of Professional Studies Signature Date