

Practices for promoting socially just leadership in rural schools

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Dedication

I have only made it through this program because of my wife, Jessica Oldham, and the support she has provided. She supported my dreams and uprooted our family to move to a new city, Knoxville, five years ago so I could pursue my Ph.D. She supported and encouraged my dreams to present at conferences and publish in academic journals, often at the expense of time with my family. During my time as a doctoral student, we moved twice and had two more children. She is a dedicated and loving mother who I am lucky to be with every single day. She makes me a better person who keeps me grounded in the realities of what is most important in life. Thank you, Jessica, for being everything I could ask for as a husband. This degree is not a product of my intelligence, but a reflection of your support because without it I never would have accomplished it.

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Abstract

While ensuring equitable educational opportunities is a federal mandate of the United States Department of Education, research has shown that rural school principals may have difficulty doing so. Studies have investigated the practices urban and suburban school principals use to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students, but few studies have been completed with rural principals serving as the main unit of analysis. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the practices rural principals employ to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students, the barriers they face when doing so, and the variation of equity practices among rural principals with differential student outcomes. This multi-site case study included four rural principals in a southeastern state of the United States. Due to this study's subject matter, demographics and size of the community were considered when selecting cases, but z-scores were also used to compute student outcomes for more objectivity when choosing cases based on the criteria outlining this study. The qualitative data was open-coded to address the first two research questions. The qualitative data was examined through the lens of Theoharis's (2009) conceptual framework on effective social justice leadership to address research question three. Rural principals shared many of the same practices to ensure equity like pedagogy, modeling and having high expectations. The principals also shared many of the same barriers such as community, financial limitations, and staff resistance. Using Theoharis's (2009) social justice framework revealed that the most effective principals based on student outcomes were also the most socially just. Findings showed that principals who had outside factors that helped in their practices of social justice were more likely to have positive student outcomes. The most effective rural principals had district, community, and staff

support regarding their social justice practices, whereas the least effective principals did not have extra support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The Department of Education lists increasing equity and excellence for all students as their top educational priority for 2016 (Department of Education, 2016). The Department of Education, in the budget released for the fiscal year 2016, stated:

The 2016 Budget puts a strong focus on equity and excellence at every level of our education system, in every school, beginning with a significant increase for the Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) program that includes additional targeted resources to help turn around our lowest-performing schools, a critical component in improving educational equity. (p. 3)

The United States Department of Education has increased funding for Title I grants to the lowest-performing schools, including rural schools, for the last decade. For the fiscal year 2017, the Department of Education, as a portion of their budget, requested a renewal of the Small, Rural School Grant Program and the Rural and Low-Income School Program. Both programs provide grants to small and low-income rural schools that face significant challenges in meeting the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Research has shown that one of the challenges rural schools face in meeting the requirements of ESEA is providing equitable educational opportunities to marginalized students (Budge, 2006; DeMatthews, 2015). The budgets for both of these programs, the Small, Rural School Grant and Low-Income School program, combined is over 172 million dollars per year, yet the problem of inequity persists for many marginalized students in rural schools.

Equity, in the context of education, is the promotion of fair practices and opportunities so all students can be successful. Equality, on the other hand, is treating all students the same (Schütz, Ursprung, & Wößmann, 2008). Scholars have found that equity-oriented leadership is essential to creating positive student outcomes (Blanksteiin, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Furman & Shields, 2005; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002; Quinn, 2002). Furthermore, scholars have noted that principal leadership that prioritizes equity has the potential to change a school's climate from negative to positive (Comer, 1994; Fraser, 2012; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan. & Lipton, 2000; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Riester et al., 2002). While scholars have examined the positive impact of equity-oriented leadership on student outcomes, scholars have also investigated the adverse effects on student outcomes when equity is not a priority in principal leadership practices (Dinham, 2005; Fraser, 2012). Scholarship suggests that principals who do not prioritize equity-oriented leadership provide fewer educational opportunities (Comer, 1997; Furman & Shields, 2005; Riester et al., 2002), a more negative school climate (Birkett et al., 2009; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997), and lower rates of academic achievement (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Edmonds, 1979; Irvine, 1990; Lee, 2002).

Scholars have examined equity-oriented principal leadership in suburban and urban contexts. While most students in the United States attend suburban or urban schools, 31% of public schools are considered rural serving over 10 million students (Department of Education, 2013). Scholars have studied rural principal leadership and the strategies they employ to promote student success. Specifically, scholars have investigated the challenges rural principals face when trying to lead for equity in schools. For example, sometimes rural schools are

geographically isolated which could present challenges to rural principals because their districts have lower tax bases (Autio & Deussen, 2016; Bauch, 2001). The lower tax base is a product of the sparsely populated rural area that surrounds the school. Since the population of rural areas is less than suburban and urban areas, there are fewer tax dollars provided to the districts for public education (Autio & Deussen, 2016). As a result, rural principals have less money to spend that could help provide more resources to students and professional development to teachers that emphasize promoting equitable educational opportunities (Carey, 2004; Chalker, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jimerson, 2007). Rural principals sometimes are tasked with performing multiple jobs by themselves because the district does not have the necessary resources for principals to hire additional staff (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2005). Rural principals also may have difficulty retaining staff or hiring more diverse faculty members because the school districts usually provide lower pay and fewer benefits (Autio & Deussen, 2016; Chalker, 1999; Starr & White, 2008). Finally, research has also shown that there are some contextual factors of rural schools that make equity-oriented leadership particularly challenging, specifically the values of a community that views equity for certain marginalized student populations as antithetical to their moral beliefs (Bishop & McClellan, 2016). Ultraconservative segments of Christianity, manifested predominantly in rural southeastern states, have been found to possess homophobia than other regions of the United States (Bishop & McClellan, 2016; Finlay & Walther, 2003; Pew Research, 2015; Rosik, Griffith, & Cruz, 2007).

Almost half of the rural population in the United States lives in the South (Census Bureau, 2015). From 2000-2010, the South experienced a 14.3% increase in its population, higher than any other region in the United States (Census Bureau, 2013). Since the 1950s, out-

migration has continued to occur in rural communities (Gibbs, 2005; Hammer, 2001). As a result, homogeneous populations have been replaced by an increase of in-migration from more diverse populations, including poor, working-class immigrants who identify rural communities as new destinations because of low-wage, low skilled-job opportunities (Schafft, Killeen, & Morrissey, 2010; Stull & Ng, 2016). Thus, marginalized student populations in rural schools are rising, including students of poverty, a demographic trend that has dramatically increased over the last generation (United States Department of Agriculture, 2016). The US census (2010) also showed that the majority of African-Americans live in rural areas of the southern United States and the percentage of the “black alone” (Census term) population grew from 55 percent to 57 percent (Census Bureau, 2015). Tennessee, for example, experienced marked increases for all minority groups from 2010 to 2015, including an increase of persons living in poverty growing to 16.7% (Census Bureau, 2015). While a larger portion of rural school demographics are made up of increasing numbers of marginalized students (United States Department of Agriculture, 2016), research has shown that rural schools are struggling to create equitable educational opportunities for these students, including immigrants (Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010; Frattura & Capper, 2007), students of poverty (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Gholson, 2015; Klar & Brewer, 2013), and students of color (Berkel et al., 2009; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003).

Marginalized students are not limited to ethnic minorities, but can also include students of poverty, students with disabilities, and students with differing sexual orientations. The enrollment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students attending rural schools recently has increased (GLSEN, 2012). Rural schools, specifically those in the

southeastern portion of the United States, are less safe for LGBTQ students than schools in other regions (Ballard, Jameson, & Martz, 2017; Shelton & Lester, 2016).

Therefore, rural principals face particularly challenging circumstances. Rural principals face those challenges while lacking adequate resources and staff support to help ensure equity for marginalized students (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2002a, 2007; Zeichner, 2003). Whereas the literature has highlighted some efforts by rural school principals to enact equity for marginalized students such as for LGBTQ students (Bishop & McClellan, 2016), the literature is scant regarding rural principals' leadership practices that ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Statement of the Problem

While the literature generally indicates that promoting equity in schools leads to positive outcomes at both the organizational and student level, many scholars have noted that there is a need for more research regarding how rural principals ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students (Brown, 2004; DeMatthews, 2015; Hlalele, 2012; Howley & Eckman, 1997; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Riester et al., 2002; Theoharis, 2007). In other words, what are the practices and behaviors that rural principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for marginalized children? Fraser (2012) stated, "There are quite a number of areas where there needs to be more investigation into the actual practice of social justice leadership including....rural schools."(p. 7), while Maxwell, Locke, and Scheurich (2013) contended that, "...little research has been centered on rural social justice/equity leadership" (p. 2). Theoharis's (2007) research examining equity and marginalized students, suggested expanding the study of principal leadership practices for social justice into rural areas by saying: "Areas for future

research could involve an expansion of the current study [on social justice leadership] to include rural leaders” (p. 249). Furthermore, Bradley, Werth, and Hastings (2012) emphasized that “much more discussion needs to occur regarding how rural practitioners think about and what they do when it comes to social justice advocacy” (p. 382). The call for more research both from the United States and internationally as well. In their study of 16 rural schools in Canada concerning inclusive education with the premise of equity-centered leadership, Irvine, Luppatt, Loreman, and McGhie-Richmond (2010) suggested, “Future research should examine the beliefs and practices of school administrators in other countries that are committed to inclusion to add to the research base and for point of comparison” (p. 85).

As heads of their schools, rural principals make numerous leadership decisions that affect equity for their student population (Bishop & McClellan, 2016; Jimerson, 2005; Strasser, Couper, Wynn-Jones, Rourke, Chater, & Reid, 2016). In Gholson’s (2015) study about the attitudes of rural principals toward students of poverty, the author concluded the study by suggesting, “researchers should consider further studies in other regions with greater diversity of educators, such as the rural south” (p. 129), to expand the scope of existing literature on rural principal leadership for marginalized students. In Bishop and McClellan’s (2016) study on the perceptions of rural principals toward LGBTQ students, the authors concluded their study by commenting that the literature “concerning leadership in schools developing equity for LGBTQ students” (p. 142) is almost nonexistent. Furthermore, Bishop and McClellan (2016) concluded that “further study needs to be conducted of rural principals leading [for equity] for other marginalized groups” (p. 147) to help fill the gap concerning leadership practices of rural

principals. Finally, findings from DeMatthews' (2015) study on principal leadership in creating a more inclusive school, recommended that "similar investigations into social justice leadership should be conducted in areas that relate to other marginalized groups...[like] students living in poverty while attending rural schools" (DeMatthews, 2015, p. 162).

The importance of studying the practices rural principals employ to create equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students is underscored in the literature as authors have indicated a need for further study on the phenomenon. Therefore, this study intends to answer the call of Gholson (2015), Bishop and McClellan (2016), and DeMatthews (2015) by investigating the practices of rural principals to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students. Moreover, this study will expand the literature in equity studies by heeding the recommendations of Theoharis (2007), Fraser (2012), Maxwell, Locke, and Scheurich (2013), Bishop and McClellan (2016), Bradley, Werth, and Hastings (2012) and Gholson (2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the practices of rural high school principals in creating equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students. Additionally, this study examined the barriers rural high school principals face when enacting these practices to increase equity.

Research Questions

To achieve this purpose, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What practices do rural high school principals employ to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students?

2. What aspects of rural schools do high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity?
3. What are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differential student outcomes?

Significance of the Study

Howley and Eckmann (1997) suggested a possible reason for the lack of rural-centered research was that “rural people in general, including their practices, are often ‘othered’” (p. 34), or marginalized, while Maxwell et al., (2013) pointed to the deficit of literature highlighting rural equity leadership as an indication of an unconscious bias among scholars. Despite the lack of literature dedicated to the leadership practices of rural principals, rural principals continue to face challenges similar to urban principals, such as retaining staff and providing the proper support for marginalized students (Venzia, 2005). Principals in rural schools often face additional challenges, however, including high teacher turnover, lack of community support, and limited resources for professional development in comparison to urban principals (Chalker, 1999; Starr & White, 2008).

This study will examine the practices of rural principals to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. Also, this study will investigate the rural principal practices for equity regarding the barriers they face when promoting equity. Educational leadership scholars have identified the need for additional research focused on rural principal leadership. Furthermore, equity scholarship has highlighted the lack of studies completed examining rural principal leadership for equity, while identifying equity-oriented leadership as a leadership style that could help promote positive student outcomes. Therefore, this study will augment existing

literature in two ways: by examining rural principal leadership practices and identifying how equity-oriented leadership could help better promote positive student outcomes for rural students.

Findings from this study may provide successful leadership strategies to address increasing equity for marginalized students in rural contexts. In addition, the study could help inform public schools administrators and boards of education of the barriers rural principals face when enacting equity for marginalized students and thus, facilitate possible changes in policy or professional development to help rural school districts better provide equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students. Finally, this study could better inform future scholarship of research areas that should be examined further and create a starting point for future research regarding rural principal leadership to ensure equity for marginalized students.

Definition of Terms

For clarification, terms specific to this study that may be unfamiliar to the reader are defined.

- **Social justice leadership-** describes a leadership orientation that accounts for and assists in creating equitable conditions for students from marginalized backgrounds.
- **Equity-oriented leadership-** describes a leadership orientation that prioritizes creating equitable conditions for students from marginalized backgrounds.
- **Inclusive education-** all students attend and are welcomed by their school in regular, age-appropriate classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of life of the school.
- **Principal-** for the purpose of this study, the principal will include any administrator or assistant principal in a leadership position of a school.

- **Rural-** The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) program develops geographic data to help those in the education field (nces.gov) and public better understand the relationships between schools and their communities. The data terms used, school locale codes or Johnson codes, is a geographic indicator that characterizes the type of community where a school is located. Johnson codes are assigned categories based upon the two criteria: the population of an area, and the distance of the area from an urban area. For the purpose of this study, rural was designated by Johnson Codes 6 & 7, which are rural areas with a population of 2,500 to 19,999 both adjacent and not adjacent to a metropolitan area.
- **Positive student outcomes-** positive student results, including higher rates of academic achievement and post-secondary enrollment, as a result of increased educational opportunities provided by schools.
- **High School-** secondary schools that consist of grades 9-12 in the United States
- **Marginalized students-** refers to students who are often ignored and powerless within the constructs of society, including schools; includes students of color, students of poverty, immigrants, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students.
- **Equity-** the promotion of fair practices and opportunities so all students can be successful.
- **Equality-** Providing the same educational services to everyone regardless of sex, ethnicity, ability, citizenship, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations of a study are restrictions set by the researcher to narrow the scope of the study for significance factors. Since this is a multi-site qualitative case study, certain restrictions were made to ensure an in-depth examination of the phenomenon. This study was controlled by the following delimitations:

Only high school, public school principals in Tennessee, were included in the study. Furthermore, only public-school principals that led a school defined as rural were included in the study. Therefore, this study cannot be generalized to private or urban schools.

Secondly, the study will focus only on a southeastern state in the United States, and therefore findings may not accurately project to other states in the United States. While the study could be used as a point of comparison to other states with similar rural populations, findings should not be generalized to more urban and populated states in the United States.

Conclusions

This chapter introduced the contextual factors that influence rural schools and the practice of rural school principals as they work for marginalized student populations. The problem under investigation was identified as the lack of qualitative empirical research regarding, specifically, the practices rural principals take to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students and the barriers they face when leading for equity. This chapter, therefore, explained the purpose and significance of the study as a crucial piece to guide future rural district school policy. The chapter concluded with definitions of terms used in the study. The limitations and delimitations of the study were provided for a greater understanding of the

confines and components of the proposed study. Additional information associated with qualitative research design will be discussed more specifically in Chapter 3 of this study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 will provide a review of the literature related to this study and by doing so, will reveal the reasons for proposed research questions and study design. Within the review of literature, successful principal behaviors will be explored to provide a basis for what a good principal does in their educational leadership to create positive student outcomes. Next, literature will be highlighted that underscores the various needs of marginalized students for them to be successful in secondary school. In addition, the uniqueness of rurality and rural schools will be discussed to provide the contextual factors as to why rural schools have struggled to provide equitable educational opportunities to students. Chapter 2 will also identify gaps in the literature as it pertains to the actions rural principals take to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students and will examine empirical research regarding equity-oriented rural principal leadership for marginalized students. Finally, Chapter 2 will detail the theoretical framework for this study, Theoharis's seven keys to effective equity leadership, and how the framework will provide a point of comparison for effective rural principal practices to ensure equity for marginalized students.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in this multi-site qualitative case study and will outline the study's research design to explain the rationale, participants, and sample for the study. The chapter will conclude with a description of the data analysis procedures used for this multi-site qualitative case study.

Chapter 4 will be dedicated to qualitative analysis. Specifically, qualitative data will be examined to aid in the legitimization of findings through the theoretical framework posed for this study, which is discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5 will conclude this study with discussion and conclusions and will aim to provide practical recommendations to rural principals and district leaders when considering the leadership actions or policies necessary to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. Chapter 5 will also include a discussion of the implications for practitioners and suggestions for future research as gleaned from the study's findings.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the purpose, research questions, and significance of this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the practices rural principal employ to ensure equitable educational opportunities to marginalized students. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What practices do rural high school principals employ to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students?
2. What aspects of rural schools do rural high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity?
3. What are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differential student outcomes?

This chapter begins with an overview of the search process used to locate bodies of literature pertinent to this study. This section will be followed by a review of recent literature regarding principal behaviors that help promote positive student outcomes among marginalized student populations. Additionally, a review of the literature on the needs of marginalized students will help explain what practices principals could take to better promote positive student outcomes for those students. Furthermore, the uniqueness of rurality and rural schools will be explored to provide the contextual factors necessary to explain why rural schools have historically failed to provide equitable educational opportunities to marginalized students. Empirical research about the practices of rural principals to ensure equitable educational opportunities will be explored to establish what research has already underscored about the topic

and to identify gaps in existing literature over the subject. Finally, a review of Theoharis's (2007; 2009) seven keys to effective equity leadership framework will be detailed to explain its relevance to this study and how the framework will be utilized to investigate the practice rural principals employ to ensure equity for marginalized students.

The Search Process

When searching for literature for this study, the University of Tennessee online education databases were used to retrieve articles and reports from EBSCO host, including Academic Search Premier, ERIC, and JSTOR. In addition, searches were conducted through the university e-Journal search engine that resulted in articles from *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *Educational Researcher*, *Journal of School Leadership*, *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *Journal of Education Administration*, *Rural School and Community Trust*. Google Scholar was accessed to locate information from the U.S. Department of Education, and additional peer-reviewed articles. Key words used in these searches included *marginalized students*, *principal behaviors*, *rural schools*, and *rural principal leadership*.

Specific searches were conducted on topics such as rural principal leadership for marginalized students, principal behaviors that create positive student outcomes, educational needs of marginalized students, the condition of rural schools in the United States. Most sources provided additional resources considered for this study in articles' reviews of literature and references section. Information covering rural principal leadership for marginalized students was descriptive, and not experimental.

Rural Context

This literature review will provide rural contextual factors unique to rural schools. In addition, this section will highlight how rural schools have struggled to provide equitable educational opportunities to marginalized students and the difficulties faced in keeping up with educational mandates that prioritize equity for marginalized students.

Rural Communities

Rural communities have undergone significant changes in the last one hundred years. In 1900, more than 60% of Americans lived in rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995). By the year 2000, more than 80% of Americans lived in urban areas, while the largest ten metropolitan areas accounted for more than 25% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). With the rise of urbanization and globalization, rural communities experienced mass out-migration that altered the way they operated (Gibbs, 2005; Hammer, 2001; Howley & Howley, 2010; Malhoit, 2005; Schafft & Jackson, 2010), while also experiencing a rise in drug abuse, violence, and poverty (Kalomiris, 2003; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002; Stewart, 2001).

Rural communities throughout the United States have experienced the closing of manufacturing facilities replacing the traditional living-wage employment with seasonal, temporary employment (Drabenstott, Henry, & Mitchell, 1999). Rural communities have long depended upon agriculture to bring much needed revenue into the community, but many of those jobs and farms left as a result of globalization (Mayer, 1993; McGranahan, 2003). A mass out-migration took place beginning in the 1950s as citizens left to find alternative employment and a better standard of living (Sjaastad, 1962; Stockdale, 2004). The out-migration of the historically homogeneous population continues to occur in rural communities while simultaneously more

diverse populations, especially poor, working-class immigrants relocate to the area because they identify rural communities as new destinations because of the low-wage, low skilled-job opportunities. (Foulkes & Schaft, 2010; Stull & Ng, 2016). Since rural schools are often reliant on the community for support, the out-migration has further strained rural schools financially. Rural schools are the victims of inequitable funding formulas from their state legislatures that rely on local taxes, specifically property taxes to help fund schools (Jimerson, 2007). This funding strategy falls short of adequately funding rural schools because the communities lack the local tax base to raise the necessary revenue (Carey, 2004).

In some cases, more affluent suburban areas could outspend their rural counterparts 3-to-1 (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The lack of funds does not necessarily just equal fewer books or deteriorating schools, but also fewer playgrounds and opportunities for sports activities as well, especially in a school with more students of color (Day, 2006). As a result, rural principals are often not able to properly support students in a way to promote positive student outcomes, such as providing additional extracurricular activities or additional academic offerings (Foulkes & Schaft, 2010).

Specifically, poverty has continued to grow at an unprecedented rate with one in six rural Americans living below the poverty line (Jensen, 2006). Over the last two decades, rural communities have become poorer surpassing even urban city centers as some of the poorest areas in the United States (U.S.D.A., 2016). Poverty affects every aspect of society. Education researchers are clear about the negative impact poverty has on students, including poorer grades (Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley, 2006), lower standardized tests scores (Cason,

2001), and less likely to participate in college-preparation programs or attend college at all (Dehaan & Deal, 2001).

Contrary to expectations, rural schools are some of the most racially diverse in the country (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). Over 22% of rural school students are students of color; however, in some regions, New Mexico for instance, percentages reach 70% (Jimerson, 2007). Many students of color are from poor families and communities (Milner, 2015). Research has shown that students of color from poorer areas and families have lower achievement than any other subgroup (Fine, 2004), and lack the resources of urban areas in overcoming the negative consequences of poverty (Kogan et al., 2006). The lack of academic achievement by students of poverty in rural areas only continues to perpetuate the cycle of rural poverty (Huang & Howley, 1991).

Education as a Fix

Education researchers have suggested that one remedy for the problems facing rural communities was to create better rural schools (Gibbs, 2005; Huang & Howley, 1991; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Schmidt, Skinner, Ploch, & Krannich, 2002; Stern, 1994; Theobald, 1997), and better partnerships between rural schools and communities to help initiate more economic success (Miller, 1993, 1995; Monk & Haller, 2004; Muyeed, 1982).

Because of geographic isolation (Abel & Sewell, 1999), and the lack of professional credentialing of teachers (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Malloy & Allen, 2007) rural schools have historically faced difficulties in educating students. As more people moved into urban areas, forgotten rural communities and schools fell behind in policy focus, research, and funding (Bassett, 2003; Parks & Sher, 1979). As Flora (2015) suggested, “Our society has become so

deeply urbanized that we almost assume urbanization to be natural law” (p. 23). This assertion was reiterated by Lyson and Falk (1993) who suggested,

Rural programs too often are small versions of urban programs not specially suited to rural needs. Because of the low density and small scale of rural efforts, programs often fail when they are not especially attentive to rural needs. Urban administrative rule often results in high cost for rural programs. (p. 248)

Consequently, national educational policy largely focused on suburban and urban schools when crafting policy. When President Clinton signed Goals 2000 into law, Title I had the responsibility of developing standards and accurate assessments to receive government funds, therefore beginning the standardization of America’s schools regardless of their geography. The new measures, however, had unintended consequences for rural schools because to meet the new standards of equal access, rural schools were forced to consolidate resources (Seal & Harmon, 1995). The consolidation of resources, including staff, placed further stress on rural schools to meet the needs of students they were struggling to meet in the first place. Therefore, while one of the major policy goals of Goals 2000 was “to ensure the needed equitable educational opportunities” (Stedman & Riddle, 1998, p. 1), the policy indirectly created further inequity in rural schools, an unintended consequence.

While the standardization of education took place, research became available to policymakers about the difficulties rural schools might have when implementing broad reforms. Stern (1994) in her report to the U.S. Department of Education entitled *The Condition of Education in Rural Schools* stated: “At the same time, the scarcity of human and fiscal resources and the accelerated pace of change have further strained the capacities of many rural school

districts, especially those already impoverished.” (p. 41). While rural schools did try to increase their standards of education, many found the standards-based reforms difficult to implement. Reports by the National Rural Development Institute (Helge, 1990) and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (MDC, Inc. 1988) indicated that programs in rural schools designed specifically to help at-risk students were often not available as a result of the distance of services, barriers of topography in certain locations, or turnover in trained staff (Helge, 1990). Later research on rural schools and the problems they faced when implementing standards-based reforms affirmed the concerns of scholars before the movement began (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ghazali, Setia, Muthusamy, & Jusoff, 2009; Jimerson, 2007; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Peyser & Costrell, 2004; Rostovsky, Owens, Zimmerman and Riggle, 2003). Nonetheless, the Department of Education, guided by initiatives from the President, continued to move forward with standards-based reforms that largely focused more on urban and suburban schools (Baker & Foote, 2006), even though 1 in 5 students in America attended a rural school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

No Child Left Behind (2001), *Race to the Top* (2011), and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2016) continued the standards-based reforms started in the early 1990s. These education policies emphasized creating equitable opportunities for all students (Department of Education, 2014), regardless of the research that underscored that rural schools historically underachieved in educating marginalized student populations. Not surprisingly, research shows that rural schools have continued to fall short of providing equitable opportunities for their students even with the mandates passed as a part of standards-based reforms.

Scholars have examined principal behaviors in all community types that are best at promoting equitable opportunities and positive student outcomes for all students. However, as a

result of the unique nature of rural schools, general principal behaviors that help promote positive student outcomes may not always be applicable in rural contexts for a variety of reasons. Much of the literature that has examined rural schools focused on the lack of rural schools resources available to address some education issues, including retention of quality staff or the lack of extracurricular activities present for students who attend rural schools. Overall, however, literature concerning effective principal behaviors of rural principals to help promote positive student outcomes is sparse. The following section will examine literature related to the effective principal behaviors shown to promote positive student outcomes followed by research specific to rural principal behaviors.

Principal Behaviors

Given the unique nature of rural schools, principal behaviors should be viewed through that lens. Generally, however, research concerning principal behaviors to help promote equity and positive student outcomes have not properly considered rural context as a factor in leadership behavior. School principals, rural, suburban, and urban perform multiple roles as the leader of a school, including duties categorized as instructional, managerial, and political (Cuban, 1988). Principals have many responsibilities including curriculum design, time allocation, teacher responsibilities, student engagement, and community-school relations. Foremost, however, the principal is responsible for creating a learning environment conducive to creating educational opportunities for all students (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2001). Studies on effective principal behaviors to promote positive student outcomes have highlighted certain school processes as more effective than others (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). For example, Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, and Luppescu (2010) identified four areas where principal

leadership behaviors were most effective in promoting positive student outcomes: the professional capacity of staff, learning climate of the school, family and community involvement, and ambitious instruction. This review will examine effective principal behaviors that promote positive student outcomes through the lens of instructional, managerial, and community leadership.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership has its empirical origins in studies undertaken in the late 1970s in urban communities where students succeeded despite the odds (Edmonds, 1979). Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee (1982) reported that schools in challenging circumstances where students succeeded had strong instructional leadership, including requirements for clear teaching objectives, high expectations, and few distractions for students in the classroom. Other studies recognized the importance of strong instructional leaders for successful schools; however, there was no consensus in the literature regarding core behaviors of effective instructors (Edmonds, 1981; Lezotte, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1985).

While education and its practices evolved over the decades after the 1970s, literature during that period affected education policy and practice in the 2000s. Hallinger (1985) developed the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) to measure effective principal behaviors. PIMRS became the standard of measurement for effective behaviors of instructional leaders and has been used in more than 199 studies since its creation (Hallinger, 2011). Hallinger's framework was largely responsible for the creation of the National Standards for School Leaders from the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (Neumerski, 2013). Those standards were adopted by 43 states, with some redesigning principal training

programs and evaluations to better align with the standards (Blank, 2011). The standards firmly highlighted the behaviors of effective instructional leaders as helping establish a school vision, promoting a positive school culture for learning, managing aspects of the organization that facilitate an effective learning environment, collaborating with the community to meet their needs, demonstrating equity, and understanding their larger role in the community and political sphere (Blank, 2011; Neumerski, 2013).

With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), principals became responsible for student academic performance and improving their schools on an annual basis, functioning as instructional leaders (Hallinger, 2005). While educational leadership scholars differed over the most effective instructional leadership practices, there was consensus that strong principal leadership was essential to creating an academic culture and high expectations for student success (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Scholars found that principals could better promote positive student outcomes by creating a school mission statement (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Marks & Printy, 2004). Research about instructional leadership highlights the importance of the principals' model the mission statement to legitimize the expectations for the student body and staff (Soehner & Ryan, 2011; Stemler, Bebell, & Sonnabend, 2011). The instructional leader should lead by creating a mission statement and abiding by it, but also manage through activities such as academic standards or time allocation, that align with the purposes of the mission (Hallinger, 2005). As Hallinger (2005) stated, "Instructional leaders focused not only on leading, but also managing" (p. 224).

Furthermore, research has emphasized that instructional leadership which created a clear mission statement, developed high standards and expectations for students and teachers, and effectively modeled those values and practices, promoted a positive school climate and culture (Sahin, 2011; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Waldron & McLesky, 2010) necessary for positive student outcomes (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Bradshaw, Mitchell, and Leaf's (2010) findings concluded that schools trained in school-wide prevention programs could effectively promote a more positive school culture, which resulted in fewer suspensions and discipline problems. Unfortunately, research has shown that rural schools often fail to create a positive school culture as a result of lowered expectations of marginalized students. Hirschfeld (2008) found that disciplinary policies, school practices, and staff perceptions of poor students of color promoted greater punishment and exclusion of students perceived to be on a "criminal track" (p. 79). Cobb and Glass (1999) discovered that rural charter schools in Arizona, who functioned as vocational secondary schools, did not create a pathway to college for students of color, or students expelled from nearby public schools. Likewise, students of color attending public rural schools in the South, in comparison to White students, were enrolled in nonacademic tracks in high school, more likely classified as in need of special education services, and underrepresented in advanced courses (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). Other studies have confirmed how school culture in rural schools, as a result of negative staff and leadership perceptions, could negatively affect immigrant students as well. For example, Howley, Rhodes, and Beall (2009) investigated the educational aspirations of immigrant students in rural schools and found that immigrant students were identified as remedial at higher rates than their peers, because of their poor English

skills or teacher bias. Studies investigating LGBTQ students and students of poverty have also confirmed how lowered expectations and staff perceptions could negatively affect their educational aspirations (Kosciw, Greytek, & Diaz, 2006; Murray & Malmgren, 2005).

Despite the struggles of rural schools, scholarship has highlighted how developing high expectations and standards are crucial to creating a positive learning climate for teachers and students. (Bryk et al. 2010). While literature is clear that creating a mission statement can also create a more positive school climate and culture, scholars have also highlighted the limitations context may place on creating a mission in certain environments (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Kose (2011) examined the difficulties principals may have in creating high expectations as a result of context and concluded that principals should, “first understand the nature, history, and power relations of different stakeholder groups” (Kose, 2011, p. 132) before implementing changes. For instructional leaders to create a successful mission for their school, they must “work with other stakeholders to shape the purposes to fit the needs of the school and its environment.” (Hallinger, 2005, p. 229). Working with stakeholders to develop high standards and a mission statement could be more difficult in rural schools because the stakeholders and community are often more reserved and conservative until trust is established. As a new rural principal pointed out to Clarke and Stevens (2009), “People in a small community tend to be a little more conservative...It takes time for people to work out who you are and what you stand for and to decide whether or not they can trust you.” (p. 287). Rural principals, perhaps more than their suburban or urban counterparts, must begin the process of socialization into the organization and the community by being an active participant in community and school events. In this way, the rural principal could gain the trust of the community stakeholders and work

collaboratively toward building high standards for the school. A rural principal who chooses not to do so could find their instructional leadership suffers and “may find their efforts short-lived” (Ashton & Duncan, 2012, p. 3).

Instructional leadership also stresses the importance of principals’ deep understanding of content and instructional materials (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). School principals were expected to understand the axiom of quality instruction, but also be familiar enough with the curriculum of subjects to guarantee that appropriate content was delivered to students every day (Stein & Nelson, 2003). To promote an atmosphere conducive to learning, an instructional leader should provide constructive feedback to improve the teaching of staff and provide direct assistance to staff and curriculum development (Robinson, 2010). Research has shown that this strategy can create more positive student outcomes (Hallinger, 2005; Mosenthal, Lipson, Tornello, Russ, & Mekkelsen, 2004). Robinson (2010) examined the leadership capabilities needed for a principal to be an effective instructional leader and determined that deep understanding of content for curriculum development and relational trust between staff is essential to developing effective instructional leadership.

Other instructional leadership research focused on principals’ support for improved instruction (Leithwood, 2001). Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) emphasized in their research that specific content knowledge for principals is not as necessary for positive student outcomes as a supportive approach of teachers and their subject areas. Horng and Loeb (2010) underscored the need for principals to be cultural leaders who create effective learning environments by “staffing schools with highly effective teachers, and supporting those teachers with effective teaching and learning environments” (p. 69). Moreover, Supovita, Sirinides, and

May (2010) found that student outcomes were more positive if principals fostered a supportive environment that encouraged collaboration for developing instruction. In other words, the instructional leader must be a cultural leader, one who supports cooperation and collaboration, as well (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011).

Research, however, has highlighted the difficulties of rural principals in terms of instructional leadership. In a study of ten rural high school principals, Morford (2002) found that nine of the ten new principals left their position within three years. Morford (2002) asserted that if rural principals are turning over every one to three years, then a lack of time would prevent the rural principal from becoming an instructional leader. Clarke, Stevens, and Wildy (2006) surmised that one reason rural principals leave the profession so quickly is that they lack the necessary time to accomplish the goals associated with being an instructional leader. Rural principals often find themselves responsible for almost every aspect of the school, including “accountability, planning, monitoring, reporting, school performance.” (Clarke, Stevens, and Wildy, 2006, p. 78). Thomas and Hornsey (1991), in their study of rural principals, found that rural principals often complained about feeling overloaded by constant meetings, paper work, and the never-ending community pressure that held unrealistic expectations for them and the school. Starr and White (2008) asserted that the lack of time for rural principals compounded their problems, and ultimately could hinder their ability to be good instructional leaders.

Therefore, in summary, instructional leadership emphasizes certain principal behaviors to generate positive student outcomes. An instructional leader must develop a vision for the school that establishes high expectations for students and faculty. An instructional leader must nurture a positive school culture and climate to create effective learning environments that promote more

positive student outcomes. An instructional leader must also effectively manage the school to ensure that the school operates smoothly. While the instructional leader provides constructive feedback to teachers to improve instruction, they must also involve a variety of stakeholders in school development planning to foster an environment of collaboration and respect. An instructional leader must be responsible for their leadership to create more positive student outcomes. While it is not necessary for a principal to be an expert in every area of instruction, they must still work with staff to coordinate a challenging curriculum and monitor student outcomes to maintain high standards and expectations. Despite research that articulates principal behaviors for effective instructional leadership, however, rural principals often are faced with contextual factors that may increase the difficulty of developing effective principal behaviors, and consequently, their instructional leadership may suffer.

Managerial Leadership

Scholars have called for a broad definition of instructional leadership that encompasses managerial leadership skills as well (Neumerski, 2013). Literature has encompassed managerial leadership as part of a broader definition of instructional leadership because principals as instructional leaders are unlikely to see school improvement unless they improve their managerial leadership as well (Bryk, et al., 2010; Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Scholars, such as Murphy (1988), have emphasized the need of educational leadership scholarship to view managerial and instructional leadership as collaborative and not separate because “this perspective incorrectly separates two potentially reinforcing constructs” (p. 127). In addition, Grissom and Loeb (2011) contended that the conception of effective instructional leadership should be combined “with an ability to target resources where they are needed, hire the best

available teachers, and keep the school running smoothly (p. 1119). Scholars disagree, however, over what responsibilities of a principal are instructional or managerial, and whether managerial leadership affects student outcomes. Research has suggested that managerial leadership could indirectly affect student outcomes either positively or negatively (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003).

The principal has historically been the administrative manager, handling functions such as time management and staff employment decisions (Valentine & Prater, 2011). Literature has shown that schools operate more effectively, and thus promote more positive student outcomes if the managerial duties of a principal were carried out competently (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). Grissom and Loeb's (2011) study of principal effectiveness and managerial skills found that the most successful schools were those with principals who worked as effective managers. In fact, Grissom and Loeb suggested, "a productive strategy for increasing performance of the districts' lowest-achieving schools could be to shift principals with the greatest management" to school in need (p. 1119). Specifically, the authors found the management skills of hiring, budgeting, organization, and time allocations were statistically significant in creating more positive student outcomes.

Principal's time increasingly is comprised of managerial duties. As much as 30% of a principal's day consists of taking care of administrative duties, such as supervising students or managing schedules, with an additional 20% consumed by organizational management such as hiring and managing staff (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010). As Myers and Murphy (1995) stated, "Principals are the connecting link between central administrations and classrooms...these

middle-level managers are responsible for the efficient and effective functioning of the educational organization” (p. 14). Therefore, while principals are responsible for creating effective instruction, they must balance their instructional and managerial duties to create a functional school to promote positive student outcomes. For rural principals, however, their managerial responsibilities are often more than 50% of their day because they do not have the support staff in place to help with managerial duties (Clarke, Stevens, & Wildy, 2006). As a result, it is often more difficult for rural principals to find a balance between instructional and managerial duties.

Scholarship has found the importance of principals’ managerial leadership with hiring practices as particularly important to promoting positive student outcomes (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Scholars have found that the quality of classroom instruction is the clearest factor in promoting positive student outcomes (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). One way principals’ improve instructional quality is through hiring effective and professional teachers, but they must also work to hire individuals who will add to a school’s professional community. According to Youngs and King (2002), principal leadership has a strong effect on the school’s professional community, a necessary consideration when hiring new teachers. When hiring teachers, a principal must also consider whether the teachers’ values of teaching and learning will complement the vision and expectations set for the school and staff (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Louis & Kruse, 1995). Literature has highlighted leaders and schools where such considerations have been made for hiring practices and confirmed improvements to student outcomes (Lomos, Hofman, & Bosker, 2011; Louis & Marks, 1998).

Literature also highlights how instructional quality can be strengthened by principals' creations of internal structures and conditions that promote teacher learning (Youngs & King, 2002). Youngs and King (2002) found that the most effective schools are led by principals who possess the necessary leadership behaviors to create coherent professional development opportunities for teachers that help promote high expectations and standards for teacher and student learning. A principal's managerial leadership influences the professional capacity of staff by structuring effective professional development opportunities (Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000). Establishing regular meeting times and aligning the professional development activities with school goals are ways to increase the professional capacity of staff (Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). In addition, creating professional development for staff that concentrates on instructional strategies and provides opportunities for reflection and feedback promotes social trust among staff members, which could lead to more positive student outcomes (Corrigan & Goertz, 1995; Little & Houston, 2003). Professional development to continuously promotes teacher learning, and ultimately principals must discern what professional development is right in the context of their school to do so (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001). To begin to provide needed professional development to staff, principals must possess certain organizational management skills such as budgeting and organization. Milanowski and Kimball's (2010) study examining how principals could be better human capital managers concluded by asserting that principals must have the necessary skills of budgeting to provide meaningful professional development because the district must prioritize salaries or extracurricular activities in budgeting. To provide

staff with effective professional development, a principal must possess strong organizational skills to ensure that funds are set aside properly for the school's professional development needs.

Rural principals, however, often struggle to provide effective professional development due to lack of funding. Because rural schools are often geographically isolated, physical distance is a deterrent for rural schools to provide professional development because travel increases cost (Barrett, Cowen, Toma, & Troske, 2015; Peterson, 2012; Rude & Brewer, 2003; Weitzenkamp, Howe, Steckelberg, & Radcliffe, 2003). Choy, Chen, & Burgarin (2006) investigated differences between rural and non-rural schools professional development, and found that teachers in schools with fewer than 150 students were significantly less likely than teachers in larger schools to participate in mentoring or coaching, to collaborate with other teachers, or to have professional development offered on a regular basis from their school. Barley and Beesley (2007) found that effective professional development was a factor in high-performing rural schools. Therefore, while literature asserts that effective professional development is essential to the promotion of positive student outcomes, rural principals often struggle with providing this because of a lack of funding.

Historically, educational leadership scholarship has identified discipline as an important managerial role of principal leadership. In their study of 14,000 elementary students, Eberts and Stone (1988) found that one of the most effective leadership roles of a principal in promoting positive student outcomes is maintaining consistency in disciplinary actions and maintaining it effectively. In addition, principals, according to Bossert et al., (1982), are important to creating a proper learning environment through supporting teachers with discipline problems. Furthermore, principals used their managerial duties to buffer instruction from distractions. The authors

summarized their findings by stating that, “findings indicate that the managerial behavior of principals is important to school effectiveness” (p. 38). Bradshaw, Mitchell, and Leaf (2010) examined the use of school-wide prevention models by principals to reduce discipline issues and promote a more positive school climate. Prevention models developed by principals clearly articulated positive student behavioral expectations provided incentives to meet those expectations and established clear guidelines for managing students who did not abide by the expectations set (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005). Bradshaw et al., (2010) found that school-wide prevention models were effective across the board in promoting more positive student outcomes, including a reduction in student suspensions and higher student achievement scores than schools that did not implement school-wide prevention programs. However, Gregory, Cronell, and Fan (2011) found that students of color had higher rates of suspension at rural schools. Studies have also confirmed the higher rates of discipline in rural schools for immigrant students (Tajalli & Garba, 2014) and LGBTQ students (Albritton, Huffman, & McClellan, 2017).

Scholars have underscored the importance of time allocation to the managerial duties that promote positive student outcomes as well. Rossmiller (1992) examined the buffering of core academic subjects from distraction through principal practice and identified the practice as significant in creating a more effective school. A principal should organize a school schedule that limits classroom disruptions as much as possible to promote a steady learning environment (Rosenblatt & Somech, 1998). Horng, Klasik, & Loeb’s (2010) study on principals’ use of time and school effectiveness, found that organization management activities, such as scheduling and time management of students and staff, promoted more positive student outcomes, including a

more positive student culture, higher student achievement gains, and parental support. Furthermore, Grissom, Loeb, and Master's (2013) study that examined effective leadership behaviors concluded that a principal's use of time, especially limiting disruptions to the classroom, as essential elements to developing effective schools.

In summary, effective managerial leadership behaviors that help promote positive student outcomes are found in studies throughout the literature. Decision-making is important for principals as is hiring teachers. Rural principals, unfortunately, face disadvantages when seeking to hire rural teachers, including lack of updated materials or extra workloads. Principals have to provide their teachers with effective professional development to continue their education and to establish the school's goal of increasing educational success for all students. Rural principals, however, often struggle to provide adequate professional development for their teachers because of the cost and location of their school. Finally, principals must be equitable with discipline decisions. Unfortunately, research highlights that marginalized students in rural schools are often singled out and not treated fairly. The role of the principal as a community leader will be discussed in the following section.

Community Leadership

As literature has shown, the principal is the instructional and managerial leader of the school. The principal must set the direction and expectations of their school towards an academic goal while designing curriculum standards with staff and community stakeholders. The principal must adequately manage resources, staff, and students to create a positive school climate and culture that produces positive student outcomes. The principal, however, also serves as a representative of the school to the community. Furthermore, to develop a successful mission for

their school, instructional leaders must, according to Hallinger (2005), “work with other stakeholders to shape the purposes to fit the needs of the school and its environment.” (p. 229). Scholars also have identified effective managerial leadership behaviors that help promote positive student outcomes in the interactions between principal and community (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Principals must work with community leaders to fundraise for school events and also incorporate various community stakeholders when constructing the school calendar (Rayfield & Diamantes, 2004). Creating smooth managerial operations between community and school creates a more effective school which produces more positive student outcomes (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Therefore, community leadership is an important component of instructional and managerial leadership. Scholars have specifically explored how principal community leadership behaviors impact student outcomes to identify specific behaviors of principal community leadership that help create more effective schools. Epstein and Sanders (2006), on the importance of principal community leadership, stated that “students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support students’ learning and development” (p. 87). One area where scholars have examined principal community leadership behaviors is the creation and promotion of school/community partnerships.

Scholars have examined how principal leadership behaviors create positive school/community partnership in rural and urban schools (Bauch, 2001; Khalifa, 2012; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Khalifa (2012) examined successful urban school leadership in the context of the principal as a community leader. Khalifa (2012) asserted that an urban school principals’ leadership behavior was important enough to positively or negatively affect student outcomes. Khalifa (2012) found that it was essential for an urban school principal to be involved with the

community on a partnership basis to facilitate trust between the school and community. Urban principals who successfully cooperated with the community more quickly gained the trust of parents, who consequently trusted the principal's leadership actions in the school. Green's (2015) study of urban principal and community leader actions support urban schools and create more positive student outcomes, underscored the importance of the principal establishing trust between the school and community by allowing the school to serve as a base of spatial assets for the community. Green's (2015) study highlighted the importance of principals to include the use of school land, facilities, and classrooms for purposes that improve the community. According to Green (2015), the urban school principal exhibited the behavior of cooperation with the community, and by doing so, despite the unavailability of resources and poor history of student success, changed the school's culture, and ultimately promoted more positive student outcomes (Green, 2015).

Rural schools, however, faced many challenges as a result of the changes that occurred on a community level. Until the 20th century, the majority of teachers in the United States were rural or semi-rural (Sher, 1977). Like the communities that surrounded them, rural schools were impacted by urbanization, especially regarding the retention of teachers. Burton, Brown, and Johnson (2013) examined the role of urbanization in rural areas by "creating conditions that make the social exclusion of already marginalized groups that much more likely" (p. 35) to the point teachers started to operate with a certain fatalism about the educational success of their students. The pessimism that surrounded rural schools led to the departure of teachers and qualified staff (Howley & Howley, 2010). The poor conditions exacerbated by urbanization and globalization created schools filled with educators with the consensus that "generational poverty

limited personal and institutional horizons to such a degree that social mobility was beyond the school's capacity to address (Howley & Howley, 2010, p. 42). In other words, rural teachers started to feel hopeless in their mission to educate rural students.

Bauch (2001) examined the importance of school-community partnerships for rural schools to improve their educational processes. The author suggested that principals had to incorporate different leadership behaviors in the context of rurality to be effective. Bauch (2001) emphasized that principals' must "let go of traditional and behavioral models [of leadership] and embrace those that are relational and can build on the school community's sense of place (p. 2). While rural schools are often isolated and poor, rural families that make up the community have dense relational networks and, "strong intergenerational closure that serves to strengthen community norms, values, and attitudes" (p. 7) while creating social capital for their children (Bauch, 2001). The leadership of a rural principal should be relational to gain the trust of the community and form a partnership to create a more effective school. Bauch (2001) identified several effective principal community leadership behaviors that help in the development of school success including the encouragement of parent involvement, facilitation of school-business-agency relationships, and using the community as a curricular resource.

Likewise, Budge (2006) developed similar findings in her examination of rurality and its effects on principal leadership behaviors. The author's case highlighted the importance of strong leadership behaviors, especially with the community surrounding the school to develop positive student outcomes. Budge (2006) found that the community that surrounds rural schools does not always cooperate with the goals of the school's leadership. Therefore, principals developed the leadership behavior of motivation not only for students but the community as well. Parents and

community are not always supportive of the educational goals of the school, and therefore, the principal must be out in the community to properly motivate parents and stakeholders to have a vested interest in the success of their children and school (Budge, 2006). Furthermore, Budge (2006) contended that rural principals were most successful when they “understand the ‘mentality’ of a small, rural community, which included the willingness to be highly visible, accessible, and approachable” (p. 7). Therefore, urban and rural principals must develop certain community leadership behaviors to promote positive student outcomes, including cooperation and motivation. Overall, principals must be equipped with certain behaviors, instructional, managerial, and community, to meet the needs of marginalized students.

Needs of Marginalized Students

This literature review has examined the effective managerial, instructional, and community principal behaviors underscored by literature that helps produce positive student outcomes. In addition, this literature review highlighted how rural principals could be limited in their leadership behaviors as a result of rurality. Research has also explored the difficulty of principal leadership in promoting positive student outcomes for marginalized students, including in rural schools (Autio & Deussen, 2016; Blankstein et al., 2016; Carey, 2004; DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Furman & Shields, 2005; Quinn, 2002; Riester et al., 2002; Starr & White, 2008). While federal law mandates principal leadership that ensures equitable educational opportunities for all students, some marginalized students are still left behind (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Harvey & Anderson, 2005; Lee, 2002; Lucas, 2001; Swanson, 2003). Scholars have examined the needs of students of color, immigrants, students of poverty, and LGBTQ students to highlight the actions principals could

take to better promote positive student outcomes. A synthesis of the literature that addresses the needs of marginalized students reveals consistent themes across student groups, specifically their need for an inclusive school environment that promotes positive teacher-student relationships combined with district and school supportive policies.

Inclusive Environment

Literature underscores the importance of leadership and staff support for marginalized student populations (DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Furman & Shields, 2005). Specifically, scholars have investigated the learning environments of marginalized students to help identify reasons for persistent negative student outcomes, including lowers rates of graduation (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010), achievement test scores (Theoharis, 2009), and higher rates of school dropout (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Overall, there is a consensus among educational leadership scholars as to the importance of inclusive environments for the promotion of more positive student outcomes for marginalized students.

Specifically, scholars have examined the importance of inclusive environments for marginalized students, including immigrants, LGBTQ students, students of color, and students of poverty. Howard (2002) examined urban African American students' perceptions of their learning environments and teaching practices and found that staff should have "knowledge and understanding of students' cultural backgrounds" (p. 441) to encourage cooperation between faculty and students and a school environment of inclusion. In addition, other studies have confirmed the importance of inclusive environments to prevent students of color from the school-to-prison pipeline (Coggshall, Osher, & Colombi, 2013; Wilson, 2014). Immigrant students benefit from inclusive environments as well (Stone & Han, 2005). As Bryan (2005)

stated, “Racial and ethnic minority students often feel powerless in a majority-dominated school where language, class, and culture differences are seen as deficits.” (Bryan, 2005, p. 219).

Therefore, schools should develop an inclusive school environment so isolated students can feel comfortable and welcomed in an unfamiliar place. By creating an inclusive environment, research has shown that schools could better promote more positive student outcomes, including increased rates of post-secondary enrollment (Gonzales, 2010; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010; Roy & Roxas, 2011).

Rural schools often struggle to promote an inclusive environment for students of color and immigrants. Studies have confirmed that the presence of racism in rural schools is more commonplace. Ryan (2003) found that racism manifested itself in the form of harassment or graffiti in the bathrooms of rural schools. Such personal interactions with racism have been linked to elevated rates of deviant peer affiliation, violence, anger, and mental health problems in students of color (Brody et al., 2006; Wong, et al., 2003). Herbert and Beardsley (2002) highlighted the struggles of a gifted black male, Jermaine, who lived in an impoverished rural community. Jermaine was smart and excelled in school, but their study confirmed that Jermaine’s impoverished surroundings threatened his future educational aspirations. Strayhorn (2009) confirmed these findings by using a hierarchical linear regression analysis from the nationally-representative sample of respondents to the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:1988). Those findings confirmed that the educational aspirations of students of color, specifically African-American males, were negatively affected by their rural surroundings in comparison to their peers from urban and especially suburban settings.

Research has also highlighted the struggles of rural schools to create inclusive environments for immigrant students. Large migratory families have moved into rural communities over the last 30 years because of cheaper housing and more economical job opportunities offered in poultry processing plants, meatpacking plants, and manufacturing firms (Dalla & Christensen, 2005; Fennely & Leitner, 2002; Wrigley, 2000). In addition, refugee resettlement organizations increasingly placed refugee immigrants in rural areas because of the affordable living conditions they offered (Pipher, 2002). Rural schools were unprepared to provide the proper learning environments for immigrant students and lacked the funds to aid in professional development to educate teachers on the best educational strategies to help academically grow immigrant students (Riehl, 2000).

Research indicates the importance of inclusive environments for the promotion of positive student outcomes for students of poverty and LGBTQ students as well. Scholars have focused on the creation of cooperation between the community and school as essential for establishing an inclusive learning environment conducive to the educational success of students of poverty (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Velsor & Orozco, 2007). One way to restructure the community-school relationship to establish a more inclusive school learning environment for students of poverty is by creating more family-centric school activities, so everyone could participate (Epstein, 2001). Secondly, school staff could reach out to low-income families early in the school year to help establish the norm of collaboration around educational goals and the creation of positive interactions centered on the educational success of the student as the priority (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Once again, the literature on the needs of marginalized students, in this case, students of poverty, reverts to the importance of establishing a welcoming

school environment to the creation of more positive student outcomes. By reaching out and collaboratively working with the community, school leadership can better develop a supportive and inclusive environment that helps lead to more positive student outcomes for students of poverty (Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, & Hibpshman, 2005). Rural schools, however, must do a better job of addressing the needs of their students of poverty. Johnson, Strange, and Madden (2010) examined the graduation rates of over 800 rural school districts across the United States and found that dropout issues tend to manifest themselves the most in high-poverty schools with high numbers of students of color. In addition, immigrant parents of students of poverty in rural schools are hesitant to become involved perhaps because of the negative attitudes towards their children by school staff (Ghazali, Setia, Muthusamy, & Jusoff, 2009; Good, Masewica, & Vogel, 2010).

Scholars have also examined other areas where schools must improve to provide better more inclusive learning environments for LGBTQ students. Creating an inclusive environment is essential to promoting positive student outcomes for LGBTQ students. As some studies have shown, creating an inclusive environment for LGBTQ students could mean life or death (Chesir-Teran, 2003). Experiencing a negative school environment can also substantially interfere with LGBTQ students' learning processes and is associated with increased absence from school (Kosciw, 2004). Chesir-Teran and Hughes (2009) found many associations to have a strong effect on creating more inclusive schools as well, including class discussion about homosexuality or the presence of a gay-straight alliance in the school. Other studies have underscored the importance of gay-straight alliances to fostering an inclusive school environment for LGBTQ students (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Lee, 2002; Szalacha, 2003). Walls, Kane, and Wisenski (2009)

stated that although “Gay-straight alliances alone will not eradicate the hostile environment...they are one mechanism available...to support a more positive school experience for sexual minority youth (p. 328). Gay-straight alliances help create an inclusive school environment by giving LGBTQ students a place for recreation, creating leadership and advocacy training and providing seminars on LGBTQ topics (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2004). Furthermore, schools with gay-straight alliances made LGBTQ students more comfortable and promoted a sense of belonging among the student population (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Overall, literature agrees that gay-straight alliances work best; however, when reinforced by policies and a school culture dedicated to inclusion (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002). In other words, there is no magic bullet to create a more inclusive school for LGBTQ students, but instead, there must be a holistic approach that is comprised of multiple strategies to help promote a safe and welcoming school environment for LGBTQ students.

Specifically, research indicates that rural schools must make a concerted effort to establish a trusting and inclusive environment for LGBTQ students to better promote positive student outcomes. Rostosky, Owens, Zimmerman, and Riggle’s (2003) study that examined the alcohol and marijuana usage of 1725 LGBTQ students from 25 rural high schools found that not only did LGBTQ students use alcohol and marijuana more consistently than their peers, but they also had lower academic achievement. The post-hoc analyses led the authors to conclude that LGBTQ students were less trusting of their school environments and recommended certain steps to rural principals for establishing a more inclusive environment, including more effective professional development sessions and extracurricular activities to involve LGBTQ students more in school functions. Other scholars have investigated the need for inclusive environments

for LGBTQ student in rural schools as well, specifically in the South and Midwest. Kosciw, Greytek, and Diaz (2006) found regional differences in the negative experiences of LGBTQ students who attended American schools. Notably, they found that LGBTQ students in the South and Midwest regions of America to be more likely to hear homophobic language in school or to experience both verbal and physical harassment. Kosciw, Greytek, and Diaz's (2006) study indicated that LGBTQ students from rural communities and schools were more likely to be physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation when compared to urban and suburban schools. Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz (2009) would follow up with a regression analysis that also demonstrated that LGBTQ youth in rural schools faced particularly negative school cultures.

Literature identifies creating an inclusive environment as essential to the educational needs of marginalized students in urban, suburban, and rural contexts. By creating an inclusive environment, schools create a positive school culture that embraces the differences of every student. While creating an inclusive environment does meet some needs of marginalized students, other studies have highlighted the needs of marginalized students to have school support by forging positive student-teacher relationships and developing policies that better protect marginalized students from victimization in the form of harassment or bullying.

Literature has underscored how marginalized students in rural schools specifically need school support, in the form of positive student-teacher relationships and protective policies.

School Support

Scholars have identified school support strategies that could help meet the needs of marginalized students. For example, studies have indicated that teacher-student relationships are linked with student outcomes, such as social capital and emotional development (Hamre &

Pianta, 2001; Murray & Murray, 2004; Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003). As Nodding (2003) argued, “it matters to students whether or not they like and are liked by their teachers” (p. 244). By developing positive student-teacher relationships, schools keep students from disconnecting from the education process and allow for them to build the necessary relationships to propel them towards education success (Gibson, Bejinez, Hidalgo, & Rolon, 2004). Croninger and Lee (2001) found that positive student-teacher relationships, especially for marginalized students, could be an essential source of social capital and instill confidence to pursue their educational goals.

Literature has suggested that marginalized students with “emotional and behavioral problems may be at an increased risk of experiencing poor student-teacher relationships” (Murray & Greenberg, 2001, p. 29). In addition, literature highlights how supportive student-teacher relationships are crucial to producing positive student outcomes for marginalized students, including LGBTQ students (Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001), students of color (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Townsend, 2000), and students of poverty (Murray and Malmgren, 2005; O’Donnell, Schwab-Stone, & Muyeed, 2002).

Scholars have also examined, however, how harmful the absence of positive student-teacher relationships could be for marginalized students in rural schools. Voight, Hanson, O’Malley, and Adekanye (2015) studied 400 different schools in California, including rural schools, to examine the relationship between school support and academic student success. The authors concluded that rural students of color often experience higher levels of racial discrimination, and schools could better promote positive student outcomes by providing the

necessary support systems, including more positive student-teacher relationships. Scholars have asserted that positive student-teacher relationships are critical for students of poverty to succeed in rural schools (Ullucci & Howard, 2015), but other factors, like outdated curriculums, limited educational programs, and inadequate facilities could negate the positive effects of supportive student-teacher relationships in rural contexts (DeYoung, 1987; Kozol, 2012; Seal & Harmon, 1995). Literature also highlights how school staff may resist relationships with certain students, especially LGBTQ students. For example, Bishop and McClellan's (2016) study on the staff support of equity for students in rural schools revealed that individuals in positions of leadership in rural schools are not always willing to accept diversity or encourage their staff to do so either. Regardless, research underscores the importance of school leadership establishing positive student-teacher relationships as a part portion of their expectations and mission statements. By doing so, principals could better meet the needs of marginalized students and better promote positive student outcomes.

One way school leadership could better support marginalized students and raise awareness for equitable issues is by providing professional development opportunities that help educate teachers about problems faced by marginalized students. Peters' (2002) case study of three schools who tried to accelerate their inclusive environment by providing professional development to staff underscores the importance of professional development to developing positive teacher-student relationships. As a direct result of professional development, school leadership at the schools examined in the study were able to better promote positive teacher-student relationships, and create a more inclusive environment in the school (Peters, 2002). In addition, Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, and Spagna's (2004) examined how school

leadership in southern California moved their schools toward more inclusive practices. The authors noted that professional development effectively “assisted in teachers change efforts” (Burstein et al., 2004; p. 111) and that “inservices were helpful in establishing a comfort level with inclusive practices” (p. 111).

Furthermore, Hoopey and McLeskey’s (2013) case study of principal leadership in an effective inclusive school, found that providing high-quality professional development promoted positive student-teacher relationships and helped create a more inclusive environment for the school. Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources, rural principals are often limited in their abilities to offer professional development opportunities, which scholars have opined may contribute to the continued inequitable treatment of marginalized students in rural contexts (Peyser & Costrell, 2004). The effectiveness of professional development to promote more positive teacher-student relationships has been confirmed by multiple scholars in the United States and internationally. Florian’s (2012) investigation of professional development of teachers in Scotland determined that as a unified approach of inclusive education helped promote more positive student-teacher relationships.

Therefore, there are some supports that school leadership could use to help meet the needs of marginalized students according to the literature. Primarily, school leadership could help better promote positive student-teacher relationships by providing high-quality professional development opportunities to help educate staff on the needs of marginalized students and the importance of positive student-teacher relationships. Secondly, school leadership could promote positive student-teacher relationships which could help marginalized students feel more connected to the school, and thus gain more confidence in their abilities for educational success.

Research, however, has shown that rural schools often do not establish positive student-teacher relationships, and thus create an unwelcoming environment for marginalized students. For example, Dessel (2010) examined the prejudicial attitudes that contribute to an unwelcoming environment for students of color, including immigrants, in rural public schools, and determined that biased school policy and resistance from teachers helped foster a school culture that contributed to problematic intergroup relations. As a result, there were increased chances of bullying and violence directed towards students of color in rural settings, and ultimately the author concluded that principals must use prejudice reduction approaches, like professional development, to help establish a more inclusive environment for all students.

Literature has explored how schools could implement policies that target bullying of marginalized student populations to better support them in school. Literature has recognized the negative effects of bullying on student social skills, psychological status, and school achievement (Boulton, Trueman, & Murray, 2008). Scholars have investigated the negative effects of bullying on student outcomes all over the world, including Australia (Murray, Harvey, & Slee, 2010), the United States (Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers, & Parris, 2011), and the United Kingdom (Boulton, Smith, & Cowie, 2010). Bullying has become an especially serious problem in large multicultural societies like the United States (Shin, D'Antonio, Son, Kim, & Park, 2011). Literature has described the negative educational outcomes that accompany the bullying of students of color (Bauer, Lozano, Rivara, 2007; Choi & Cho, 2012; Juvonen, Graham, & Shuster, 2003; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011), immigrants (Mendez, Bauman, & Guillory, 2012; Scherr & Larson, 2009), and LGBTQ students (Russell, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). As a result, scholarship has identified some

strategies to better support marginalized students from bullying, like creating more inclusive policies at the school level that helps to better protect marginalized students from victimization.

Students of color make up school populations across the United States. African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians make up the majority of students of color in America's classrooms. Regardless of location, literature has highlighted the positive student outcomes that accompany students of color once the school and district have adopted policies that accept inclusion and punish bullying. Juvonen's (2006) study of student vulnerability in middle school found that Latin and African-American students expressed a lower sense of vulnerability and reported fewer instances of victimization when greater ethnic diversity, supported by school inclusive policy, was present. Schools that created an inclusive environment, or one that emphasized supports from teachers and students, were more effective in creating bullying prevention programs for Asian and Latino students (Choi & Cho, 2012; Schinke & Matthieu, 2003). Other studies, Esbensen and Carson (2009) and Espelage and Swearer (2010), underscore the need for an inclusive environment to mitigate the harm bullying has on the student outcomes of students of color. Research is also very clear about the need for policies to prevent the bullying of LGBTQ students.

Research on LGBTQ students has emphasized their risks of bullying and victimization while at school (Bontempp & D'Augelli, 2002; Rivers, 2001). Furthermore, literature has highlighted the increased risk of suicide and greater mental health problems for LGBTQ students (Bontempp & D'Augelli, 2002; Remafedi, Farrow, & Deisher, 1991). Recent literature on promoting positive student outcomes from LGBTQ students has focused on the structural conditions of schools, specifically policy, as a way of making a positive difference for LGBTQ

students in secondary schools (Russell et al., 2010). A study of over 2,400 students in California showed that when schools adopted LGBTQ-inclusive policies, the entire school felt safer and became a more welcoming school for everyone (O'Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004). While creating policies that protect LGBTQ students is a strategy that could better promote positive student outcomes, research asserts that such policies could not be successful individually, but instead must be a portion of a holistic approach to providing LGBTQ students a better educational experience.

Rural schools often do not protect marginalized students from bullying and victimization, however. In a 2011 national school climate survey of over 8,500 students who self-identified as LGBTQ findings confirmed the results of earlier studies that LGBTQ students were in more danger of experiencing harassment if they attended rural public schools (Kosciw et al., 2012). Of the study participants, 53.8% of students who attended a rural school reported hearing homophobic remarks such as “fag” or “dyke” frequently, while their schools were also the least likely to have LGBTQ-related school resources or supportive LGBTQ staff to help them (Kosciw et al., 2012). Perhaps LGBTQ students in rural schools turn to substance abuse because there are not support systems in place from teachers (Bishop, 2016) or from the school itself, like Gay-Straight alliances that do not exist in frequency in rural schools (Fetner & Kush, 2007; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

George Theoharis researched seven principals who were leaders for social justice (2007, 2009) to specifically “address the ways in which leaders enact justice, the resistance they face in that work, and how leaders maintain themselves to continue their pursuit of equity and justice.”

(Theoharis, 2009, p. 222). Theoharis' social justice leadership framework is distinct because principals are the unit of analyses, whereas a great deal of social justice leadership literature focuses on effective schools as the unit of analysis (Capper & Young, 2009; Maynes & Sarbit, 2000; Theoharis, 2009). Secondly, whereas there is immense theoretical research concerning social justice leadership (Furman & Shields, 2005; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002), Theoharis' (2007; 2009) empirical qualitative research specifically identified differences between good principal leadership and social justice leadership, which are illustrated in Table 1.

Theoharis (2009) ultimately summarized his findings by identifying seven "keys" that are crucial for social justice leadership. The seven "keys" are located in Table 2.

Theoharis' (2009) social justice leadership framework is a useful lens for examining the social justice practices of principals because it clearly defines what practices of principals are most helpful for creating and maintain a socially just school. While Theoharis (2009) examined the social justice leadership of urban principals, this study will use Theoharis' (2009) seven "keys" of effective social justice leadership as the lens of analysis for rural principal practices to promote equity for marginalized students.

Other studies have used Theoharis (2004; 2007; 2009) social justice leadership framework to examine the equity practices of principals. DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) used Theoharis's social justice leadership framework to examine the challenges of two urban principals who were working to create a more inclusive school culture for students with disabilities. Whereas other social justice leadership scholarship "reported on issues related to the inclusion of marginalized groups and the actions of social justice leadership" (p. 872), DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) focused on the challenges and dilemmas of principals who

Table 1

Good Leader Characteristics vs. Social Justice Leader Characteristics

Good Leader	Social Justice Leader
Works with subpublics to connect with community	Places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect and understanding of that diversity
Speaks of success for all children	Ends segregated and pullout programs that block both emotional and academic success for marginalized students
Facilitates professional development in best practice	Embeds professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make sense of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability
Builds a collective vision of a great school	Knows that school cannot be great until the students with the greatest struggles are given the same rich academic, extracurricular, and social opportunities as those enjoyed by their more privileged peers
Empowers staff and works collaboratively	Demands that every child will be successful but collaboratively addresses the problems of how to achieve that success
Networks and builds alliances with key stakeholders	Builds and leads coalitions by bringing together various groups of people to further agenda (families, community organizations, staff, students) and seeks out other activists administrators who can and will sustain her/him
Acts as a positive ambassador for the school	Builds a climate in which families, staff, and students belong and feel welcome
Uses school data to understand realities of the school	See all data through a lens of equity
Understands that children have individual needs	Knows that building community, collaboration, and differentiation are tools for ensuring that all students achieve success together
Engages in school improvement with a variety of stakeholders	Combines structures that promote inclusion and access to improved teaching and curriculum within a climate of belonging
Works long and hard to make a great school	Beyond working hard, becomes intertwined with the school's success and life

Reprinted with permission from Theoharis, G. (2009). *The school leaders our school children deserve: Seven keys to equity, social justice, and school reform* (pp.160). Teachers College Press, NY.

Table 2

Seven "Keys" to Social Justice Leadership

Acquire broad, reconceptualized consciousness/knowledge/skill base	Knowledge of research on inclusion; providing professional development with a focus on equity; reach out to marginalized families and community (Theoharis, 2009, 129-141)
Possess core leadership traits	“Arrogant humility”; Passionate vision; Tenacious commitment to justice (Theoharis, 2009, 141-150)
Advance inclusion, access, and opportunity for all	Eliminate pullout and separate programs; Increase academic rigor and access to opportunities; Increase student learning time; Increase accountability for the achievement of all students (Theoharis, 2009, 27-44)
Improve the core learning context- both the teaching and curriculum	Address issues of race; Provide ongoing staff development focused on building equity; Hire and supervise through an equity lens; Adopt common research-based curricular approaches; Empower staff (Theohairs, 2009, 46-60)
Create a climate of belonging	Create a warm and welcoming school climate; Foster community building in each classroom; Reach out to marginalized families and the community; Incorporate social responsibility into the school curriculum; Use a proactive and process approach to discipline (Theoharis, 2009, 62-75)
Raise student achievement	Increase access to core learning; Improve core learning; Create a climate of belonging (Theoharis, 2009, 77-83)
Sustain oneself professionally and personally	Communicate purposefully and authentically; Develop a supportive administrator network; Work together for change; Keep your eyes on the prize; Prioritize your work; Engage in professional learning; Build relationships; Prioritize life outside school; Use mindful diversions; Accept outside validation; Engage in regular physical activity; Provide for others; Employ potentially harmful behaviors (Theoharis, 2009, 113-127)

Adapted from Theoharis, G. (2009). *The school leaders our school children deserve: Seven keys to equity, social justice, and school reform*. Teachers College Press, NY.

led for social justice. The article detailed some of the social justice actions and practices that were taken by two urban principals when faced with dilemmas that challenged their goals of creating a more socially just school environment. Some of the dilemmas faced by the two urban principals were (a) ongoing enrollment, (b) budget, (c) community, and (d) student behavior. This study is relevant to my study because it specifically investigated practices of social justice principals and the challenges of trying to implement social justice in their schools.

Auerbach (2009) used Theoharis' social justice leadership theory to examine family and community engagement of principals with Latinos to better promote a more equitable and culturally responsive school. Auerbach (2009) found that principals, like those studied by Theoharis (2004; 2007; 2009), were motivated by an ethical commitment to students. The principals viewed the family and community engagement as "not just the right thing for schools to do but was a part of a larger moral commitment to serving disenfranchised Latino immigrant families" (Auerbach, 2009, p. 26). Like Theoharis's (2007, 2009) study, the four urban principals examined by Auerbach (2009) "persevered in spite of resistance by uninvolved parents and by some school staff" (p. 26). In addition, where none of the principals indicated resistance from other administrators about their efforts to create a more inclusive environment for Latino immigrant students, the district and other members of the leadership team were resistant to a social justice approach. This study is relevant to my study because it investigates the practices of principals, specifically their goals to engage with family and community, to better promote a more socially just environment for Latino immigrant students. The study is also pertinent to my study since it details the supports and barriers the principals encountered when trying to implement a more social justice leadership orientation.

Albritton, Huffman, and McClellan (2017) utilized Theoharis' framework to investigate how rural principals in a high poverty school in a southern state, who identified themselves as social justice leaders, perceived student diversity, specifically LGBTQ students, and how they maintained an inclusive environment for all students. The results indicated that principals struggled to recognize LGBTQ students' needs or support LGBTQ causes within the school. One principal shared the following when parents reacted negatively to a lesbian teacher/coach: "She didn't really fit in here, and she was actually a lesbian. She didn't fit into the community really well because this is more of a conservative area here" (Albritton, Huffman, & McClellan, 2017, p. 32). The study indicated that principals should provide better professional development to draw on social justice leadership theory, and therefore inform practice in the classroom and strategies to address external and internal resistance. While rural principals claimed to be socially just, their practices revealed otherwise in Bishop & McClellan's (2016) research concerning the lack of social justice leadership for LGBTQ students in rural schools by highlighting that rural social justice leaders may have a different definition ascribed to social justice than what is found in the contents of social justice literature.

Bishop and McClellan's (2016) study explored how rural high school principals perceived and supported LGBTQ students using Theoharis' (2007; 2009) social justice leadership framework. Using semi-structured interviews, Bishop and McClellan (2016) examined how the context of school in rural places with conservative values affected the principals' perceptions and implementation of equitable educational opportunities. Bishop and McClellan (2016) found that LGBTQ students were more successful in rural schools that promoted a sense of belonging. This finding aligned with other research completed about

LGBTQ students in other school contexts. Feeling safe and a part of an inclusive environment could lead to more positive student outcomes for LGBTQ students in any educational context.

Furthermore, Bishop and McClellan (2016) also found school leadership support, by providing professional development opportunities that stressed inclusion and acceptance, to be essential for promoting positive student outcomes of LGBTQ students. Another finding confirmed by other scholarship on the promotion of positive educational outcomes for LGBTQ students (Payne & Smith, 2011). Their findings, however, were disappointing because they also revealed that rural principals upheld the community's values in their own bias against LGBTQ students who attended their institution. Therefore, in the study completed by Bishop and McClellan (2016), despite national mandates instructing otherwise, rural principals did not provide the same opportunities to LGBTQ students and allowed the community's conservative values to influence their principal leadership.

Theoharis' (2004, 2007, 2009) social justice leadership framework has been used by scholars to explore the supports, and barriers principals may face when leading for social justice but also to determine if the leadership practices of principals are socially just. Theoharis' (2007, 2009) study, however, was not inclusive of all marginalized student populations nor geographic areas. His study did not investigate principals in rural settings. Theoharis' (2007) study on social justice leadership theory concluded by stating that, "areas for future research could involve an expansion of the current study [on social justice leadership] to include rural leaders" (p. 249). Bishop & McClellan (2016) expanded Theoharis' study by investigating rural schools in the Midwest and the social justice practices of principals for LGBTQ students. Albritton, Huffman, and McClellan (2017) expanded Theoharis' study by investigating rural schools in a southern

state and the social justice practices of principal for LGBTQ students. Theoharis (2007, 2009), Bishop & McClellan (2016), and Albritton, Huffman, and McClellan (2017) did not investigate rural schools in a southeastern state in the United States, and only investigated specific marginalized student populations, such as students with disabilities and LGBTQ students. This study intends to augment existing research by using Theoharis' (2009) seven "keys" to effective social justice leadership as a lens for examining rural principal practices to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students as a whole. Literature underscores the contextual challenges rural principals face when promoting equity for marginalized students in the southern United States. Using Theoharis' (2009) seven "keys" of effective social justice leadership to study rural principal practices for equity could help highlight the areas where rural principal practices are socially just and others where they are not. Therefore, this study using Theoharis' (2004, 2007, 2009) social justice leadership framework will expand social justice research in two ways by (a) examining rural social justice principals and (b) examining their actions to ensure equity for marginalized students as a whole. Continuing research in social justice leadership in different communities and for other marginalized student populations may add or modify existing social justice theory, thus enabling current or future principals to become better equipped to meet the needs of marginalized students and increase their chances of educational success.

Summary of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature covering the contextual challenges faced by rural schools, the effective principal behaviors needed to promote positive student outcomes, and the needs of marginalized students to be successful in school. Chapter 2 also provide literature

that underscored how rural school principals struggle to exhibit effective principal behaviors or meet the needs of marginalized students because of limitations placed on them by rurality. Finally, chapter 2 provided the theoretical framework for this study, Theoharis' (2009) seven "keys" to successful equity leadership, and how this study could expand the scope of Theoharis's (2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory by examining factors, such as investigating schools in a southeastern state and marginalized students as a whole, not yet examined by other educational leadership scholars using Theoharis's (2009) model.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature revealed that while research has been conducted on rural principal practices for marginalized students, including LGBTQ, immigrant, and students of color, scant qualitative research has been conducted on rural principal practices to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students, particularly in the southern United States. Investigating rural principal practices to ensure equity for marginalized students in the southern United States will augment existing literature and help to inform future reform efforts. In addition, as leaders of schools and communities, rural principals would benefit from a study that could help identify effective practices for improving student outcomes for marginalized students, a group that has historically struggled to achieve positive student outcomes in rural schools. Rural principal perceptions of how rural schools support or hinder the creation of equity will help inform practice and should be considered in future reform efforts (Torres, Zellner, & Erlandson, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to examine the practices of rural high school principals in creating equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students. Additionally, this study examined the barriers rural high school principals face when enacting these practices to increase equity. To achieve this purpose, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What practices do rural high school principals employ to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students?
2. What aspects of rural schools do high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity?

3. What are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differential student outcomes?

Chapter 3 describes the methodology that was used to achieve this purpose. Included in this chapter is a rationale for choosing the design. Explanations are provided for how qualitative case study design achieved the purpose of the study, in addition to the role of the research, sample selection, data collection, and instrumentation. Trustworthiness of findings is explained, and the chapter will conclude with a summary of the methodology used for this study.

Case Study Design

To achieve the purpose of the study, this study used an exploratory multi-site case study approach. Case study research is used in studies of the social sciences, including anthropology and sociology (Hartley, 1994). As Meyer (2001) stated,

Case study research consists of a detailed investigation of one or more organizations, or groups within organizations, with a view to providing an analysis of the context and processes involved in the phenomenon under study. (p. 329)

In this study, the organizations were rural high schools. The focus of the study was rural principals and their practices to ensure equity for marginalized student populations. Case study research consists of an investigator who explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) by collecting data from multiple sources, including interviews and observations (Creswell, 2013). Case studies are useful for exploring new processes or behaviors that are little understood (Hartley, 1994). The study has highlighted how rural principal practices to ensure equity is an area in need of further research to better understand how rural principal leadership

practices could better promote positive student outcomes for marginalized students. Case studies are particularly useful for responding to *how* and *why* questions about a set of events. This study's research questions centered on the *how* and the exploratory nature of case study was the most effective way to answer the questions by highlighting the contextual factors that support or hinder the practices of rural principals to ensure equity for the marginalized student. As a result of scant research concerning the phenomenon, the study was exploratory in nature and approached the research questions with the intent of gathering more data to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to case study research. While Yin (2011) and Stake (1995) provide helpful insights on how to approach case study research, there are no specific requirements guiding case study research. This is a strength of case study research because it allows the researcher to adapt the design and data collection procedures to fit the research question. While the specific nature of case study research is narrow and specific to certain context-related factors which can be an advantage to investigating seldom researched phenomenon, the specificity of case study research could also be a weakness because it is impossible to replicate to confirm findings (Flick, 2014). Because the scope of case study research is often narrow, it is more difficult to use the findings and make generalizations that could apply to other areas because each area, as accepted under the philosophy of constructivism, is different contextually creating different data findings. Where case study is weak on replicability and generalizability; however, it makes up for by providing a means for researchers to investigate a phenomenon holistically (Merriam, 2009). To do so, case study researchers must acquire rich and descriptive data by using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2013). As Merriam

(2009) stated about case study research, “[It] results in a holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meaning that expand readers’ experiences.” (p. 50). By doing so, case study research can provide more knowledge about an underreacted phenomenon, which can help structure future research and expand the knowledge base of educational leadership scholarship. Figure 1 serves as a visual model for this exploratory multi-site case study:

Rationale for the Design

There are several reasons why I chose to use the case study approach to answer the study’s research questions. Scholars have highlighted the lack of educational leadership research centered on rural principal leadership to ensure equity for marginalized students. Specifically, scholars have examined how the context of rurality could impact principal leadership practices and have suggested that future research investigate the phenomenon further. Thus, the research questions focused on the rural principal leadership practices to ensure equity for marginalized students, and what aspect of rural schools’ principal perceive as supporting or hindering the practice of ensuring equity for marginalized students. Case study design was specifically chosen to examine the phenomenon because it is empirical inquiry within a real-life context (Yin, 2013). In this case, the empirical inquiry will investigate principals and their practices for equity within the context of rurality, which research indicates could affect rural principal practices for equity. Ultimately qualitative design was chosen over quantitative because it better facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. For this study, data sources used were interviews, observations, and document analysis. Because more than one data source is used, qualitative methodology ensures that the phenomenon, rural principal practices for equity, were explored through more than one lens allowing for multiple aspects of

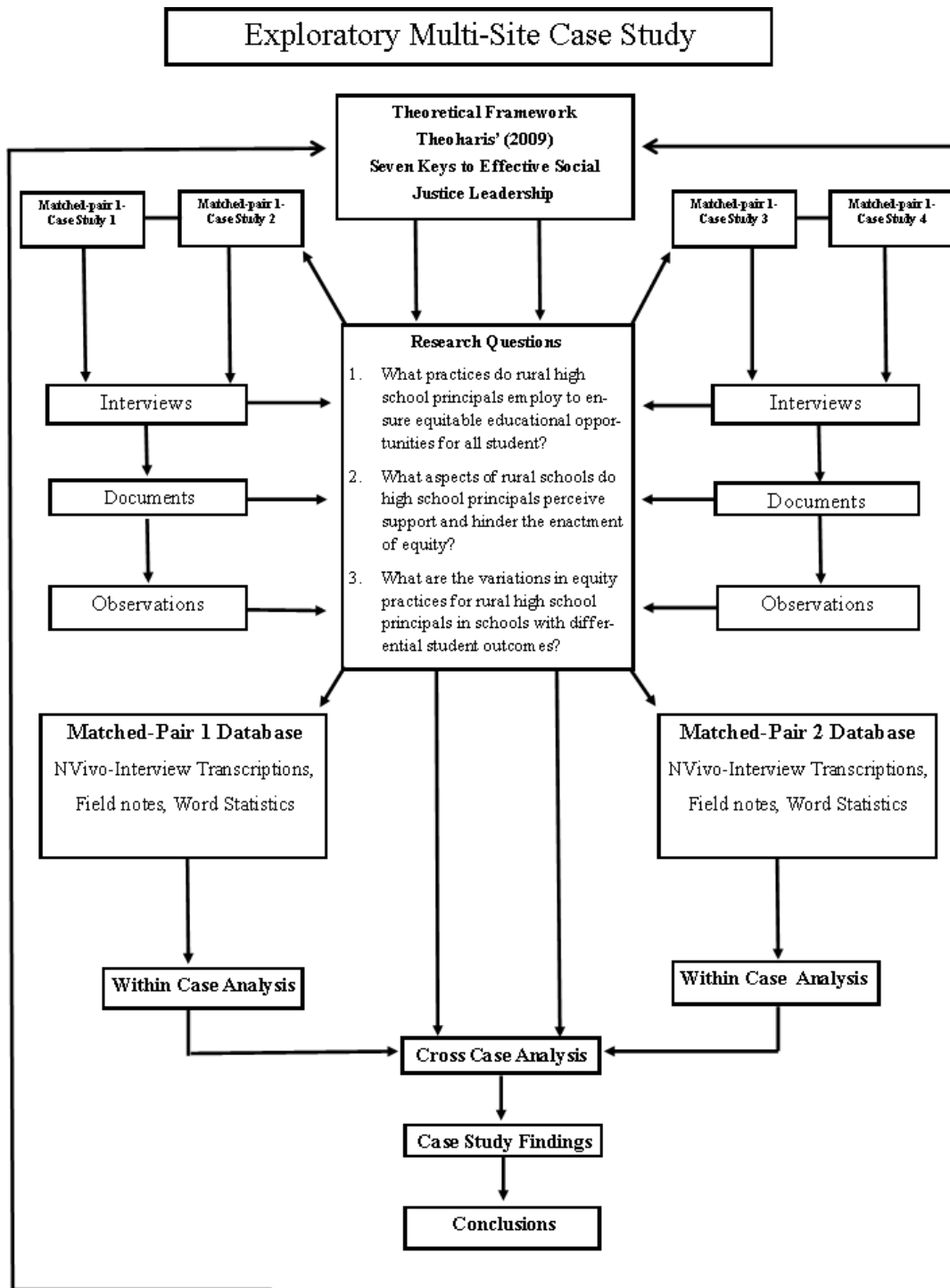


Figure 1: Study Design

the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. In addition, because the phenomenon does not have a clear, single set of outcomes, a qualitative, exploratory approach was more appropriate.

Scholars (Bennett & Elman, 2006; Maoz, 2002) are often critical of single case studies because they offer no point of comparison and only a snapshot of a phenomenon in a particular setting (Yin, 2013). Multi-site case studies, however, are more reliable because they offer more points of comparison and more empirical data collecting measures which creates stronger and more reliable findings (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). Thus, multi-site case studies allow for more holistic research questions and theoretical evolution (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The multi-site case study was chosen for this study so that I could gain further insight into rural principal practices to ensure equity for marginalized students and to compare and contrast the practices of rural principals. Multi-site case studies allowed the researcher to study multiple cases to better understand the differences and similarities between cases and to analyze data both within each situation and across situations (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013).

Qualitative Methods

This study utilized a qualitative approach instead of a quantitative approach because qualitative methodology seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as “real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2005, p. 29). Qualitative research broadly defined is “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Qualitative research is by nature inductive, or inferences made from the data that is not readily explained by focusing on the individual and accepting the contextual factors that may influence research. This study took a constructivist

approach because it seeks to understand the world where rural principals live and work, and the approach helped me to ascribe subjective meanings to their experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Furthermore, the study's central research question asks *how*, which can best be answered using the rich, thick description required by qualitative inquiry. To properly answer the research questions, multiple sources of data were needed to provide the detail and contextual factors that would be unclear using quantitative inquiry.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative inquiry is important because the research is considered an instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In other words, data collected as a part of qualitative inquiry is mediated through a human instrument, the researcher, through observations and interviews, instead of questionnaires or surveys (Merriam, 2009). As a result, the qualitative researcher must describe any biases and assumptions, expectations, and experiences to qualify his or her ability to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003; Yin, 2013). Therefore, I comprehensively evaluated any potential biases I had before beginning my research.

Throughout the study, I was a teacher at a suburban high school in Tennessee, but my primary and secondary education came from a rural school of fewer than 400 students. Growing up in a rural community and receiving my primary and secondary education from a rural school impacted my perspective of rurality greatly. While many Americans described my community as “fly over country,” my experiences taught me that the people of rurality cared about their families and communities in a deeply personal way. Furthermore, my grandfather, father, and mother had all held leadership positions at local rural schools, and I knew the responsibility and dedication it took to do the job correctly. My experiences and background growing up in a rural

school allowed me to be more of an expert and observe and ask questions that quickly focused on the study's research questions. Critics of case study research contend that researchers only confirm preconceived notions with their findings, but Flyvbjerg (2006) asserted that there is no greater bias in case study toward confirming preconceived notions than in other forms of research. In addition, Shields (2007) concluded that the strength of qualitative researchers was that they, "account for and include difference—ideologically, epistemologically, methodologically—and most importantly, humanly" (p. 12) and ultimately case study research includes "paradoxes and acknowledges that there is no simple answers, that it can and should qualify as the gold standard" (p. 12).

To control for my bias, I relied upon multiple sources of data for data collection and used member checks and other verification methods outlined later in this chapter. Theoharis' seven keys to equity (2009) also allowed me to control for bias in my study and gave me a non-biased lens to interpret my data.

Research Sample

Sites

For this study, rural principal leadership practices for social justice, I used matched-pair sampling because it provided a logical basis for selecting similar cases in case study research (Gerring, 2007; Levy, 2008; Tarrow, 2010). There are many advantages to using matched-pair sampling for case study design. First, since statistical analysis is used to find similar cases, qualitative methodologists are more confident that cases are similar. For this study, by computing z-scores, I was able to better assign rural schools values based upon their assessment

data. Also, matched-pair sampling protects the researcher from the frequent criticism of case study research that cases were intentionally selected to verify a foregone conclusion.

My goal was to find rural high schools with differentiated student outcomes to compare the equity leadership of each principal. Because scholars (Blankstein, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Furman & Shields, 2005; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002; Quinn, 2002) have indicated that equity-oriented leadership practices could better promote positive student outcomes, it was my intention to then compare the equity-oriented leadership practices, or lack thereof, of the rural schools based on differentiated student outcomes. To find rural schools, I compiled a list of all rural schools in the eastern portion of the state according to Johnson Codes 6 and 7 (Geverdt, 2015). Rural schools in the eastern portion of the state fit the description of rural schools discussed in chapter two and aligned with the research questions of this study. Also, gatekeepers were used to help gather participants for this study, and their connections were manifested mainly in the eastern portion of the state. Johnson codes 6 and seven are used to categorize areas in the United States with populations of 2,500 to 19,999 adjacent and not adjacent to a metropolitan area. Once a list of rural schools was sorted, I reviewed the student demographics of each school to locate rural schools with minority ethnicity populations of at least 15%. I chose 15% because after reviewing the data of rural school demographics, that was the highest average percentage of marginalized student populations for rural schools that fit Johnson Codes 6 and 7, and those schools also had higher percentages of other marginalized student groups described in my literature review, including students of poverty and immigrants (Geverdt, 2015).

After identifying rural schools with at least a minority population of 15%, I searched the state's Department of Education database of school academic records at the state's website. Specifically, the state measurement data available from schools concerned student growth in the areas of literacy and numeracy. The results were reported on a 1-5 scale and were one-year scores, in this case, scores for the year 2016- 2017. In calculating the scores, a students' performance was compared to the scores of his or her peers who performed similarly on past assessments. If students met expectations or grew academically at the same rate as their peers across the state, the school would earn a level 3. If students produced scores above expectations, the district would earn a level 4 or 5, depending on the amount of progress made by students. If students did not meet expectations, the school would earn a level 1 or 2.

Data were collected from the state's website concerning the rural schools' literacy and numeracy scores from state assessments. The composite of both scores was used to identify student growth in rural schools on a scale of 1-5. Rural schools' assessment composite scores were transformed to z-scores to illustrate variance from the mean for each school. After z-scores were calculated, rural schools were placed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for point of comparison. To better compare schools, I also listed each school's student size, socio-economic status, and marginalized student population, which included student ethnicity and socioeconomic data. Keeping in mind the demographic data of each school, I selected two matched-pair samples, specifically including two rural schools with student outcomes below the mean and two rural schools with student outcomes above the mean. Comparison of demographics, student achievement data, and principal information are located in Tables 3,4, and 5.

Table 3

Comparison of Student Demographic: 2017-2018 Data

Student Ethnicity & Demographics	Hovito High School	Tanis High School	Ra High School	Shiva High Schools
Ethnicity				
European American	77-79%	81-82%	74-76%	81-82%
African American	18-20%	1-2%	5-6%	10-11%
Hispanic or Latino	1%	15-16%	19-20%	5-6%
Asian	>1%	1%	>1%	1%
Demographic				
Economically Disadvantaged	75-80%	30%	60%	45%
Immigrants	1%	12%	7-10%	>10%
LGTBQ	1%	1%	2%	3%
Student enrollment				
	350-450	1000-1100	700-800	850-950

Table 4

Comparison of Student Achievement Data: Literacy and Numeracy, 2017

Achievement Data	Hovito High School	Tanis High School	Ra High School	Shiva High School
Literacy-Numeracy Composite	3	5	3	5

Table 5

Principal Information

Categories	Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	Years of Experience in school
Principal 1 (Hovito-Matched-pair 1)	Luke	M	17	8
Principal 2 (Shiva-Matched-pair 1)	Han	M	26	17
Principal 3 (Tanis-Matched-pair 2)	Lando	M	24	5
Principal 4 (Ra-Matched-pair 2)	Leia	F	29	6

The site participant for each school was the principal. This was important to measure the principal's practices and their social justice leadership style. This study did not assume that principals chosen were social justice leaders. Instead, this study intended only to examine the practices of rural principals to investigate whether they lead their schools in a socially just way. If they are not social justice leaders, that will be reflected in their behaviors and observations according to the seven "keys" of effective social justice leadership by Theoharis (2009).

Data Collection

After the four sites were chosen and the IRB form was submitted and approved by the University of Tennessee, the data collection process began for the study. Merriam (2009) stated that qualitative case study data comes from several sources, including interviews, document analysis, archival records, and direct-observation. As outlined below, this study utilized interviews, direct observations, and document analysis to provide the rich description needed to answer the research questions.

Interviews

For this study, a semi-structured interview protocol was used to interview four rural principals. Stake (1995) asserted that interviews in qualitative research, specifically using case study, were instrumental for "discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case" and the interview was the "main road to multiple realities" (p. 64). To ensure reliability, a protocol pilot test was developed, submitted to content experts, and then piloted before official data collection.

Protocol pilot

When creating my protocol, I tried to create questions that were not redundant nor poorly written. I reviewed my study's research questions while constructing my protocol to ensure that

my study's goals were manifested in the protocol questions. The interview questions created were based on Flick's (2014) two types of questions: open and theory-driven. While I constructed interview questions with my research questions in mind, I also specifically created questions that could help to identify whether principal practices of interviewees incorporated Theoharis's seven keys to successful equity leadership. Some questions were designed to be open so that interviewees could speak freely about their leadership and include the contextual factors that could impact their leadership practices, which Theoharis highlighted as important for establishing successful social justice leadership. Secondly, I constructed theory-driven questions that addressed principal practice and whether those practices incorporated parts or all of the keys to equity leadership described by Theoharis (2009). In addition, as the interview questions were created, I kept in mind the goal "of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interview that leads to a more give-and-take in the conversation" (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 37).

For the first iteration of my interview protocol, I submitted 19 questions, all of which were based on my research questions and Theoharis's seven key to successful equity leadership, to four qualitative experts: one principal and three professors in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department at the University of Tennessee. I wanted to include some experts with active leadership positions because I thought their perspective as leaders could help me consider some questions that I may have overlooked about leadership practices. The experts provided me with some helpful advice on crafting my questions, including suggestions on better probing techniques and specificity of questions to gain the information from interviewees I needed to help answer my research questions. The advice from qualitative experts helped me to craft more specific interview questions that better helped clarify what I was addressing and how they related

to my research questions. Also, because of their feedback, I limited the number of closed questions in the protocol in exchange for probing questions that could better help me obtain more information and keep the interviewee talking. The experts also advised me to remove some questions, and instead probe for a more organic interview process that could better produce answers to my research questions and establish a more comfortable interview atmosphere for the interviewee. Soliciting feedback from qualitative experts helped me to understand better how to improve both the format and content of the interview questions. After I received advice from qualitative experts and amended my interview protocol, I had narrowed my questions down to 12. Finally, a helpful piece of advice I received from an expert was to send each principal an email before the in-person interview to gather all demographic information beforehand. This method could save time for the participant and me and could entice the principal to participate in the study by making the interview more respectful of their schedules and time.

After I reflected on the expert feedback, a final interview protocol was designed for principals. The interview protocol was piloted with five different principals in a southeastern state. The principals were chosen through convenience sampling, and all agreed to participate. The first principal interviews took one hour to complete, but as I became more comfortable with the protocol and the information I was attempting to gather, the last few interviews lasted about 50 minutes. Each principal provided advice on how to strengthen the protocol. Specifically, one principal suggested that I define certain terms, so they could better understand how to answer the questions. Therefore, I included definitions for terms like “marginalized students” and “equitable opportunities.” The piloting of the protocol with principals also helped me remove redundant questions that I previously overlooked. Using those experiences, combined with the comments

from qualitative experts, I crafted the final interview protocol. The final interview protocol consisted of 12 questions, with most questions consisting of additional probing questions to gather more specific information specific to my study (see Appendix C).

Final interview protocol

Once the interview protocol was piloted and finalized, I contacted the superintendents of the districts selected to ask for permission to interview principals selected. If permission was denied, the principal selected was replaced with another using the same selection criteria. In addition, I used gatekeepers to help contact principals selected for the study.

Once I had received permission from their district superintendents, the interviews were conducted with the four rural high school principals who agreed to participate. Interviews were conducted at four matched-pair schools. However, if saturation has not been met, a third match-pair will be added. All interviews took place at the principal's convenience and the site of his/her choice. Interviews were conducted in person at the principal's school with participants digitally recorded using a hand-held audio recorder. Some notes were taken using a computer and writing pad during the interviews.

Rural principals who were identified as possible candidates for my study were sent an introductory email (Appendix A). Principals received an explanation of my study, and their consent was requested. If their consent was given, principals were sent a follow-up email (Appendix B). The email requested demographic information about the principal's time as a leader and as a resident (if applicable) of a rural community. By acquiring demographic information beforehand, I was able to focus on the in-person interview on the subject of my study.

Principals were provided with an introductory statement of consent before beginning the interview to ensure that they agreed to participate, their identity would be kept confidential, and that data retrieved from their responses will be used in the study (Appendix A). After the research was explained to respondents, interviews began and lasted roughly 50 to 60 minutes. The first interview established a baseline for data and follow up interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. The interviews allowed me the ability to differentiate between principals' leadership practices and how their practices supported marginalized students. Interviews also helped me to establish the barriers to their leadership practices the principals perceived.

Direct-Observation

Merriam (2009) asserted that observations, like interviews, were a primary source of data in qualitative research. Observations require “practically all of the senses---seeing, hearing, feeling, and smelling.” (Flick, 2014. p. 308). Observations were included in this study to allow the researcher to see rural principal practices in action, how their leadership helps promote equitable educational opportunities, and the barriers equity-oriented leadership practices may face in rural contexts.

There are several forms of observation, but for this study, I utilized the non-participant observation. Flick (2014) stated that the non-participant observer “maintains a distance from the observed events to avoid influencing them” (p. 309). Observations were conducted to immerse me in the setting of the study. Specifically, the shadowing of the principal was used to observe their leadership practices. If a principal gave consent to an observation, times for observations were set after I had spent some time in the school building and around staff to determine what

times would be best to observe their equity-oriented leadership practices. If a principal did not give consent to direct observation, the principal and site were removed from the study, and another principal and site were invited.

After consent was granted and I met the principal, I shadowed the principal in various contexts of their leadership of the school, including staff meetings, student interactions, an organization of professional learning communities (PLCs), parent and staff meetings, and classroom observations. Field notes about the observation were recorded on the observation protocol (see Appendix D). The observation protocol was used to guide and focus my observations and helped me to align particular field notes with the effective principal practices that help promote equitable educational opportunities for all students as detailed in chapter two. Included in the filed notes were descriptions, quotations, and observer comments. Shadowing the principal helped me to see the principal's practices for equity in action, and how they supported and led for equity with their leadership practices.

Documents and Archival Records

The documents used for this study were faculty meeting handouts, school newsletters, principal emails, staff and student handbooks, professional development handouts, screenshots of the school's website, and other assorted documents distributed or created by the principal. All of these documents were used in the study to identify how the principal ensured equitable educational opportunities for all students and the barriers the principal may face when attempting to do so. For example, professional development handouts were examined to see if priority was placed on teacher education to promote equity better, faculty meeting notes were analyzed to determine how much of a role equity plays in the schools' day-to-day activities, and student and

staff handbooks were studied to determine school support for marginalized students and protections put into place for them by school policy. The documents collected helped me gain insight into the equity-oriented leadership of the principal. All of the documents were used in the study to identify how the principal's practices helped the promotion of equitable educational opportunities, and the support and barriers they faced when promoting equity.

Summary of Data Collection

Data were collected for this study using interviews, direct observations, and document analysis to specifically address the research questions of my study. Table 6 provides a summary of how data sources aligned with the study's research questions.

Data Analysis

For this study, open coding using a constant comparative method was used to analyze data collection for research questions 1 and 2, while a priori coding based off Theoharis's (2009) conceptual framework was used to analyze data collection for research question three. Open coding is the process where the researcher assigns short abbreviations to different points within data to specify pieces of data for locating later during analysis using the constant comparative method to determine similarities and differences (Merriam, 2009). Data collection addressing the research questions were organized into categories using the constant comparative method. Also, to address research question three a priori coding was used to organize data collection into seven categories based on Theoharis's (2009) seven keys to effective social justice leadership. During the coding phase, codes that developed were sorted into seven a priori themes whenever possible when addressing the research questions. Some of the codes that did not align with were combined to create new "keys" to effective social justice leadership. The

Table 6

Alignment of Data Sources with Research Questions

Research Question	Principal Interview Questions	Observation	Artifact Collection
What practices do rural high school principals employ to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students?	P1, P2, P4, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12	x	x
What aspects of rural schools do high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity?	P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P11, P12	x	
What are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differentiated outcomes?	P1, P2, P3 P4, P5, P8, P10, P11, P12	x	x

coding approach was informed by constant, comparative analysis and involved a continuous back and forth between data and codes to ensure a thorough and well-informed interpretation was attained (Charmaz, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Researchers have asserted that data must be analyzed simultaneously while collecting data for qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2014; Merriam, 2009). While collecting data, I reviewed data to identify patterns and to generate further probing questions for interviews. Specifically, when establishing themes, interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed with the study's research questions, Theoharis' seven "keys" to social justice leadership (2009), and the chapter 2 literature review in mind.

Interviews

Audio recordings were made of each interview using a handheld recording device and then transcribed verbatim using Dragon Dictation software and Microsoft Word to foster intimacy and familiarity with the data before coding. Through the manipulation of transcription data during coding, new themes and contexts emerged (Konopasek, 2008). Because my study consisted of at least four interviews, the possibility of a large data set was strong. Therefore, I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software to assist me in constructing categories and themes from codes for this study (Konopasek, 2008).

Direct Observations

Direct observations were a useful way to validate the data from interviews by allowing me to observe the principal in action, and how he/she leads for equity in their school. I used NVivo data analysis software to bring together all observation field notes into the program for

data analysis. Once all materials were collected, I used Theoharis (2009) seven keys of effective equity leadership to identify and organize themes.

Documents and Archival Records

Documents and archival records were analyzed to gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge. For document analysis to produce empirical results, it was necessary for me to be as objective as possible in my analysis for results to be credible (Bowen, 2009). To ensure reliable results, I followed O’Leary’s (2014) guide for document analysis. I gathered my documents and analyzed each one to acknowledge and address biases. I specifically analyzed documents to evaluate the original purpose of the document, such as the target audience (Bowen, 2009). I considered whether the author of the document was a firsthand witness or secondhand witness and if the document was edited or anonymous. Also, I kept in mind the latent content of the document, such as style, agenda, facts or opinions. Using the constant comparative method, I identified emerging patterns and established themes.

Data Triangulation of Qualitative Sources

Since my study was a multiple case study, there were two stages of analysis: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. Within-case analysis, since it only examines one case at a time, is “less useful in the development of generalizations” (Ayres, Kavanaugh, Knafl, 2003, p. 873) in comparison to cross-case analysis but is productive in helping the researcher identify specific contextual variable that “might have a bearing on the case” (Merriam, 2009, p. 204). For within-case analysis, each case is first treated as a comprehensive case by itself to identify contextual variables that may affect the case (Merriam, 2009). I used open-coding to address the first two research questions. Categories were created to organized themes found during the constant

comparative analysis. Then, I conducted within-case analysis using an a priori coding method based on Theoharis's (2009) social justice leadership framework. According to Eisenhardt (1989), this is a process that "allows the unique patterns of each case to emerge before the investigators push to generalize patterns across cases and also gives investigators a rich familiarity with each case which accelerates cross-case comparison" (p. 540). Using the constant comparative method, I first analyzed principal interviews for each case. After working through the principal interview transcript, I was able to inductively construct categories. Afterward I analyzed my direct observations and documents in the same way.

Once the within-case analysis was completed for each school, a cross-case analysis was conducted. Because this qualitative, inductive study was multisite, it sought to build abstractions across cases (Yin, 2011). The cross-case analysis is a highly systematic method that allows the researcher to summarize and code under broad thematic headings to distinguish between the commonalities and differences between cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The cross-case analysis adds trustworthiness to the study through comparison of multiple cases (Merriam, 2009).

A qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple sources of evidence to seek convergence and corroboration using data sources and methods (Yin, 2011) and triangulating data allowed me to converge data sources, which helped to establish credibility for my study (Eisner, 1991). All interview transcripts, all observation field notes, and all documents and archival records were combined and placed in NVivo for cross-case analysis. I used NVivo to help organize the codes of interviews, observations, and documents of each school. By examining data collected from different sources, I was able to corroborate findings across data

sets and reduce potential bias. Since I had already identified emerging patterns and themes for each piece of data using an a priori method based on Theoharis's (2009) social justice leadership framework, merging the sources in NVivo allowed me to compare similarities and differences of categories side-by-side within my data collection.

For the cross-case analysis, I performed multiple iterations of coding including individual and team analysis before determining final codes. During the multiple iterations of coding, I kept a list of emerging codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to help me visualize the emergent themes and to avoid duplication. I used previous emerging patterns and themes, based on Theoharis's (2009) social justice leadership framework to provide a baseline for developing categories once all of the data was in NVivo. Since I already had established categories from my within-case analysis, once I began my cross-case analysis, I wanted to see whether the same categories appeared in subsequent data. The data across cases fit into categories that were constructed during the within-case analysis, but I did remain cognizant of the possibility of new categories and themes to emerge during the coding process (Charmaz, 2003).

Also, a conceptual framework for assessing the social justice leadership of principals was used as a lens to comprehend and conceptualize the integration of findings for this study. Specifically, Theoharis's (2009) social justice leadership framework allowed for integrated findings to be viewed through the seven keys of successful equity leadership to better examine the rural principal practices for marginalized students and the barriers they encounter using an equity-oriented leadership philosophy.

Ethical Safeguards

Creswell (2013) contends that ethical safeguards must be taken in qualitative research. Site participants were informed about the details of the study in advance and provided consent forms to sign granting permission for the study to be conducted. The privacy and confidentiality of participants were strictly maintained throughout the collection and presentation of data. Because the site participants were working principals, attention and care was given to scheduling interviews. The participants were asked to choose dates and times that were most convenient to their schedules.

Because the site participant and I did not know each other, personally or professionally, I attempted to minimize discomfort as much as possible by conducting the interviews in a location that was most comfortable for them. Also, I addressed risks to participants by keeping their personal information strictly confidential. All transcripts and data collected by this study were kept in a locked cabinet accessible only by me.

Verification Methods

In their seminal work on qualitative inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four aspects to the concept of “trustworthiness”: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To confirm these four aspects and demonstrate qualitative rigor, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested strategies like member checks, categorizing, peer debriefing, or audit trails. While Guba (1981) admitted that the criteria was primitive and needed further study, aspects of the criteria have become fundamental to evaluate the quality of qualitative inquiry.

I analyzed participant responses by comparing and contrasting them using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop themes for comparison to Theoharis’

(2007) model of resistance framework. The study analyzed four interviews and observations of rural principal along with documents and archival records. It is possible for emergent, new data to appear, but I expect some themes to emerge similar to the Theoharis (2007) framework, which adds to the study's trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Overall, I demonstrated the trustworthiness of this study by conducting a multi-site study, triangulation of data, and conducting member checks.

Multi-Site Case Study

Since there was only one researcher for this study, there was a heightened risk for bias in the interpretation of data. To protect against potential bias in data analysis, a multi-case study was performed to provide multiple indicators for confidence in the trustworthiness of the measure (Yin, 2011). Because the study compared and contrasted the findings across two rural schools, findings were more detailed and helped strengthen the precision and trustworthiness of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Triangulation of Data

Baxter and Jack (2008) contended that "Triangulation of data sources, data types or researchers is a primary strategy that can be used and would support the principle in case study research that the phenomena be viewed and explored from multiple perspectives" (p. 556). By collecting data from more than one source, interviews, observations, and documents, I was able to triangulate sources adding trustworthiness to the study (Patton, 1990). Yin (2011) asserted that there were three principles to follow when collecting case study data: multiple sources of data must be used, a case study database must be created, and there should be a chain of evidence

maintained. By using multiple sources of data, interviews, and observations, I was able to look across the data to establish themes to add to the trustworthiness of the study.

Rich, Thick Description

Providing rich, thick description is vital to case study research because it allows the researcher to convey findings by enabling readers to envision the setting and experiences described (Creswell, 2014). Merriam (2009) stated that case study research must use rich, thick description and that such description can be “creative, using prose and literary techniques to convey the researcher’s understanding of the case.” (p. 44). The description cannot stand alone, however, but must be balanced by analysis and interpretation. As Patton (2002) asserted, “Endless description becomes its muddle. The purpose of the analysis is to organize the description so that it is manageable. The description provides the skeletal frame for analysis that leads into interpretation.” (p. 503). This study included various sources of data, including interviews, observations, document records to provide the details and context needed to accurately depict the experiences of where the study took place. The data sources were closely analyzed and then organized to create patterns and connections necessary for good interpretation of findings.

Audit Trail

Audit trails are used to document how data is collected and how decisions are made in regards to the study (Merriam, 2009). The rigor of the study is supported by tangible evidence using audit trails, and they can be used as proof of the decisions made throughout the study (Flick, 2014). Documentation records were intentionally thorough and recorded for each part of data collection. Also, software and audio programs, like nVivo, and Dragon Dictation were used

to add greater detail to the data collection process. Using Yin's (2013) advice, I attempted to make data collection as clear as possible to establish a chain of evidence that could be understood well enough that an external observer could trace the steps of data collection. An audit trail is used specifically to document the course of development of the completed analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Member Checks

Member checks are valuable to help provide additional credibility to a study. Maxwell (2005) contended that member checks were the "single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (p. 111). Member checks involve taking preliminary analysis back to the participant to ask whether the analysis is accurate (Merriam, 2009). After performing interviews and transcribing verbatim, I gave each participant a copy of the transcript from the interview to ensure that I did not misrepresent anything communicated in the interview. After the transcript was identified as accurate by the participant, I kept all transcripts in a safe, secure area where only I had access to the files.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 described and supported the methodology and research design that was used for this multi-site case study. All aspects of the research process were identified and explained, including size and selection, qualitative instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Methods to ensure trustworthiness were discussed. Chapter four will present detailed data analysis of the study.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This multi-site case study investigated rural principal practices for promoting socially just leadership for marginalized students. The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students?
2. What aspects of rural schools do high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity?
3. What are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differential student outcomes?

Findings from each site were based on interviews, observations, and artifacts. Each principal was interviewed and observed once with field notes taken during the shadowing process. Artifacts included professional development handouts, school improvement plans, and brochures available for the public. In addition, matched pair sampling was used to group cases which were given labels matched pair 1 and matched pair 2. For a complete review of data collection methodologies, please refer to Chapter 3.

The four schools that served as cases for this study were located in a southeastern state. All four were public high schools providing instruction in grades 9-12. Chapter 4 includes the qualitative data findings from both matched pairs selected for this study. Preceding the cross-case analysis of each matched pair, descriptions of each school's specific community context, demographic and academic data, and principal perceptions will be provided. Furthermore, within

case analysis will address research questions 1 and 2. Research question 3 will be addressed in the cross-case analysis provided at the end of this chapter. Finally, the last section of Chapter 4 will provide an application of the seven keys of effective social justice leadership from Theoharis's (2009) conceptual framework to the study findings.

Limitations of the Study

As a result of the qualitative design of this study, there were limitations that could negatively affect the results and limit the generalizability of the study. This study includes the following limitations:

Qualitative data can be biased and inaccurate. Bias in interview data can result from the researcher in the structure of the interview protocol and the respondents. Qualitative data are the perception of the respondent, and therefore the researcher must assume honesty and accuracy. While bias may be found in the interview protocol, the protocol has been tested for trustworthiness thus minimizing the likelihood of bias.

It can be difficult to replicate qualitative research, especially a case study. The specificity of qualitative research focuses on a phenomenon in a certain context, and therefore it can be difficult to replicate and confirm findings independently.

The site participant for each school was the principal. This was important to measure the principal's practices and their social justice leadership style. However, because the only interviews conducted will be principals there will only be self-reported data available. This is a limitation because it limits my ability to ensure data gathered is accurate.

Matched Pair 1- Hovito High School and Shiva High School

Hovito High School

Hovito High School is the first of four schools included in this study, and the first school of matched pair 1. Hovito High School is a four mile drive down a two-lane state road from the interstate. Through the drive, it becomes apparent that the community centers on agriculture as there are multiple farms between the interstate exit and the entrance to the school. The town has a population in the range of 6,000- 8,000 people. A short distance from the school is a factory that employs several of the towns' residents. There are myriad churches throughout the town which relates to the city's founding in the late nineteenth century as a planned community stemming from the temperance movement. The temperance movement was largely a religiously based movement that advocated for the abolition of alcohol and the creation of "utopias" based on biblical governance. This town originated as one of those planned "utopias."

On the outskirts of town, close to another more affluent area of the county, is a community and technical college that appears to have been updated recently. The school, however, lies on the opposite end of the county, a good distance away from the community and technical college. There are closed shops and abandoned buildings that cover most of the town, all of which are eclipsed by a rusting railroad bridge that passes over the nearby river adjacent to the city center. Most homes are single-family and appear to have been built 20-30 years ago. There is a park in the town that has basketball and volleyball courts but are in disrepair and look unused.

The local high school was incorporated into the county school system in 1999 after the towns' citizens voted to abandon the city school system format. The school itself is not aesthetically pleasing. The building is made primarily of concrete and appears old with additions made in the back of the building. As a result, the building is not continuous but separated into different buildings which require walking outside to get to them. Once inside the building, however, the school is updated and quite colorful. Banners hang on almost all of the walls, there is a case where former and current students are honored by trophies, scholarships, and ACT scores, and the school's mission statement is front and center, visible as soon as someone enters the building. From the entrance of the school, there are two main hallways that run parallel to one another where academic courses are offered. Where the two hallways meet is known as the "commons," where most of the students congregate during class changes. Down from the commons area is a set of doors that leads to an outside walkway towards the gym, CTE classrooms, and the cafeteria. Students and teachers walk freely around the school, but there are security measures in place to ensure safety. The front doors of the school are covered with a transparent image of the school's mascot that allowed light to enter the building but blocked anyone from the outside from seeing inside the school. Doors on the front and back of the building were locked except for the entrance to the front office which was where guests were permitted to enter the school. In addition, the principal, administration team, and faculty frequented the hallways to watch student behavior and monitor for unknown people in the building. I was stopped by many of these teachers during my observation at the school and was asked to show them my pass before I was allowed to proceed.

Student Demographics and Academic Progress

At the time of this study, Hovito High School served a student body of 350-450 students, 78-80% were white, 18-20% were African-American, 1% were Hispanic or Latino, 1% were Native American or Asian. The student body consisted of 75-80% economically disadvantaged, and 30% were students with disabilities. Less than 1% of the student body were non-US citizens and about 1%, according to the principal, of the student body identified as being LGBTQ.

The school had a graduation rate of 96%, and an average ACT score of 19.3. During the 2016-2017 school year, the state assigned scores on a scale of 1-5 to schools throughout the state as indicators of academic progress based on state assessments. The state measurement data available for schools concerned student growth in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In calculating the scores, a students' performance was compared to the scores of his or her peers who performed similarly on past assessments. If students met expectations or grew academically at the same rate as their peers across the state, the school would earn a level 3. If students produced scores above expectations, the district would earn a level 4 or 5, depending on the amount of progress made by students. If students did not meet expectations, the school would earn a level 1 or 2. Hovito High School was given a 5 out of 5 for their literacy score, but a 1 out of 5 for their numeracy score. As a result, the composite of the literacy and numeracy scores was a 3 out of 5, which indicates average/to expected academic growth for students during the 2016-2017 school year.

The Principal

The principal of Hovito High school, Luke (pseudonym), has been in his current position for eight years. He has a total of 17 years of experience in education. He played college baseball

and afterward came back to his hometown to be a teacher. His hometown is about a 30-minute drive up the interstate from the high school he leads. After teaching and coaching for 11 years at his former high school, he applied to be the principal at Hovito High School and was given the position. Since he continued to live outside of the community and did not attend Hovito High School, his promotion to the job was not met with widespread acceptance. Over eight years, however, through many acts of service in the community and at the high school, his job has gotten easier than it was in the first 2-3 years. His relationships with students is obvious. He knows each student by name, and they converse with each other regularly in a jovial way. He constantly walks the halls and interacts with students and teachers.

Research Question 1: What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students?

This section will examine the data collected for Research Question 1: What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students? Data for this question were collected from an in-person principal interview, an observation that consisted of shadowing the principal in his daily administrative duties, and artifacts that were both provided by Hovito High School or obtained through the public website.

For research question one and two, the process of open coding as described by Saldana (2016) was applied. Open coding “breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts and closely examines and compares them for similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). While collecting data, I reviewed data to identify patterns. Specifically, when establishing themes, I analyzed interviews, observations, and documents the study’s research questions one

and two, Theoharis's social justice conceptual framework (2009), and the chapter two literature review in mind.

Practices: Luke

Pedagogy. Luke's pedagogy was a leadership practice he used to help promote equitable opportunities at Hovito High School and create more opportunities for marginalized students. Ending pullout and segregated programs for students was one of Luke's practices that helped create more equitable opportunities for all students, and one that he was proud of: "We've gone from secluded classrooms to full inclusion and no more pullout programs." Luke emphasized that Hovito High School was a fully inclusive school since he became the principal and that students with special needs were required to attend the same classes as their peers: "You know if you got a specialized student going into a biology classroom, we're not going to pull that kid just because they are special. They're going to be in that classroom [like everyone else]". Luke seemed proud of the inclusive classrooms his leadership had brought to Hovito High School. Yet, during the observation at the school, there was a designated special education hallway. The classrooms were noticeably populated with students of color, and the rooms were placed in a different location, separate from other academic classrooms. Luke informed me that those classrooms were for intervention purposes only, and that "it's not a situation where we pull a kid just because to give them instruction on their own," but instead it was an opportunity to allow students to catch up or get extra help with homework assignments. Luke insisted that as a result of his inclusion policy, more marginalized students were in classrooms than before his tenure. He celebrated the end of pullout programs from Hovito under his leadership, despite evidence to the contrary in some instances, but, according to Luke, there were more marginalized students

enrolled in AP classes and CTE programs. In fact, Luke was proud that 20% of his CTE population was made up of marginalized students.

To help end pullout programs, Luke emphasized to teachers the need for them to utilize the high achievers in their classrooms to help students who struggled with the content: “I encourage teachers to realize that they can utilize those kids, so to speak, who have already mastered the content to teach those who haven’t.” Though Luke tried to institute peer-to-peer tutoring at Hovito, teachers were resistant to his strategy because it had never been done there before. They were afraid that “the peer’s tutors wouldn’t know the information well enough to tutor” and would cause more disruption than help to other students. Luke had to “try to sell this to the teachers,” but after some time the teachers understood the positive effect on student academic growth. While Luke’s implementation of peer-to-peer tutoring was originally met with resistance, Luke insisted that his teachers implement and accept the new strategy. Luke saw his efforts to promote peer-to-peer tutoring as twofold: helping marginalized students who had not mastered the content while providing additional educational reinforcement to those who had: “So it’s not just helping the marginalized student, but it’s also benefiting the higher functioning student in teaching by having them teach particular skills. It’s benefiting everyone across the board.” As a result, Luke said students, especially marginalized students, experienced more academic success. Luke stated that at Hovito, “we grow our kids here, and it’s not me, but the teachers who do it.” Luke commended his staff for eventually embracing the change and credited them for its success.

Expanding opportunities was a leadership practice Luke believed was important to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students, but he acknowledged a lack of

resources which hindered his ability to change the curriculum in a way he wanted: “As a rural principal, and we talked about resources earlier and the difficulties of that [as a rural school we always get the short end of the stick], but offering students the curriculum that would expand their potential is more difficult here.” One way Luke expanded the curriculum, despite financial limitations, is by partnering with the local community college to help create a Careers, Technology, and Engineering (CTE) department at Hovito High School: “We have to be somewhat creative with our curricular offerings and to be able to partner with local institutions like our community college here or [State] College of Applied Technology and bring some of these extra opportunities into our school is a great help.” The creation of the CTE department at Hovito was one practice used by Luke to create more opportunities for marginalized students since the program’s population was “predominantly those students who are marginalized.” Luke saw the creation of the CTE department as perhaps his greatest practice in improving social justice for students at Hovito High School: “Providing a curriculum that would allow students to take a wide variety of classes that give them exposure to other careers or educational opportunities may be the most influential practice I do here to ensure equity for all kids.” Also, Luke felt a sense of responsibility to marginalized students with the creation of the CTE program because of his:

The job is to give them the opportunity to have a curriculum that is demanding enough to prepare them [marginalized students] for that opportunity by giving them CTE courses that provide them with an advantage over someone that may be applying for the same position or entrance into the same school.

Luke commended the district of Hovito which had been “very supportive” by providing Luke with extra money each year to ensure that the CTE program continues.

Another pedagogical practice of Luke to help ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students was how he built into the school schedule specific intervention/activity periods for students to help prepare them for the ACT and other state assessments. According to documents collected at the school site, the academic period created in the school schedule was not a regular occurrence but was implemented the week before the ACT was given. The academic support block pulled out students according to the academic ability for specific additional help with certain subject areas like English and math. Luke grouped students in the academic periods from high achievement to low achievement and utilized peer tutoring to help struggling students. Luke insisted that the academic activity periods were not pullout programs, but instead avenues to create greater opportunity for marginalized students by increasing their academic achievement. Luke asserted that this method was a practice to address achievement holistically by improving the core learning of Hovito High School. Luke stated this practice in terms of his goals:

For example, this year we’ll focus on improving our ACT composite scores. For example, we are doing ACT bell ringers across the board every quarter. We’re giving pretests and post-tests, and then we are going to determine the types of intervention we should use so to speak. We have some great incentives for the kids who put forth the effort and really try.

Luke, however, maintained that he facilitated more opportunity for all students by stressing the importance of the ACT because he wanted students, specifically marginalized

students, to be competitive for scholarships to post-secondary institutions, and therefore he increased student accountability by having student celebrations. Students with high ACT scores had their pictures publicly posted for others to see, so those kids received recognition for their academic success. Luke emphasized that things like celebrations were to increase opportunity for all of his students: “things like celebrations that we’re doing but that was all generated by the goal of increasing post-secondary opportunities, and increasing ACT composites allows our kids to be competitive with scholarship opportunities with college.” Also, there were posters throughout the school that stressed the importance of the ACT and the average for each subject needed to gain admission to colleges or universities.

Modeling. Luke stressed the importance of effectively modeling to staff and students his expectations and the importance of advancing social justice at Hovito High School. Specifically, Luke modeled the kind of relationships he expected his staff to embrace with students at Hovito: “The main thing is understanding that every kid that comes through my high school door is valuable to me and we have to do our [staff] best to influence them positively.” Luke had a personal philosophy in which he treated his students and their families like he would his own: “I go the extra mile for them. That’s who I am.” Indeed, Luke did see the student body and staff as his family. While I was there for an observation, he told me about how he had personally taken a student to the hospital and waited for her parents to arrive the day before.

Luke saw modeling positive relationships as an effective practice for conveying to teachers that they were expected to develop positive student-teacher relationships to create equity for marginalized students regardless of outside factors:

The students never learn any younger. What I mean by that is, and I talk to my teachers about it all the time—we've got kids who come from backgrounds where they have very little positive influence outside of our school and so whether they come to us with some of these negative things like speech or negative expectations of their abilities or maybe even negative behaviors, it's on us to make that change because they're not going to learn it any younger and regardless, you know, they're at a high school level. There's a lot of blame always thrown around in the education field. Whether it's elementary or what, it's always the parent's fault and those sorts of things. The high school is blaming everybody else but themselves, but it doesn't matter. We've got kids in our classrooms and in our schools that need our help, and regardless of whose fault it is, they're not going to learn any younger.

Luke also modeled high expectations for all students as a practice for ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students: "One of the biggest things that we do is, it doesn't matter what background our kids come from or what issues they're dealing with, we have high expectations for everyone, and that comes from me." Luke effectively modeled a positive attitude concerning high expectations for marginalized students, and he insisted that all students could experience success regardless of background:

Our school population is such that we have a high percentage of [low] SES [socioeconomic] students and a relatively high population of special education students, and a moderate level of ethnic or racial minorities, but the bottom line is that it doesn't matter what category they fit in, they're still our kids and because they're our kids we've got to give them our best.

Yet, Luke also maintained his humility by acknowledging that without others he could not lead effectively because “the teachers are the ship and they help keep things going and moving in the right direction, and with their help we get the focus [from students] and then together we become the rudder, but it has to start with me.” Luke took considerable pride in the fact that he advanced inclusion, access, and opportunity for all through his expectations of all students:

Expectations are huge for low socioeconomic and marginalized students because if you have lower expectations only because some students are a certain demographic, you’re limiting them from the beginning. But if I have the same expectation for every student across the board and those are high, then you’re providing equal opportunity for every student to be successful. So, you kind of have to create that pervasive thought that all students can learn, and all students can learn at a high level.

Luke emphasized the importance he and his teachers placed on giving students their best, but also insisted that only their best would do: “allow them to produce their best and give their best and so what we try to do is level the playing field in terms of opportunities for all of our students within [Hovito] High School.” Keeping high expectations, however, would only work if Luke was able to develop positive relationships with his students:

Developing those relationships to be able to have those difficult conversations where I might have to tell a kid, “Listen you’re not fulfilling your abilities [academically]”, and that could be a marginalized student or a student from a different demographic, but it all still starts at the relationship in which the kid is receptive to my encouragement and criticism.

School culture. Luke's practices of creating and nurturing an inclusive environment helped to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. Luke emphasized the need to go to extracurricular activities to show the students he supported them. Luke's ability to personally connect with students also helped to create an inclusive environment at Hovito. In several cases, not only did Luke know students by their name but he also knew about what was happening in the student's personal life. He asked about their jobs, family, or comment about the big play they made in the game Friday night or their solo for the chorus performance. Luke saw creating an inclusive environment as interwoven into his practices as a leader: "the main thing is understanding that every kid that comes through my high school door is valuable and we have to do our best to influence them positively." The school's environment was set up to make all students feel like they belonged. There were multiple pictures throughout the school that addressed the need to report bullying, LBGTQ students, and other marginalized groups.

Luke believed that student extracurricular clubs were an effective way to nurture an inclusive school environment, and he facilitated the creation of student clubs on campus that he believed would help maintain an inclusive environment at Hovito. Hovito High School has an Ebony Club for young African-American girls who attend the school and want a social outlet. Luke commented that there probably are not any other schools with an Ebony Club within 200 miles, but he believes this helps create a warm and welcoming climate for all students:

We have an Ebony club here and you'll just not see that in many other rural communities, in my opinion. But again, in our community, that was something that was important, and it allowed for students to interact with one another. The crazy thing is, and I can show you a picture from the yearbook, but 70% of the kids in the Ebony club are

white, and I think that's really cool. They pull in their friends, and it becomes a club that I think helps our school community

Hovito High School publicly lists all clubs on the school website. Following the visit to Hovito High School, I visited the website to research extracurricular clubs offered by the school. I was interested in finding any information about the Ebony Club since Luke was proud because he believed it "helps our school community." While searching the clubs, the Ebony Club was listed. However, upon review, there wasn't a staff sponsor of the club and once the club link was accessed in big bold letters on the home page was the statement, THIS IS A WHITE CLUB.

The staff also seemed committed to creating an inclusive environment at Hovito. During an observation, the staff was interactive with students, and there were many positive student-teacher relationships that helped to create an inclusive culture. Students seemed at ease, and there was a mixture of white students and students of color in every classroom. Luke emphasized that he encouraged teachers to be in the hallways during breaks and to attend or sponsor extracurricular activities to better foster positive student-teacher relationships. Despite the lack of faculty sponsor for the Ebony Club, Luke insisted that there were some extracurricular activities that existed at Hovito because he had teachers who were willing to help students, especially those who were marginalized:

We have kids who are normally not in any type of extracurricular activity, many of them marginalized, but are pulled into activities because we have teachers and other students who are willing to kind of step out and do those things like developing a drama club.

Luke created a uniform discipline policy as an effective way to promote an inclusive environment at Hovito. Hovito High School's student population ranged from 350-450 students,

and 20-23% of the population was comprised of students of color. To make sure that all students were treated equally, Luke emphasized the uniform discipline policy that applied to everyone regarding specific disciplinary infractions. Although Luke admitted that he did have discretion regarding discipline on certain things, like dress code policy, teachers also had the freedom to use their discretion for discipline policies like dress code as well, because some were observed reprimanding students of color for their dress as other white students observed that day were not. Luke, however, acknowledged the research about higher rates of discipline for students of color and insisted that his school did not conduct itself in that way. Luke made it a point that discipline for students of color would be handled in the same manner as any other student: “My standards are the same and punishment will be the same no matter who it is.” Once discipline data were retrieved from the Tennessee Department of Education website, Hovito recorded 11 suspensions for the 2016-2017 school year, but data on subgroups was not yet available.

Empowering teachers. Luke’s practice of empowering teachers helped to nurture a positive environment for all students at Hovito. Observations at Hovito High School indicated that the staff has positive perceptions about Luke. Frequently, teachers popped into his office to ask a question or to joke around. He knew the teachers by name, and they often referred to him by his first name as well. Custodial, cafeteria and front office staff also appeared to like Luke and interacted with him positively in the hall, cafeteria, and front office. Luke instituted a new lunch detention service when he first became principal. Teachers who had called home but still couldn’t get a student to cooperate either behaviorally or academically were referred to Luke on a “lunch detention list.” During lunch every day, Luke sits at a long table with students who have been referred to him by his teachers. At lunch, he converses with them and insists that they

complete the work assigned by their teachers. Luke communicated to me that this has dramatically led to more assignments submitted the first time and less time for teachers to locate students and ask for a missed assignment. Overall, Luke conveyed that his lunch detention policy put him in better standing with his staff because they felt more empowered to be able to control a student's performance behaviorally or academically because of his administrative support. As a result, Luke asserted that Hovito had developed a more positive culture that benefitted students.

Shiva High School

Shiva High School is the second of four schools included in this study, and the second school of matched pair 1. Shiva High School is a fifteen mile drive from a major interstate down a two-lane state road from the interstate. The outskirts of the community that surrounds Shiva is agricultural. There are many farms that run continuously along the state road towards the community. The town has a population in the range of 13,000- 15,000 people. The community around Shiva is very active. The town has many stores, all of them occupied by customers as I drove by. The town's community is centered around a square where the courthouse for the county lies. There is a prominent statue in the town honoring a former president who lived in the community and began his political career there over a hundred years ago, suggesting that the town takes immense pride in its history. Displayed prominently in the square is another historical marker indicating that the town was the capital of a proposed State, an attempt to join the Union instead of the Confederacy in 1861. The marker details the strong abolitionist and Unionist views of the town's residents at the time and is decorated with fresh flowers and American flags.

Multiple manufacturing facilities employ most of the towns' residents that lie within or just outside the city limits. There are churches of different denominations that line the roads in

the community and a small liberal arts. Christian college is located within the city limits. In addition to the small liberal arts college, there is an extension site for a local community college. Most homes around the city appear to be single-family with older homes located in the historical district with newer construction on the edge of town. Multiple parks are available throughout the city, and they appear in good working condition.

The local high school is a part of the city school system and is separated from the county system. As a result, Shiva operates in a system of only six schools with Shiva, the only high school. Serving the community for over 100 years, the school is newly renovated and modern, a stark juxtaposition to its surroundings that are comprised of pre-Civil War mansions and churches all accessible via sidewalk lit by gas lamps. Shiva High School is an imposing structure because it is also connected to a performing arts center used for the city, but the school is aesthetically pleasing as a result of its new construction and professional landscaping. To enter the building, a visitor must buzz-in via intercom to the front office. Once inside, the visitor has identification checked and a specially made identification sticker made with the visitor's picture on it. The inside of the school is just as aesthetically pleasing as the outside with banners that decorate the main entrance, a mission statement painted in bold letters on the entrance, and student portraits hanging on a wall outside the front office. From the entrance of the school, there are three main hallways that run in opposite directions where academic courses are offered. Vocational courses are offered at Shiva High School but are off campus, and students require school transportation to take them to the site every day. Students frequented the hallways with little supervision and seemingly walked freely around the school.

Student Demographics and Academic Progress

At the time of this study, Shiva High School served a student body of 750-850 students, 82-83% were white, 10-12% were African-American, 5-7% were Hispanic and 1-2% were Native American or Asian. The student body consisted of 40-45% economically disadvantaged, less than 2% were non-US citizens, and 2-3%, according to the principal, identified as being LGBTQ.

The school had a graduation rate of 97% with an average ACT score of 19. During the 2016-2017 school year, the state assigned scores on a scale of 1-5 to schools throughout the state as indicators of academic progress based on state assessments. The state measurement data are available for schools concerned student growth in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In calculating the scores, a students' performance was compared to the scores of his or her peers who performed similarly on past assessments. If students met expectations or grew academically at the same rate as their peers across the state, the school would earn a level 3. If students produced scores above expectations, the district would earn a level 4 or 5, depending on the amount of progress made by students. If students did not meet expectations, the school would earn a level 1 or 2. Shiva High School was given a 5 out of 5 for their literacy and numeracy scores. As a result, the composite of the literacy and numeracy scores was a 5 out of 5, which indicated exceptional academic growth for students during the 2016-2017 school year.

The Principal

The principal of Shiva High School, Han (pseudonym), has been in his current position for six years. He has a total of 26 years in education and 17 years of administrative experience. Han does not live in the same community where Shiva High School is located but commutes

about 25-30 miles to work every day. He grew up in the same state where his school is located, attended a rural school when he was younger, and always knew he wanted to be a part of education. He inherited a successful school but has made a considerable effort in trying to provide more opportunities to the students of Shiva. His positive relationships with staff and students are obvious as he constantly stopped to talk with them about their personal lives and success at Shiva.

Research Question 1: What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students?

This section will examine the data collected for Research Question 1: What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students? Data for this question were collected from an in-person principal interview, an observation that consisted of shadowing the principal in his daily administrative duties, and artifacts that were both provided by Shiva High School or obtained through the public website.

Practices: Han

Pedagogy. Han's practice of ending pullout programs was one strategy that helped ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. Han eliminated pullout programs by creating mandatory morning and evening tutoring classes for students who were struggling academically. The tutoring sessions were created specifically by Han to target the students who often "fall through the cracks," and was one practice he used to create positive student outcomes. In addition, Han emphasized the importance of Tier-One instruction in every classroom as a way to end pullout programs, and while Shiva did provide some intervention programs for students who

struggled academically, Han insisted that the students had to stay in regular education classes with intervention as supplemental to their educational experience:

We have things that we do for our kids who are struggling. You know certainly through intervention and counseling and that kind of thing, but the best way you can affect the whole population is how good your base instruction is in subject areas.

Similar to Luke, Han made clear that as a rural school, financial resources were a barrier to ensuring equitable opportunities. Therefore, the only way to help create positive student outcomes for all students including those who are marginalized is through base instruction: “Base instruction must be the key to helping students in rural schools because of financial inequity.” Base instruction was certainly an emphasis for Han, but so was ensuring marginalized students the same educational experiences as their peers. Last year, Shiva received an Advanced Placement award from the College Board for raising participation rates for underserved student populations. Han was proud of this award, and posters about the award were in several different areas of the school.

When Han became principal, he became convinced that the CTE program had an image problem and he was determined to change it:

When I came here there was a negative perception of those courses, and I took that on, owned it, and said to myself that this was going to be better by the time I left here. We’ve done a whole lot of work in that area.

Specifically, Han recognized his staff’s negative perception of the school’s CTE programs which affected how students perceived the program. He set out to use his practices to change that perception. This negative perception was a problem because the CTE program at

Shiva was comprised mostly of marginalized students. According to Han, before he became principal, the program was one where the “other” kids were sent, and academically successful students avoided the program. Even parents perceived the program as bad for their children and despite knowing that some of the classes “would be good for my kid,” overall parents requested that their kids not take the courses because they didn’t “want my kid being around those kids.” Han believed that parents’ perceptions about the program were wrong, and “to be honest the thought process behind it [their motivations] was really sad.” Therefore, Han used the practice of providing professional development sessions for his staff to help educate them about the opportunities the CTE program afforded marginalized students:

Our folks have really done some professional development around understanding of what job opportunities and things like that are here in the community [for marginalized students]. We have divided up our staff into teams and took them to surrounding industries and did tours and then the next year for our professional development we broke the staff up into teams again for a scavenger hunt around town to different places that the kids could have opportunities like for the National Guard.

According to Han, because of his efforts using professional development, the staff’s perception of the CTE program slowly changed, and Han was proud to report that the CTE department had an increased enrollment by 20% in the last two years.

Another effective pedagogical practice of Han that helped ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students was his insistence on increasing post-secondary opportunities for all students as a priority goal at Shiva: “We started taking some trips to college campuses for them [students] to see what that’s like. We’re taking trips to the [local technology

center] for those students to understand what career opportunities that are out there.” Han supplemented the college trips with the requirement that every classroom display the post-secondary opportunities that were directly related to that subject’s content. Han believed posted signs about post-secondary opportunities was a way for students to make the connection between the classroom and the opportunities that would be presented to them after graduation. By linking the college visits with the classroom, Han believed that his efforts effectively communicated to students and staff why student success in the classroom was important to their future.

Finally, Han believed his pedagogical practice with the creation of academic supports helped ensure equity for all students. As a part of the school schedule, Han implemented what he called “Academic Activity Periods” to provide time every day for struggling students to get the extra help they needed. Han did this while providing mandatory tutoring for students before and after school as well. Han created the “[City name] Promise” program as well to target marginalized students which tracked student academic progress from 8th grade until graduation. On 8th grade nights in the Spring every year, Han met with every incoming Freshman individually to talk about their goals and what they wanted to accomplish at Shiva. This resulted in personal meetings with over 150 students on 8th grade nights, and once they spoke, Han asked the students to sign a banner that had “[City name] promise in big letters. This served as a commitment to fulfill their goals and to ultimately graduate. Han believed that “[City name] Promise” was an effective way to make sure kids were on track and fulfilled the promises they had made to him, the school, and to themselves before they started high school.

Professional development. Han used professional development as a practice to advance relationships among his staff to help ensure positive student outcomes and opportunities for marginalized students. Han specifically designed professional development for his staff that centered on creating more positive relationships with students:

So this year professional development was about relationship building with kids so we are striving hard to make sure that folks understand that the number one way we can affect change in these kids is for someone to be a good positive role model for them. But not just role model but someone that they could develop a positive relationship with because that increases academic performance and outcomes for marginalized students more than anything else in my opinion.

Han provided professional development to teachers that gave them autonomy, while also providing them with resources to help marginalized students and involve them in more activities of the school. Han called it “DIY PD BINGO.” The document, provided to me by Han, was a sheet of paper that looked like a bingo card, in that, there were five columns across and five rows down all filled with professional development activities. To meet their requirements from the district, a teacher had to have bingo, or 5 across, up and down, or diagonally, by the end of the year. Please refer to the “DIY PD BINGO” card in Appendix.....Some of the choices provided were, “Eat lunch in the cafeteria with students and write a reflection,” “write and send a positive note to a student or parent,,” and “sponsor a club and write a reflection about your experience.” Han believed “DIY PD BINGO,” providing professional development that educated teachers and staff on the importance of increasing opportunities and developing positive relationships and supplemented that instruction with activities that got staff more involved with the student body.

As a result, Han believed he effectively promoted the relationships that he wanted and knew would help create more positive student outcomes among marginalized student populations.

As a portion of the professional development offerings at Shiva, Han used the practice of encouragement to compel teachers to make school visits. Initially, math teachers at Shiva went to other schools in the state and brought back strategies to help ensure greater opportunities and academic success for students. According to Han, as the Math department experienced success by raising the academic achievement of their students, including marginalized students, other departments began taking trips as well. Han spoke very positively about the momentum those school visits had created in improving academics at Shiva. Han credited his practice of providing equity focused professional development offerings as essential to aid in the improvement of opportunities available to marginalized students at Shiva. As a result, Han spoke proudly about how opportunities had greatly improved for marginalized students from AP courses to CTE programs.

Hiring staff and changing curriculum. Han believed one of his most important leadership practices was hiring quality teachers, especially in terms of ensuring equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students and creating more positive outcomes for them:

You know certainly through special and through intervention counseling and that kind of thing [for students] but the best way you can affect the marginalized population is how good your base instruction is in subject areas, and you get that by hiring quality people. I did inherit some good people, but in my time here we've had to full 40% of our staff positions.

Han insisted that “hiring quality people” was essential to improving student outcomes for all students but especially those from marginalized populations. As a result of his hiring practices, Han believed that the school was immensely better at providing opportunities to marginalized students and improving the core learning context. He emphasized that the way he hired people initiated change:

We are looking for people who will make our school better, not just keep it the same. We tell candidates from the beginning. We’re not going to hire people to be just as good. We’re always looking to get somebody who’s got more innovative ways of thinking. More things that they’re doing to integrate technology and things like that to increase student engagement, especially for our marginalized students.

Han admitted that Shiva had an advantage in recruiting teachers because Shiva had better financial resources than surrounding schools: “We’re very fortunate being in this system that we’re funded a little better, so we can pull people from other schools that we know are doing a good job because we pay a little better.” Also, Han did not just have one assistant but many staff members that could help him raise student achievement: “I have two assistant principals which for a school this size is pretty good. We also have three guidance counselors and a fourth one who works just for crisis intervention kind of thing.” Because Shiva had displayed a strong record of academic achievement, the district played mainly a “support role” and gave Han autonomy to make decisions regarding student achievement. As a result, Han implemented many different supports throughout the school to ensure that all students experienced academic success. For example, Han had the autonomy to move teachers around and create positions to help produce more positive student outcomes for all:

Case in point, two years ago I had a teacher who was working with a group of students doing our graduation access program, which is the kind of kids who come to us low on credits and get close to turning 18 and we put them in a fast track program where they're doing credit on the computer and being able to get caught up and graduate with their peers. We have two teachers doing that program who work to the point and have worked on the other end of keeping our students that we had for four years from getting into that population, a population that consists of many marginalized students by the way. So, that population started to shrink, and we were able to take one of those teachers who is also certified and transfer her into guidance office and pull one of our guidance counselors out and make him just an intervention counselor. That was a decision I was able to make here.

Another practice Han used to help ensure equitable opportunities was to improve the curriculum at Shiva. Through his hiring practices, Han hired some effective teachers who could implement Tier-One instruction in the classroom. Han saw this as crucial to engaging all students, including those from marginalized populations, and helping them learn the academic content:

High quality Tier-One instruction [most effective practice used daily that affects student outcomes for marginalized students]. I have the best group of teachers that I've ever been around that do a really good job of just the day-to-day presenting of content that is engaging to students and it truly works. You know when you look at a three-tiered model intervention and that kind of thing, tier one instruction is what you do for everybody, especially marginalized students.

In addition, Han designed multiple interventions to help students as well, including specific intervention classes built into the school day to help aid student success, but in the end, Han admitted that ultimately the best thing he could do for marginalized students was to hire effective teachers, because that was that “best way you can affect the marginalized population.”

Cooperation with district. Han asserted that his good, cooperative relationship with the district and community was a practice that helped Shiva ensure equity for all students. When he first became principal, Han did a comprehensive review of the academic and vocational offerings at Shiva. After review, Han knew he needed to increase opportunities across the board. The CTE program numbers were down, and Han suspected that it was because the center was off campus and many marginalized students did not have their transportation to get there in conjunction with negative staff and community perceptions. Working with the district, he expanded the CTE programs by adding more equitable transportation to the equation, specifically purchasing two additional buses and hiring two drivers so that students would be able to access the vocational programs more equitably. As a result, the CTE programs experienced a 20% increase in student enrollment, many of them marginalized students. Han was also concerned with the number of students, especially marginalized students, who did not enroll in dual enrollment and AP courses. For the 2012-2013 school year, Han noted that there were 102 dual enrollment students and 132 AP students. Through encouragement from him, the administration, and teachers, and financial resources provided by the district, by the 2017-2018 school year there were 293 students who took dual enrollment courses and 212 who took AP courses, including an increase of 20% of students from underserved populations.

Han believed that his practice of cooperation with the district had positive effects on students at Shiva. Han credited the district for helping him raise student achievement by providing Shiva with resources. For example, Shiva had a program called Graduation Access Program (GAP) that they tied into the state's work ethic diploma that counts not just credits towards earning a high school diploma but also character points. After reviewing the GAP documents, Han needed the program as a way to provide additional opportunities to Shiva's student. A student in the GAP program could earn credit for taking CTE courses, but also for positive character traits; for example, never being tardy to class or not having any discipline referrals for the year. Han gave credit to the district for their support of GAP because it helped to directly address the achievement of marginalized students at Shiva. Most of the students who were a part of the GAP program were marginalized, and these students would have most likely "fallen through the cracks" had the district and Han not started the GAP program.

The district financially helped Han in other areas to address the student achievement of marginalized students as well. The English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom had more technology than any other classroom at Shiva. The district helped Han start a business marketing store that sold school merchandise to students, faculty, and citizens of the community. Students, including students of color, were observed working at the store as a part of their business marketing class. AnalyzeEd, a program designed to help students increase their ACT scores, was available for all students for \$15 per student thanks to the district's willingness to sponsor the academic software. The district provided Han with over \$40,000 a year to help provide tutoring before and after school. Finally, per Han's request, the district provided Shiva with an instructional specialist to help teachers more effectively deliver academic content and better

promote positive student outcomes, while providing mandatory district professional development to improve the core teaching of Shiva's teachers.

School culture. Han's practices of creating and nurturing an inclusive environment helped to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. Han scheduled high level classes like Advanced Placement to eat in the cafeteria at the same time as lower performing Freshman classes, many of which taken by marginalized students. When asked why he did that, Han responded that "relationships are key to the success of all students but especially those who are marginalized, and I want them to see what good behavior looks like and be around those kids."

In addition, Han used signs throughout the school to communicate encouragement to the student body. The front office, hallways, gym, and cafeteria all had signs with messages that encouraged students to do their best. Han's practice of communication in the hallways, however, illustrated his ability to authentically connect with staff and students. He frequently spoke with students and staff in the hallways and referred to them by their first name. He spoke to them about professional subjects but also personal ones displaying happiness for their successes and concern for their missteps. He had an open-door policy to his office, and teachers frequently stopped by to discuss Han's thoughts on a project, student, or extracurricular activity. Signs in the front office like "Everyone in the building is a teacher" effectively communicated to everyone at Shiva Han's expectations. When speaking to a representative from the Department of Child Services (DCS), Han said "let me know if there is anything I can do to help [student]," and he took down the student's address to personally visit them at a later date. Finally, Han received news that a special education student had received enough votes to be included in the

homecoming court. Han immediately went to the lunchroom to find the student and then led the cafeteria in applause for her as she wept. Han also told the student that he intended to buy her homecoming dress for her.

Han's leadership practices emphasized the importance of inclusion of all students from his first day as principal. Han understood the need for a new perception of the CTE programs based on his experiences speaking with parents and staff. He saw changing the culture around CTE as paramount to advancing inclusion and opportunities to marginalized students: "Providing those students [marginalized] and making sure that the students have opportunities through the career tech center and doing relevant programs was and is very important to me." Improving the perception of the CTE program was not enough for Han, however, because he also wanted to create new opportunities for marginalized students in the CTE programs, so they could have a better chance of success after graduating from Shiva:

We've gotten to the point now where we are running buses down to the tech center two times a day and in both semesters. I've got over 40 students going every day, many of them marginalized. We've added a lot of computer science type things like pre-engineering programs, and industrial electricity was added because it is huge in our community because of the influence of manufacturing. That kind of thing like welding has always been big because a lot of our industries around here need those people. So, we're trying to get more our kids in that pipeline.

As a result of Han's concerted effort, enrollment was up in Shiva's CTE programs:

We have really made a concerted effort since I've been here to make sure that we're serving that lower end of the population with good relative skills. The kids who are just

going to leave here and go to work or go to the [technology vocational center] to learn a trade that kind of thing have increased quite a bit over seven years. In the seven years I've been here we've increased our enrollment in our technology center and CTE courses by 20%, most of them marginalized students. We've tried to make sure that those kids understand that that's not where everybody else goes but that's it's important too.

Reaching out to marginalized families and the community was another practice by Han to improve social justice at Shiva. By reaching out to the community, Han made new connections that previously had not been active and provided a bridge to the community from the school that helped establish a positive culture for all students. When Han became principal of Shiva he started "Senior Legacy Day." Working with the community, Shiva sends Seniors once every year into the community and at local churches or non-profits to help in any aid they may need. The community really "rallies behind and sponsors that event", and Han conveys the importance of the event to students by telling them why "what they are doing matters." In addition, as a result of a community-school sponsorship, Shiva hosts a "Community Awareness Night" each semester. Shiva hosts members of the community to view student work and the community attends the event well each year. Han asserted that the event was good because it "raised awareness about the accomplishments of students [marginalized] throughout the building, not just some." Han also hosted an 8th-grade night at Shiva every Spring, where he invited all incoming freshmen to the high school so he could set up a "6-year plan" for each of them. Han insisted that Shiva should prepare students for the two years after high school as well. Han firmly believed that "Senior Legacy Day," "Community Awareness Day," and 8th-grade night, helped to

build the positive relationships at school and within the community that were important for student success, especially the “students who need the most support.”

Han believed his good relationship with the surrounding community was one practice that helped Shiva have an inclusive school culture and aided his efforts to ensure equitable opportunities to marginalized students. Han solicited the help of the community to help students feel that they belonged at Shiva:

We have all kinds of community organizations that help students in need, and I think that really helps us produce a positive school culture and helps students know that they belong here. We’ve got four or five kids right now that are staying in a home provided by the community for impoverished students. And there are all kinds of different situations and local churches often step up to provide an opportunity to people.

Han gave credit to the community for influencing the inclusive culture at Shiva through their attitudes as well, especially regarding marginalized students who had sexual orientations that differed from others:

We’ve not had anything about that here [outrage of LGBTQ clubs]. This is a morally conservative community, but they are pretty tolerant. We’ve had some students in the seven years I’ve been here who were transgendered and dress completely in the opposite dress and those students were never harassed to my knowledge by anyone. We have 4-5 students in our choir who cross-dress and there has never been any outrage from the community about it.

Han asserted, however, that the students of Shiva helped him tremendously to create an inclusive culture. For example, in the cafeteria, there was no real voluntary segregation based on

race. All students ate together and gave a standing ovation when Han told them that a special education student had been selected to the homecoming court. Students created the Gay-Straight Alliance at Shiva, called GenYes, and advertised the club's meeting around the school and on the website. Han facilitated the creation of the GenYes club by allowing meetings during the academic activity periods for those students who were passing their classes and were not referred by their teachers for academic tutoring. Students and teachers spoke freely in the hall in a jovial manner alongside posters depicting students of all backgrounds at Shiva participating in academics, athletics, or volunteer work. Marginalized student pictures were displayed alongside their artwork at the front entrance of the school. According to Han, student tolerance was high which facilitated a climate of belonging: "They really are [students being tolerant]. We have lots of biracial relationships. Our school just seems to be pretty tolerant, and we don't have much backlash." When Han served students, many of them students of poverty, breakfast on Thursday morning, teachers and students volunteered to help without being asked: "We are trying to do things all the time for those kids to understand that they're included and they're special and that they matter."

Empowering teachers. Han's practice of empowering staff helped to create a community of cooperation and positively influenced the inclusive environment Han wished to nurture at Shiva. Han's practice of providing professional development sessions on equity and positive relationships was central to Han's efforts to make Shiva more socially just, and his assistant principals presented content to staff on what they learned at the Governor's Academy on School Leadership:

I would like to think my administrators can have those [positive] relationships as well. I am very fortunate to have two assistant principals who have gone to the Governor's Academy for School Leadership which had a huge effect on their leadership practices, but they have also brought a lot of that knowledge back in the form of professional development sessions for staff, which creates strong leaders down the road for the school. I try to empower them to be able to do that.

By involving his assistant principals in the professional development concerning positive relationships with students, Han believed he effectively presented a "united front" to the staff about creating positive relationships with students, while also facilitating a social justice awareness and expansion of the knowledge base about social justice among other leaders and staff of the school.

Han also empowered teachers at Shiva by helping to address the needs of marginalized students. One way Han empowered his teachers was by respecting their ideas, which he implemented for students. For example, Thursday mornings at Shiva are late start days so teachers have the opportunity for professional learning communities. School starts about 30 minutes later, but the buses still bring students to school for the regular start time resulting in many students sitting in the cafeteria for 30 minutes before school begins. Some teachers approached Han concerned that many of those students in the cafeteria, most students of poverty, did not have breakfast available for them. Han embraced the idea and even volunteered to help serve the students on Thursday morning himself:

This morning [Thursday] thanks to the idea of a teacher, since we have a late start on Thursday mornings (usually starts at 7:40; late start at 8:10), we served breakfast to the

kids who were already here and had to wait around for 30 minutes. We have teacher collaborative meetings during that time, but we also have students, many of whom are marginalized, who have to sit in the cafeteria because they rode a bus. So, a teacher had the idea of serving them a good breakfast on Thursday mornings. So, I and a few other teachers did that this morning by making pancakes for the kids.

On the day of the observation, the state governor was visiting Han's school for a community meeting addressing student academic progress. The scheduled meeting with the governor, however, had no effect on Han meeting with those teachers to serve students breakfast that Thursday morning.

Han helped empower his teachers by taking their idea of Thursday morning breakfast and implementing it, but he did the same with other ideas that originated with teachers as well. For example, teachers at the school were concerned that students did not have the necessary clothes to keep warm in the winter. They came to Han and asked if they could start a "clothes closet" at the school that would distribute warm clothes to students who needed it:

Our teachers carry out information into the community. We have something here called the clothes closet and folks in the community are always bringing stuff to help take care of student needs and keep it stocked up.

Teachers at Shiva were also concerned about students, especially those in poverty, not getting presents for Christmas. Working with Han, "every Christmas our teachers will raise money to give Christmas to 30-40 kids, and people in the community contribute as well."

Data analysis revealed that Han was responsible for the myriad equitable changes that had occurred at Shiva through his leadership practices, but he insisted that the equitable changes

that had occurred only happened because everyone had bought in and effectively changed the school culture. He credited the school with raising the CTE enrollment 20%, not himself. He praised his AP teachers for making their classes more accessible to underserved student populations, not his leadership practice or the professional development he had provided that had encouraged them to do so. He commended the district for making transportation more equitable for students and increasing the accessibility of Shiva's CTE department for marginalized students, not his suggestions to the superintendent to do so. While it was clear that Han was the driver of most of these socially just practices Shiva had adopted during his tenure as principal, he refused to take any credit for them.

Matched Pair 2- Tanis High School and Ra High School

Tanis High School

Tanis High School is the third of four schools in this study, and the first school of matched pair 2. Tanis High School is a two-mile drive down a four-lane state highway from the interstate. Tanis is surrounded by the community with many big box stores, and small family-owned businesses. The town has a population in the range of 7,000-9,000 people. The community surrounding Tanis is bisected by two major interstates. While manufacturing in the city exists, most citizens of the town work in a nearby metropolitan area. The town is set up in a grid pattern relating to its founding in the 1880s as a social "utopia," where towns were planned not for efficiency, but citizen enjoyment. There are parks in public places with many surrounded by churches. The town itself is expansive and runs along the state road to the interstate. There is no town center, but instead, long shopping centers on each side of the state road. There is a small extension site for a community college in the town, and many homes appear to be in the same

area. Most homes appear to be single-family, with some older ones mixed in with newer construction.

The local high school is a part of a city school system and separated from the county system. As a result, Tanis operates in a system with only three schools and Tanis as the only high school. The city school system was organized over 100 years ago, and the school is newly renovated in parts and older in others. The building is not continuous, as a result of the system adding on buildings over the years. Tanis High School is not an aesthetically impressive building on the outside. The building appears worn, and there are water drainage spots on the side of the building from overflowing gutters. Trash is prominent on school grounds, in the parking lot, and student meeting areas outside the building. Once inside, the building is more modern than the perception from the outside appearance. There is a receptionist at a front desk that checks visitors in to make sure they have an appointment. Once inside, some banners hang commemorating school successes in athletics, fine arts, and academics. There are pictures of students, including alumni, that line the hallways specifying their achievements in and out of Tanis High School. From the entrance of the school, two main hallways run parallel to one another towards the cafeteria. The hallways are lined with classrooms throughout and extend to the back of the school where the vocational and fine arts courses are offered. Mathematics and English courses are upstairs along with the library. Students and staff were supervised in the hallways and were not allowed outside of certain areas during certain periods of the school day.

Student Demographics and Academic Progress

At the time of this study, Tanis High School served a student body of 1,050-1,150 students, 80-82% were white, 1-2% were African-American, 14-16% were Hispanic, and 1%

were Native American or Asian. The student body consisted of 30-40% economically disadvantaged, 10-12% were non-US citizens, and 1%, according to the principal, identified as being LGBTQ.

The school has a graduation rate of 92% with an average ACT score of with an average ACT score of 20. During the 2016-2017 school year, the state assigned scores on a scale of 1-5 to schools throughout the state as indicators of academic progress based on state assessments. The state measurement data are available for schools concerned student growth in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In calculating the scores, a students' performance was compared to the scores of his or her peers who performed similarly on past assessments. If students met expectations or grew academically at the same rate as their peers across the state, the school would earn a level 3. If students produced scores above expectations, the district would earn a level 4 or 5, depending on the amount of progress made by students. If students did not meet expectations, the school would earn a level 1 or 2. Tanis High School was given a 5 out of 5 for their literacy and numeracy scores. As a result, the composite of the literacy and numeracy scores was a 5 out of 5, which indicated exceptional academic growth for students during the 2016-2017 school year.

The Principal

The principal at Tanis High School has been in his current position for five years. He has a total of 24 years of experience in education and 20 years of administrative experience and lives in the same community as Tanis High School. He grew up in the same state and also attended a rural school when he was younger where he developed a love for education. He was a teacher for four years before he was appointed to administration and inherited a moderately successful

school. Through his efforts, Tanis has improved across the board, especially in providing opportunities to students. He is not as personable in the hallways with students or staff as other principals included in this study, but he does engage in personal conversations about topics that are important to staff and students. Students and staff have respect for him as they almost uniformly refer to him as sir in professional and personal conversations. For the purpose of this study, the principal of Tanis High School will be henceforth referred to as Lando.

Research Question 1: What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students?

This section will examine the data collected for Research Question 1: What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students? Data for this question were collected from an in-person principal interview, an observation that consisted of shadowing the principal in his daily administrative duties, and artifacts that were both provided by Tanis High School or obtained through their public website. Open coding was used for data analysis concerning matched-pair two as it was for matched-pair 1.

Practices: Lando

Pedagogy. Lando's practice of ending pullout programs was one way he worked to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. Lando emphasized the use of Tier-One instruction as essential to ending the pullout programs along with the district's help:

Tier One instruction is an overarching district and school goal. Some of the goals that we have here are school related to how we are going to offer Tier-One instruction and

intervene at that level here at our school. Our main goal, of course, is to offer quality instruction to every student at [Tanis] High School.

Lando ended pullout programs at Tanis, but he still needed to academically support the students who required extra attention in core subjects like English and Math. Therefore, Lando built into the school schedule every day an “Academic Support Block” (ASB). ASB is a class that runs every day at Tanis for 50 minutes before lunch. The purpose of ASB is so that all students can benefit academically. ASB is an intervention tool to help struggling students in core academic classes to prevent pullout programs. Lando believed the ASB helped meet the needs of marginalized students: “I think our ASB [intervention] class every day helps provide prescriptive intervention for [marginalized] students and probably does more to help them [marginalized students] than anything because again it’s prescriptive.” Lando believed ABS worked well for students at Tanis, but some pullout programs existed at Tanis. There were subject area hallways throughout Tanis. The more challenging academic classes, like AP or dual enrollment, were offered towards the back of the hallways, while the basic courses were in the front portion of the hallways. As a result, academically successful students were away from the other students, and somewhat segregated, according to academic level. Many marginalized students were observed entering the basic level academic courses in comparison to the more academically advanced courses towards the back of the hallway. Also, special education classrooms were in an entirely different part of the building from other classrooms and were provided private bathrooms. Consequently, there was never a reason for a special education student to leave that part of the building nor for a student in another part of Tanis High School to come into that area.

Lando's practice of expanding educational opportunities to students was one way Lando tried to ensure equity for students at Tanis. When Lando took over Tanis, the building needed updated technology and the CTE, AP, and dual enrollment offerings were minimal. To address the issue, Lando wrote a grant proposal that was selected for \$250,000. The money was used to update technology throughout the building, offer student 1:1 for electronic devices, and start a mechatronics class. Lando used technology to help teachers in the classroom, but to also give students at Tanis, specifically marginalized students, the same opportunities as others:

The city school's poverty rate is much higher than at the elementary and the middle school from the county. So, because of that, we knew that a lot of our kids who didn't have access to a device other than a phone and possibly in some cases Wi-Fi. So that was a huge reason when we started talking about 1:1, and that drove the grant that we wrote for the technology center. We use a part of our regular budget and some grants to try and improve technology here at the school. Right now, we have a lot of low SES students to consider, including ELL students, and we want those students to have access to technology so that all opportunities are available.

In addition to Lando's practice to increase opportunities through technology, one goal of Lando's administration team was to increase participation in the ACT so that students would be college ready once they graduated from Tanis. ACT goals were posted publicly in every hallway, alongside posters emphasizing the importance of increasing the number of students who took the ACT. These posters were displayed in every classroom observed. Lando was also proud of the AP College Board award that Tanis had received in 2016-2017 for expanding opportunity to underserved student populations.

Modeling and high expectation. Lando believed that positive teacher-student relationships were one of the most effective ways to ensure equity to students at Tanis. The practice of promoting positive teacher-student relationships started with Lando. He modeled for his teachers the relationships he wished for them to have as well:

I get to know my students. I talk to them a lot on a daily basis particularly those that you identify as struggling for whatever reason, whether it's a student who falls into the categories you are talking about today or otherwise, I ask about what's going on in their life and we get to know one another. If nothing else just saying "Hey" to a kid may be exactly what they need. I'm not necessarily going to counsel them about it, but I do want them to know someone here cares about them. It's about creating positive relationships.

For Lando, creating positive student outcomes started with having positive relationships with every student regardless of their background:

We really emphasize forming positive relationships with kids, and I don't care if you're a different ethnicity, race, low SES, whatever. If you're just an average Joe living here in town from a middle-class household, I expect positive relationships with him in much the same way as anyone else at this school.

In addition to the practice of modeling positive relationships, Lando asserted that high expectations were another practice he used that helped ensure educational opportunities to all students. Lando believed his practice of high expectations pushed the curriculum of Tanis High School to get better at ensuring positive student outcomes for all. Having high expectations was a practice that Lando believed affected the opportunities of marginalized students the most. Lando

emphasized that it used to be hard to implement high expectations before state testing, but with the implementation of state testing, higher expectations had to become the norm:

It has to be that way [expectations must be high]. Twenty years ago things were so much different, but we have state testing now, and that has changed everything. You know, that hasn't been such a bad thing either, especially for marginalized students.

As a result of standards and state testing, Lando could push high expectations across the board for every student because the “state expects more than just knowledge on a basic level, but instead, students now have to explain their thinking and write it out.” Lando admitted that the state testing made higher expectations essential in the classroom, but it did make it “harder on the kids and teachers.” To meet the standards, however, “expectations across the board have to be higher from a school level,” and Lando believed that this helped create “more opportunity,” for marginalized students than almost anything else at Tanis. High expectations were visible throughout Tanis. There were posters of students who performed well on the ACT lining the halls alongside ACT goals that were displayed publicly almost everywhere in the school.

Cooperation with district. Luke believed his practice of cooperation with the district was essential in his efforts to ensure equity for all students. Lando had a good relationship with the district because “we are the only high school” and the “central office is pretty involved” including in discussions about ensuring opportunities for marginalized students:

We meet regularly, I'd say, at least twice a month, and there they've brought in a couple of people from the state this year to really help us dig into our data and to talk about what we need to do to get better at providing more opportunities for marginalized students.

Lando had a cooperative relationship with the district and collaborated with the district about professional development offerings at Tanis High School. Working with the district, Lando provided “important poverty training” with the goal of expanding the social justice knowledge base and changing teachers’ perception about students of poverty and what opportunities the CTE program could provide students. Lando believed that the training facilitated more positive student-teacher relationships:

It’s about how you treat those [marginalized] kids and how you respond to them and what you want them to do. How you motivate them, how you establish relationships with them and there are techniques that go along with that. So, we’ve been training in ACES (adverse childhood experiences) and in poverty training about how to properly interact with those students to create the relationships they need.

Lando worked with his district to address the achievement of marginalized students specifically: “They [district] worked with us towards trying to provide interment intervention strategies for “that” population.” The creation of ASB was an idea conceived to address the educational needs of marginalized students, and Lando expressed satisfaction in the program for helping raise the academic achievement of marginalized students since its implementation. Like the creation of ASB, Lando collaboratively addressed marginalized student achievement with his administration team as well:

We look at our sub-groups very closely and try to make sure we are helping them. There will always be gaps depending on which subgroup you look at, but we do everything we can to try and close those gaps.

Lando was also successful in getting his district to approve a new CTE building with over 20 different course offerings. The multi-million-dollar complex featured the latest technology equipment for drafting, a 3-D printer lab, and a fully functional replica of an ambulance. Over 92% of students at Tanis took a CTE course in the 2017-2018 school year.

School culture. Lando understood the importance of a positive school culture for ensuring equity, and he used a democratic process to ensure that all staff was “a part of the effort”: “We want to make sure that every student has every opportunity that any other student may have regardless of SES, race, or whatever your identity may be.” The technology grant received by Tanis was a group effort. The implementation of the ASB was led by a committee of multiple staff members to ensure the process went as smoothly as possible. Administration sat together in the cafeteria for lunch to discuss issues that concerned the school and how to address them collaboratively. By having many staff members engaging in leadership decisions, Lando believed he empowered them and was able to more effectively provide positive relationships to students to create the positive school culture he wanted:

We stress positive relationships with kids for them to be successful, so those are key. I can confidently say that every employee in this building wants kids to be happy when they walk through the door. It’s a collaborative effort. It takes everyone pulling in the same direction for the kids to feel safe and happy when they are here. But it also helps create a sense of belonging when they come to school.

Lando acknowledged that “there has to be a lot of listening in this position” to be successful, especially if you wish to disrupt the status quo. By performing leadership in a democratic manner “everyone now knows that they are a part of the change, and that keeps the

process of providing a better education moving forward for everyone, especially marginalized students.”

Lando’s leadership practices emphasized the importance of inclusion of all students. Lando believed that his emphasis on positive teacher-student relationships helped create a more inclusive environment at Tanis High School:

Promoting it [positive teacher-student relationships} with my staff and helping them recognize the importance of that and really preaching that to people. Interactions with the kid’s parents when we can get them in the school. We want this to be a welcoming environment, and that is facilitated through positive teacher-student relationships...I think the thing that maybe promotes educational opportunities for all student more than anything is that we just do not acknowledge where you are from, what you look like, what you believe, and what your sexual orientation is because ultimately our job is to educate everyone. I try to make it apparent to teachers that those things do not matter here because we are going to have high expectations and try to help every single student and that starts with positive relationships.

Lando believed that the practice of creating positive relationships is “where we start,” to create an inclusive culture because, without positive relationships with students, teachers are “already beaten before a textbook is ever opened.” Lando credited his teachers for making the process of forming positive relationships easy because “values are important here from top to bottom,” specifically treating others the way you would like to be treated. Indeed, when walking around Tanis High School, positive student-teacher relationships were observed. Student and teachers talk in the hallways about classroom projects, upcoming assignments, or personal topics

and teachers were observed eating lunch with students in the cafeteria. Also, there were over 20 different academic and extracurricular clubs offered at the school which was possible because of teachers who helped sponsor them.

Lando believed that his practices helped create more opportunities for marginalized students and advanced inclusion across the board, specifically in areas that were not academic. For example, Lando insisted that students be fed at the school, regardless of if they could pay or not:

We want to make sure our kids are fed for example. We provide breakfast in the morning and then a second breakfast between first and second block for kids who miss breakfast in the morning. We do things like that for marginalized kids who can't afford it.

Also, the impetus of providing 1:1 devices for students was the fact that many students could not afford a computer on their own because "we have a lot of low SES students to consider, including ELL students" and many do not have access to technology at home.

Lando tried to promote a climate of belonging in several ways. He established a bullying hotline at school so that students, parents, or staff could place an anonymous call reporting bullying at Tanis. "From some feedback through surveys we found that it may be hard to speak out in public about a bullying situation," so Lando responded by creating the bullying hotline because "people are reluctant to step in or tell us, but they'll call the hotline and say you know I saw this happen today to my friend." Also, Lando believed that the creation of certain clubs at Tanis, like the Positive Peer Pressure Club and Diversity Club, helped create a positive climate as well:

I think the climate here is excellent and I think that those clubs [p3 club, diversity club] and things like the bullying hotline to a lesser degree is why. Those things play a part in why we have such a good climate here.

Ra High School

Ra High School is the fourth of four schools in this study and the second school of matched pair 2. Ra High School is a twelve-mile drive down a four-lane state highway from the interstate that eventually turns into a two-lane state road for the last three miles. To get to Ra High School, you must drive through the center of town that has a population of 5,000-6,000 people. The town itself is very small and invokes images of 1950s America with an ice cream shop and general store all open for business on the main street. Many businesses have several customers, and the courthouse of the county sits directly in the center of town. There are at least ten churches within view of the courthouse of various denominations, and there is a public park that appears well kept and in good working condition. The town is surrounded by older historic homes that appear to have been in the community for over 100 years. There are no colleges or extensions in town. The main areas of education are Ra High School and the other schools in the city that a part of the county school system. The schools are close together and surrounded by many single-family homes that appear new.

Ra High School is one of 11 schools that are part of the county education system. Nine of those schools are elementary, one is a middle school, and Ra is the only high school in the county system. The school is newly renovated in parts and older in others. The building is mostly continuous, which included sections for athletic events and vocational programs, but some of the school's vocational programs are in a different building across campus. Ra is impressive to look

at from the outside and gives an inviting aesthetic. The campus appears well kept, and there is no litter around the school or in the parking lot. The building is modern inside thanks to a new addition added last year. There is a commons area outside for students with picnic tables and an impressive hallway coming from the front entrance into the school lined with 20-foot windows. There is a massive school logo made from tiles on the floor with the school's name and their mascot, the [Indian name]. There are pictures of students, including alumni, that line the front entrance of the school and the hallways specifying their achievements in and out of Ra High School. From the front entrance of the school, there is one main hallway that runs the length of the school past the cafeteria and library directly to the football stadium. From that hallway are academic hallways that include classrooms for Math, English, Social Studies, and Foreign Languages, mainly Spanish. Students and staff walked freely around the hallways with supervision and were not allowed outside in the parking lot during the school day. To access the school building, I had to check in to the front office, have my picture taken, and display the tag at all times during my visit.

Student Demographics and Academic Progress

At the time of this study, Ra High School served a student body of 700-800 students, 74-75% were white, 4-6% were African-American, 19-21% were Hispanic, and 0-1% were Native American or Asian. The student body consisted of 55-65% economically disadvantaged, 7-10% were non-US citizens, and 1-2%, according to the principal, identified as being LGBTQ.

The school has a graduation rate of 94% with an average ACT score of 20. During the 2016-2017 school year, the state assigned scores on a scale of 1-5 to schools throughout the state as indicators of academic progress based on state assessments. The state measurement data are

available for schools concerned student growth in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In calculating the scores, a students' performance was compared to the scores of his or her peers who performed similarly on past assessments. If students met expectations or grew academically at the same rate as their peers across the state, the school would earn a level 3. If students produced scores above expectations, the district would earn a level 4 or 5, depending on the amount of progress made by students. If students did not meet expectations, the school would earn a level 1 or 2. Ra High School was given a 1 out of 5 for their literacy score and 3 out of 5 for their numeracy score. As a result, the composite of the literacy and numeracy scores was a 3 out of 5, which indicated expected academic growth for students during the 2016-2017 school year.

The Principal

The principal at Ra High School, Leia (pseudonym), has been in her current position for five years. She has a total of 35 years of experience in education, 29 years of administrative experience, and lives in the same community as Ra High School. She grew up in a different state and attended a suburban school when she was younger. She loves being a part of education and arrives at school every day at 6 AM and doesn't leave until 5 PM. Her office has two bookshelves full of educational books with notes that protrude from the top of them as they sit on the bookshelf. Before she became principal at Ra, she served as an assistant principal at Ra for almost a decade. She inherited an academically low performing school, but through her and the administration team's efforts, Ra had experienced more positive student outcomes, and students have more opportunities than ever before. She is very personable in the hallways referring to

students by their first names and joking with staff about events in and out of the school. For the purpose of this study, the principal of Ra High School will be henceforth referred to as Leia.

Research Question 1: What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students?

This section will examine the data collected for Research Question 1: What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students? Data for this question were collected from an in-person principal interview, an observation that consisted of shadowing the principal in his daily administrative duties, and artifacts that were both provided by Ra High School or obtained through their public website.

Practices: Leia

Pedagogy. One practice used by Leia to ensure equity for students was ending pullout programs. Leia was concerned about the number of students, especially English Language Learners, at Ra who were pulled from classes for intervention instruction. To end the pullout of these students, Leia implemented a new block scheduling system that included two additional blocks called skinny blocks. Skinny blocks were in the middle of the school day, from 11-12:35, and were comprised of two classes specifically to meet the academic needs of students. Students who were in courses where they were struggling to meet expectations were provided with peer and teacher tutoring to help them reach level. Leia credited the creation of the skinny blocks with improving the educational outcomes of marginalized students at Ra. The skinny blocks somewhat represented pullout programs because students were grouped based on academic performance, which led to some courses filled with predominantly students of color. There were other instances where pullout policies were still used at Ra High School as well. For example,

English Language Learner classrooms were in a different portion of the building away from academic hallways. Therefore, there was the possibility that ELL students would never mingle or interact with others at Ra because their classes were isolated from other classrooms. The special education classrooms also were isolated in small hallways away from other classrooms.

Leia implemented the “skinny” block system because she believed it would be effective in helping increase marginalized students’ academic achievement. When observing a “skinny” block, there were many Hispanic students present for math intervention. Leia conveyed that she struggled to help Ra’s Hispanic population because despite the “value they placed in education,” they “did not always have what they needed.” That included instruction in the classroom which was in English. Because many of the Hispanic students could only speak Spanish, Leia made efforts to ensure that they were getting the resources needed to understand the instruction and excel academically:

It’s tough sometimes [providing opportunities to marginalized students] because the language barrier, but you’re not supposed to be speaking Spanish to them, and they’re supposed to be learning English. It’s not the translation, but it is a problem in the classroom sometimes. They will have a teacher who does not speak Spanish, which isn’t a bad thing but hurts their ability to get an education. So, they will pair them up with a peer that’s strong in certain areas, and I think that’s been really helpful to their academic success.

To help supplement instruction in the classroom, Leia offered Saturday school, where students could receive additional instruction in English and math: “There are about 25 kids every Saturday that take advantage.” Leia credited her collaborative relationship with the district in

helping her provide more opportunities to students at Ra because they are “always open to bettering the school.”

Leia used technology to influence pedagogy as well. With the introduction of the 1:1 initiative involving computers, Leia pushed her teachers to publish their materials online so that students could access them outside of Ra High School:

A lot of the teachers post a lot of what they do in the classroom on the internet, so if kids are out sick then they can get that information off of the internet, and that’s where we hope that Canvas is really going to help take us to that next step with how we do things in the classroom.

Leia hoped that technology would provide a new avenue for some students to become academically successful and for Ra High School to produce more positive student outcomes overall, especially since technology could provide feedback about student academic success:

All the teachers have similar ways in which they present material in the classroom as far as bell ringers or exit tickets or how they evaluate what the kids did before they leave the classroom. Obviously, we’re trying to push tech more and more so whether they use something like a Kahoot or one of those programs to get that immediate feedback it helps us know what gaps there are in the curriculum.

Finally, Leia used the process of hiring teachers to affect pedagogy. Leia had autonomy when it came to hiring teachers: “We do the interviewing generally with a small committee, and then we go through reference checks and submit our recommendation to central office,” and only once or twice had Leia had a recommendation to the central office declined for reasons about

negative background checks. Leia emphasized, however, that she was good at hiring quality people because she had the experience and knew what she needed in a candidate:

I've done this long enough that when somebody walks in, I know within 5 minutes or less if they're going fit in well. I know pretty quickly if they have the skill set that we want here. With so many years of experience, I guess I just learned this skill over time.

When asked about what skill set she was referring to, Leia said she looked for a candidate who possessed high expectations for all students, could work well with others on staff and possessed a good record of student academic achievement.

Empowering teachers. Leia gave most of the credit for Ra's success to others, mainly teachers: "I'm here to lead the way, but it's the teachers who really do the work." Leia practiced positive relationships with teachers and staff. Teachers and staff frequented her office, where there were professional and personal conversations. Leia interacted with teachers in their classrooms, and they respected her, but also felt comfortable enough to speak to her informally. Leia claimed to work collaboratively on leadership decisions, like the 1:1 initiative that was a joint effort by her, the administration team, and some head teachers in the building.

Leia insisted that it was the small things that she practiced that led to the change in staff attitudes about collaboration. For example, teachers had to work one extracurricular activity because Leia believed it was effective to build school community. Another example was Leia's creation of t-shirts for the opening of school:

For the last two years I've gotten t-shirts at the beginning of the year for all of the faculty and so then that way the kids come in, and they see that we're unified, and that might sound like a silly thing, but that's the kind of small thing that create the right environment

for collaboration for staff and relationships for students...it's just a part of the effort to show students we are on the same page.

Leia credited giving the teachers “ownership” and “buy-in” for creating a positive environment where teachers worked hard, implemented high expectations and developed positive teacher-student relationships. By distributing leadership decisions and creating more “ownership,” Leia created a more collaborative environment where teachers helped each other solve problems:

It's more of a team effort now on the high school level. We've done a good job of coming off that island and being team players by making sure those doors are always open for other people to come in, and that's one good thing with our school system as well. Overall, it's a team effort not only in this school but district-wide. Everyone is expected to be better every year.

Leia's practices influenced teachers to become more collaborative, but so did the respect she showed staff. Leia was not a micro-manager but instead had guidelines that she expected every teacher to follow. For example, for discipline situations Leia gave teachers discretion, except for the requirement to call home and speak with parents if they disciplined the child:

Teachers have lots of discretion and can ask a student to stay behind for whatever reason to counsel them. We do ask that teachers make parent contact before they ever refer to the office because getting in touch with parents is crucial to students' success.

School culture. To Leia, “it goes back to relationships” concerning creating a climate of belonging. Leia asserted that every school had problems, but ultimately positive relationships help overcome those problems and create a climate of belonging:

I don't care what school you are at there is a drug problem, a harassment problem or a bullying problem. So, after last year's situation [school shooting] I thought let's try to take a positive approach to things, so that has bled over to so many other things in the school with teachers being able to take that conversation into their classrooms and clubs. There's a sign out there that says just be kind, and those are made by kids and posted everywhere.

Leia insisted that her practices of prioritizing positive relationships and high expectations was critical to establishing a positive school culture:

I think we've got very committed personnel here that have high expectations and their relationships are the two things that I would say are most important [practices that create positive marginalized student outcomes]. It's not something you buy as a subscription to some online computer program or just because they have the tech now or anything like that or the type of textbooks we use or anything. It comes down to the expectations and those relationships.

Leia used a specific example of a teacher to describe how some teachers at Ra High School meet the needs of students, especially those from marginalized populations:

We had a girl who went into state custody, who was marginalized, two days ago and she's a junior here and invested in the school. She ended up having another teacher step up, and now she's applying for foster care. That's the kind of faculty I have here.

Along with relationships, Leia stressed the importance of high expectations for all students. For example, Leia insisted that all students, regardless of their access to technology outside of school, should be treated the same. She did try to give them technology to increase

their access to opportunities at school, but ultimately, Leia did not think of kids as marginalized and believed that they should have the same expectations as everyone else:

I don't think of those kids [marginalized] in any particular category because we have the same expectations for all kids. We have the same expectations for kids who have IQ's below 70 as we do for anyone else. They're going to grow up and be productive citizens of society, and we do the kids on the other end of the spectrum.

High expectations for students was a central component of Leia's leadership practice, along with addressing student victimization in the form of bullying and harassment. Numerous anti-bullying posters were displayed throughout the school and on the school's website was an advertisement for the P3 club (Positive Peer Pressure). Students with the club were observed at lunch speaking with students about bullying. Leia was frustrated, however, by what some perceived bullying was, especially parents:

We take harassment and bullying very seriously, but in this day and age parents think that just because someone called someone a name and it happened one time, then it's bullying. No. It has to occur over some time and so what we do on that first time is counsel the kid and document the instance, and if it happens again, then we entertain ISS at that point.

Therefore, Leia saw bullying and harassment as a problem at Ra High School, but only after some time had passed with documented evidence of victimization. Leia used peer mediation to try and address bullying and harassment at Ra High School because she believed that students could reach students better than adults, in some circumstances, while simultaneously expressing doubt that students could authentically communicate with one another:

We try to do a lot of peer mediation with kids, unfortunately, in this day and time when this is for everybody just not rural settings, but kids don't know how to communicate with one another to resolve something and a lot of times it needs an adult. We deal with things being posted on social media [from a bullying and harassment standpoint].

Matched Pair 1- Hovito and Shiva High School

Research Question 2: What aspects of rural schools do high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity?

This section will examine the data collected for Research Question 2: What aspects of rural schools do high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity? The same matched pairs were used for Research Question 2 that were used in Research Question 1. Data for this question were collected from an in-person principal interview, an observation that consisted of shadowing the principal in his daily administrative duties, and artifacts that were both provided by Hovito and Shiva High Schools or obtained through their public website. Specifically, this question intends to address the barriers rural principals face when ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Hovito High School

Barriers: Luke

Scope of responsibility. Hovito High School had one principal, Luke, and one assistant principal. Luke conveyed to me the responsibilities of the job, and how he felt it was never-ending. He was not required to go to extracurricular activities, but he felt responsible for going because “it's the relationships that I build with my students” that keeps the school culture positive. Because of extracurricular activities, Luke was busy almost every night. Luke certainly

felt the pressure of leading his school almost entirely alone, and he knew the responsibility of the school ultimately fell to him because everything that happens at Hovito “has to start with me.”

Staff diversity and attitudes. Luke had autonomy when it came to hiring staff. The only caveat was that he had to have applicants approved by the central office, but in his time as principal, he had never had a person who he recommended not be accepted. Looking over staff pictures in the yearbook and during the observation of his leadership, however, there was a lack of diversity because at least 97% of the staff was white. Cafeteria, front office, and janitorial staff were all white as well. The school population, however, was much more diverse with about 23% of the student body comprised of students of color. Therefore, almost every person on the staff of Hovito High School was hired at the discretion of Luke, a staff that was almost completely white.

To help end pullout programs, Luke emphasized to teachers the need for them to utilize the highest achiever in their classrooms to help students with disabilities and students who struggled with the content: “I encourage teachers to realize that they can utilize those kids so to speak who have already mastered the content to teach those who haven’t.” Luke tried to institute peer-to-peer tutoring at Hovito, but teachers were resistant to his strategy because it had never been done there before and they were afraid that “the peers’ tutors wouldn’t know the information well enough to tutor,” and would cause more disruption than help to other students. Luke had to “try to sell this to the teachers,” but after some time the teachers understood the positive effect on student academic growth. While Luke’s implementation of peer-to-peer tutoring was met with resistance, Luke insisted that his teachers get on board and accept the new

strategy. Luke saw his efforts to promote peer-to-peer tutoring as twofold: helping marginalized students who had not mastered the content while providing additional educational reinforcement to those who had: “So it’s not just helping the marginalized student, but it’s also benefiting the higher functioning student in teaching by having them teach particular skills. It’s benefiting everyone across the board.” As a result, Luke said students, especially marginalized students, started to have more academic success. Luke stated that at Hovito, “we grow our kids here, and it’s not me, but the teachers who do it.” Luke commended his staff for eventually embracing the change and credited them for its success.

Autonomy. Luke had autonomy to make leadership decisions that addressed equity for students, but he did have guidelines to abide by from the district. For example, Luke tried to increase student learning time by giving awards specifically to students with good attendance records, and there was not an in-school suspension room at Hovito High School, indicating in-school suspension does not exist. Whereas the district “has a uniform policy that we have to follow,” Luke did have autonomy to seek alternative routes outside of in-school suspension. Luke, however, was frustrated by the transition time that took place because of Hovito’s traditional seven-period schedule. On some days during intervention or activity, the schedule would be eight periods. Luke spoke of the advantages of block scheduling, in which there are only four blocks of 90 minutes a piece because it would significantly cut down on student transition time. In all, Luke stated that his students lost about 35 minutes a day just moving from class to class. Luke expressed interest in changing the schedule at Hovito, especially since larger schools in the district had already implemented a block scheduling format, but ultimately, he was not allowed to by the district, and they have the “final decision.”

Providing professional development is another practice Luke claimed to have autonomy over. Luke indicated that he had autonomy from the district when it came to choosing which professional development to provide staff and he worked collaboratively with his administrative team to come up with offerings:

It's up to me as the principal [choosing professional development] and what we do as a staff. We [administrative team] figure out what we need and what we are struggling with, what we need to grow in, and that's where we focus our attention.

However, the professional development available to staff centered on academic achievement: "The professional development that I choose, like what the district chooses as well, is all geared towards our goals of increasing student achievement and increasing different opportunities." Indeed, during the observation, numerous posters addressed academic achievement. Throughout the observation, there was an emphasis placed on the academic achievement of students and teachers were expected to promote it. Many ACT posters advertised a student's good score in public areas as a way to encourage other students to try their best, schedules for ACT preparatory classes, and displays of ACT goals on classroom door were observed.

Attitudes of community. Luke credited his teachers for sponsoring clubs because he believed it was essential to create a climate of inclusion, but he expressed frustration when he did not see an inclusive climate created for all his students because of community influence at Hovito, specifically students who identified as LGBTQ. Luke spoke to the barriers he faced from the community regarding social justice for LGBTQ students:

You know there are specific parameters that you realize may not be explicitly stated. But throughout the community, you may have expectations, and it could be a culture within the community itself. For example, [Hovito] High doesn't have a very large LGBTQ population, and part of that has to do with the location of the school and the culture that surrounds the school. The fact that we're in the Bible Belt, in a small rural community where everybody knows everybody, and I think that's an inherently good thing, but whenever you start talking about marginalized demographics that can create an even greater margin in a sense.

Luke believed that the community surrounding Hovito was a barrier to ensuring social justice for LGBTQ students and impacted the climate of inclusion he wanted at Hovito:

Our LGBTQ population is not afraid to speak out. But based just on demographics I believe that there are probably a couple more at least who are afraid to come out and say or do something. We don't have an LGBTQ association here or a club because we have such limited numbers that have expressed that's who they are, but I also think some of that is because of the culture of the community that would not accept a club of that nature here.

Luke emphasized to his staff and students that the school valued all students no matter where they came from, their ethnicity, disability, or sexuality. For Luke, prioritizing positive relationships among staff and students was the best way to buffer his student body, specifically LGBTQ students, from an unaccepting community:

The main thing is understanding that every kid that comes through my high school door is valuable and we [staff] have to do our best to influence them positively but make no mistake: we do serve as a buffer in some ways to the community.

Shiva High School

Barriers: Han

Teacher expectations. When Han started at Shiva High School, he encountered a negative perception of the school's CTE programs by the community and staff. To address the problem, Han provides professional development to help change teachers' perceptions about the CTE programs, which served many of Shiva's marginalized student population. To help change the perception, Han scheduled industry tours on professional development days and the faculty learned about the different kind of jobs that needed students from the CTE program:

We've taken teachers on industry tours here in the community to help them understand why it's important for a lot of our kids because what's talked about in the school is very important as well for those kids to understand that I'm not going to be a more marginalized kid if I go to the vocational center. I'm not a forgotten kid that just gets pushed down there. If our teachers can also understand that then when a kid says they want to pursue something in CTE, then they have a conversation that is more positive than it used to be.

Student expectations. Han was frustrated by the battle of trying to convince students that they could be successful, especially those from generational poverty:

It's a constant battle getting those kids [students of poverty] to understand that just because my parents and maybe two generations of people in poverty have had to deal with that doesn't mean I have to, and getting them to understand that there are some things out there for them that they can be able to do.

Han understood that he and his staff were the “giver of dreams” but the consistent, hard battle of convincing students of poverty “to understand that there are better opportunities for them than what they see at home,” was draining to Han psychologically. Han expressed frustration with the negative perception some marginalized students, mainly those of poverty, had about education that was “ingrained and generational.” Han described the constant battle he had to fight to convince students that there were better opportunities available to them with education. To combat the negative perception of education, Han tried to expose the students to the real-world opportunities offered because of an education:

What we've done with district support has been key, and we've been able to do this because we got some extra funding the past two years to take some students who historically don't really have a clue about what opportunities are out there for them [marginalized students]. We started taking some trips to college campuses for them to see what that's like. We're taking trips to the [vocational technology center] center in [local city] for those students to understand what career opportunities that are out there.

To reduce stress and frustration, Han distributed leadership decisions to help drive and implement social justice at Shiva High School: “Everything that we do is team-based--- principals, department heads, faculty are all involved in the [decision] processes.”

Professional development. Han enjoyed professional development and learning about new strategies to help his students at Shiva, but he expressed frustration about the offerings of professional learning regarding rural schools. Han was aware of the discrepancy between rural professional development opportunities and others offered in urban or suburban contexts:

You are on an island. Those are some of the things professionally that we have to overcome, but then I also think this is the uniqueness of the population that you're dealing with. Rural poor immigrants, that kind of thing, is a whole lot different than it is in urban areas, and I think there's less research on rural schools into how to best serve those kids. I think most of that is centered on inner-city type schools.

Han wanted to better provide opportunities for marginalized students, but his access to professional development materials concerning the subject was limited because much of the research covering equitable opportunities for marginalized students centers on urban and suburban schools, not rural schools.

Matched Pair 2- Tanis and Ra High School

Research Question 2: What aspects of rural schools do high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity?

This section will examine the data collected for Research Question 2: What aspects of rural schools do high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity? Data for these questions were collected from an in-person principal interview, an observation that consisted of shadowing the principal in his daily administrative duties, and artifacts that were both provided by Tanis and Ra High Schools or obtained through their public website. Specifically, this

question seeks to address the barriers rural principals face when ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Tanis High School

Barriers: Lando

Autonomy and staff resistance. Lando believed that professional development was an effective avenue for ensuring equity for students at Tanis, and he claimed to have autonomy when it came to professional development choices. During an observation, however, he deflected responsibility to the district when confronted by a teacher and his confusion concerning professional development in the school hallway. The teacher was confused about professional development offerings and how he needed to pick the right courses, but Lando could not provide any answers. Instead, Lando told the teacher to contact the district office's professional development coordinator to help. The only public information I found about professional development offered to staff during the observation was in the faculty workroom under a stack of papers tacked to a corkboard.

One practice of Lando to ensure equitable opportunities was to improve the college readiness of students at the school. He created multiple supports for students from tutoring to the ASB block. There seemed to be some pushback from teachers; however, against the college readiness initiatives Lando implemented as a part of his high expectations. The teacher workroom had a common area with a public corkboard displaying information for faculty members about athletic events, professional development, and other extracurricular activities. Publicly displayed on this cork board in the center was a research article about how college

readiness initiatives don't improve schools. This paper was highlighted and had arrows pointing to it to draw attention from other faculty members.

Finally, Lando was dedicated to facilitating a positive school culture that was inclusive to everyone, and he expected staff, including his administration team, to build positive student-teacher relationships to help ensure equity for all students. Lando and his administration team's actions, however, conveyed a different message. Administrators sit together every day at lunch in the cafeteria. It was obvious that all of the administrators were comfortable with one another and had been working together for some time. While at the table eating lunch, the administrators started to discuss some students at Tanis. The discussion began with the subject of paddling and how it was more positive than people realize in getting students to follow the rules. One administrator then transitioned the conversation into how they could not paddle students today because male students may be female or vice versa. Another chimed in by making a joke about how one male student is a female while mocking the student in a homophobic manner. The table of administrators enjoyed a laugh as a result of the conversation, including Lando.

Student expectations. Lando practiced high expectations and attempted to provide more opportunities for marginalized students, but he also felt that time and student attitudes worked against his efforts. Lando expressed frustration because "time is always a constraint" when addressing student academic achievement, and he is "always trying to find time to get them [marginalized students] in here...So you're fighting that a little bit as well." Lando had difficulty encouraging marginalized students to realize the type and number of opportunities that they had available to them at Tanis:

We're here trying to say "Hey it doesn't matter what your background is. If you want to be successful, you can be," especially in our state where you can go to college [for free], and there are more post-secondary education opportunities than ever before for a kid in [state]. Not to mention the kids in the categories you are talking about [marginalized students], but I mean everybody has the opportunity to have a post-secondary education experience now for free, and so we try our best to promote that.

Inclusive environment. Lando firmly believed that his practices promoted an inclusive environment at Tanis. Throughout the hallways of Tanis High School student work was displayed alongside pictures of the students who completed them. Students of color completed many of these works, but they served as a stark juxtaposition from the decorations that were at the front of the school. At the front of the school were pictures of prominent community members and alumni of Tanis High School. There were dozens of pictures displayed. There was a "sports hall of fame" and a medal of honor memorial dedicated to alumni of Tanis who served in the armed forces. Every person displayed was white, and almost all of those pictures were of males. Also, a mural created collaboratively by students was displayed in the commons areas of Tanis, and the mural was of only white students succeeding at Tanis in athletic events, fine arts, or graduation ceremonies.

Lando insisted that all students had the same academic opportunities at Tanis and that the school advanced inclusion across the board. He frequently spoke of the 92% rate of student enrollment in CTE programs and the AP award for increasing participation among underserved populations as evidence of his practices to increase opportunities for marginalized students and providing an inclusive environment, but there were some areas of concern regarding

inclusiveness that was observed at Tanis. As a part of the \$250,000 grant written by Lando and his administration team, they constructed a new classroom for a mechatronics course. They included this course in their new curriculum that pushed pre-engineering and staffed the course with a retired engineer who “is one of the favorite teachers” of students. Upon observing the classroom, however, there were no students of color in the course. Upon further investigation into the history of the course which included reviewing past student enrollment, historically the class was composed of almost all white males. Upon reviewing the website for Tanis High School and viewing extracurricular pictures that showed students involved in the clubs, white students populated most clubs and extracurricular activities. Only one club on the school’s website had a club picture that featured other students who were not white: Spanish Club.

Lando believed the efforts of student-led clubs like the Postive Peer Pressure Club (p3 Club) helped create a climate of belonging. Members of the club were observed speaking with other students in the cafeteria about suicide prevention and hanging posters in common areas that read “we are all in this together.” The club, however, appeared to be run by only white females, and upon review of the Tanis yearbook, the roster was of all white students. Lando was serious about how bullying was not tolerated at Tanis, and he credited the creation of student extracurricular clubs, like the p3 Club, Diversity Club, and Student Alliance Club for helping to create an inclusive environment for everyone. While reviewing the Diversity Club and Student Alliance Club on the Tanis website and in the yearbook, however, there was no information nor faculty advisor listed. In addition, no posters advertised either club like there were for other clubs.

Lando believed that the creation of clubs created a positive climate for everyone. Simultaneously, however, he also admitted that while most of the students at Tanis were accepting of marginalized students, not everyone was:

It's mostly positive [students accepting of others]. You know there's a fraction of students who are not very tolerant of people who are different than they are, but I believe those students exist in any school. Overwhelmingly though the majority of our kids are very accepting of others regardless of why they're different. I can say that I understand it [bullying] very thoroughly because I have seen it in our hallways.

Indeed, not all students were accepting of marginalized students. For example, voluntary segregation was observed in the cafeteria during both lunches provided at Tanis. Hispanic students sat with other Hispanic students, and likewise for African-American and white students. The same voluntary segregation was observed in the hallways as well.

Attitude of community. Lando attempted to provide an inclusive environment for students through his creation of extracurricular activities. Lando mentioned the Diversity Club as an important student-led activity that helped promote an inclusive environment specifically for LGBTQ students. Lando named the club the Diversity Club because he believed that had it been named the LGBTQ club there would have been a negative reaction from the community:

They [community] would be reluctant and probably not appreciate it. I would say [creation of LGBTQ club]. I have dealt with this through the P3 club (positive peer pressure). We did have a diversity club at one time, but it's all about marketing, to be honest. We have a secular Student Alliance Club here as well.

Lando asserted that he had to be a “shield” for some students from the community because the community was not acceptant accepting of their sexual orientation. Landon maintained that LGBTQ students still had opportunities to be involved, but he had to serve as a buffer between them and the community to keep things running smoothly:

We still have opportunities for kids to be themselves and have a place to belong and that sort of thing, but you know, I guess, we’re more subtle in what we have because we do have to maintain a balance with the community. Because if the community begins to have a negative connotation with the school then that negativity gets projected onto the school, and I don’t want that for our students. That’s my biggest fear really. That some students could possibly be targeted with some bullying or something and I just don’t want to go there.

Ra High School

Barriers: Leia

Professional development. Leia worked with the district to provide professional development for teachers at Ra High School:

Normally we’ll have a day at the beginning of the year where the whole school system comes together for whatever and then we’ll have other days where they’ll put out RTI instructors, SPED, fine arts teachers for special PD for their disciplines. When those people are pulled out, we just generally will have what we call the core classes left in the building for our own in-service.

Leia, however, had the freedom to choose Ra’s professional development that she thought staff needed the most. Ra High School had recently adopted a 1:1 initiative for students

and were beginning to implement a new software program called Canvas. As a result, Leia focused most of the professional development on educating staff about Canvas:

What we're working on this year, since we're going 1:1 is supporting the teachers with tech in-service training. We are beginning to use what is called Canvas. We've had Canvas people come in and help some of our teacher leaders who are going out and teaching others in the building.

Leia emphasized the need to help teachers learn Canvas as a measure to ensure student success with the 1:1 initiative. No other professional development opportunities were provided by Leia that focused on social justice, ensuring equitable opportunities for all students, or facilitating positive student-teacher relationships. Instead, the district brought in a speaker for Ra's second day of professional development:

At the beginning of the year the school system brought in a guest speaker who then conducted some breakout sessions in the afternoon about how to create a better school, but that's all that comes to my mind [in terms of providing professional development to teachers that affect marginalized students].

The book was about "how to make a school better" according to Leia by implementing strategies to increase student achievement, like positive relationships, but could provide no further details. After reviewing the professional development documents from Ra High School; however, it was clear that the professional development book study about creating a good school was the only professional development offering addressed social justice issues. Instead, educating staff about Canvas was the top priority for Leia as there were over five different opportunities for staff to learn about the software.

Scope of responsibility. Leia was forthright about the extent to which principalship in a rural school was exhausting. She arrived at school at 6 AM and did not leave until 5 PM every day as a result of the myriad responsibilities she had to take on as principal. Leia was exhausted by the job in some ways because she knew she was ultimately the person in charge of Ra High School, and she compared the job to that of an emergency room doctor:

I'm a real task-oriented person with a to-do list, and when you're an administrator, you can't come in with that to-do list and expect that you know what's going to happen.

People ask me what my job is like and I tell them it's like working at the ER, and its triage, you know whatever it is the worst comes first.

Also, while at Ra High School, an assistant principal was seen only once, in her office working independently on documents related to Ra, while Leia had to address several instances alone like a student skipping lunch and a discussion with guidance department about qualifications for graduation concerning a marginalized student. After reviewing school documents, Leia, unlike other principals included in this study, only had one assistant principal to help share the responsibility of leading the school.

Geography. The remote area of Leia's school was a barrier to her practice of increasing opportunity as a portion of her leadership because there is just "more isolation for some students here from tech standpoint." Because many students at Ra High School did not have access, Leia had to provide resources for them:

We've given everybody laptops now for use in the classroom and calculators that are pretty expensive as well. We have those provided in the classrooms for years. We obviously encourage kids to have their own but if they don't, they've got one in the

classroom, and they can check those out if they need to borrow them to take the ACT or, you know, whatever they need it for.

Leia advanced inclusion by increasing opportunities for students to take dual-enrollment courses: “we’ve had more luck in our relationship with our local community college. I want to say 70 or 80 kids are enrolled in dual-enrollment.” Since dual-enrollment is off campus before and after school, however, students who wish to participate need their transportation. Leia recognized the lack of equitable transportation for students of poverty as a barrier to advancing inclusion: “Where we kind of fall short is that the opportunities are off campus and when you have a student who is low income and doesn’t have a car then they don’t have any way of getting there.” Leia was not happy about the inability of students of poverty to access dual-enrollment courses, especially since over 60% of students at Ra High School are economically disadvantaged. To compensate, Leia asserted that Ra High School did have some course offerings that were not available in other local high schools, including an NJROTC program and unique CTE courses, but she also admitted that if “parents don’t have the support, they usually won’t come [help with transportation for dual enrollment].” Leia wanted to increase access to technology for the students at Ra High School, so she decided to use a student survey to get a baseline for what technology kids had access to at home:

We did a survey not too long ago to see what access the students had with cell devices, laptops, and internet accessibility at home. We still have a good number of kids who don’t have access at home because of where they live, and it’s not available, and I’ve actually talked to some of those parents that said you know we would have internet at

home if we could find a provider that could serve us but since we live in a remote area, we can't.

In addition, Leia was frustrated because the geography of her school limited its ability to have better student achievement numbers. Leia could not offer AP courses at Ra because not enough teachers were qualified to teach the courses and there was not enough student demand. Leia believed that the lack of AP was due to the school's rural location. Ra High School was right next to the county line. Consequently, "the middle schools on the other end of the county feeds into the city high school system," and that middle school has lots of students "with good test scores," but "we [Ra's district] feeds them right into the city system instead." To help increase student achievement at Ra, Leia worked with the assistant director to figure out ways to "get some of those kids here if they wanted to be here because there was not a bus offered to bring them here." While there was an "open-enrollment system in place for the county and city system," "there was not a bus that would go from that end of the county to here." Leia and the assistant director worked to provide a bus, but in the end "we probably get about five or seven kids a year that come from the North end of the county, while the county is sending about 200 kids a year to the city school system." Leia was frustrated with the situation because she believed the city system was siphoning off the best academic students, which hurt the student academic achievement numbers at Ra High School.

School culture. A mission statement is an effective way to communicate to staff, students, and the community the priorities of the school. I asked Leia about Ra's mission statement, and she admitted that "we have one" but "I'm not the kind of person who memorizes

stuff, so I don't know what it is" and she had to look it up. The mission statement was not posted publicly anywhere at Ra High School.

Leia believed that the students at Ra High School were tolerant of others, but she also admitted that Ra High School had bullying and harassment problems "like every other school." She conveyed this message with a certain fatalism, in which the problem of bullying or harassment could never be completely solved:

They're tolerable [students accepting of marginalized students]. We tend to get comments from recruiters that our students are the most accepting of any others they deal with. Now, we're not perfect by any means. We have instances where some kids make fun of others but in this day and age that happens everywhere. Kids in this generation are kind of desensitized to something.

While Leia took bullying and harassment seriously and addressed the problem using staff and student solutions, Ra High School was dealing with serious problems about student mental health, specifically suicide:

Last year we had one referral a month for a psychiatric placement, not that we were making the referral, but our kids, and primarily our boys, were threatening to kill themselves on social media or assault someone. A lot of them do it. I'd say if you had ten kids, 8 of them probably posted something on social media... We had a kid last year run up to the office because a boy posted something on Instagram or Snapchat that he was going to kill himself. Well, girlfriend or ex just broke up, sees it, and runs to the guidance office freaking out because she thinks he's left school because he can drive, but he hadn't.

Self-inhibiting. While Leia professed acceptance of all students, she was not accepting of everyone at Ra High School, specifically LGBTQ students, and she did not require her staff to be:

We had a situation a couple of years ago where an individual, she's a junior now, wanted to be called he. I told teachers this was the request, but I said I'm not going to force you to do it. He wanted to be called by his male name and not the given female name.

Leia asserted that some LGBTQ students defined their sexuality in that way because "it's all about attention." Personally, Leia communicated that "I'm a Christian and I believe that God hasn't made a mistake when you're born. You are what you are," but to meet the requirements of her principalship she "had a counselor call the state and ask for guidelines and we send those guidelines to every teacher who has that student each semester," but there was no imperative provided by her, the administration team, or the district that the guideline had to be followed.

Also, Leia insisted that she increased opportunities for all students at Ra, but she was hesitant to increase access to extracurricular activities, especially for LGBTQ students. Leia was approached by students to create an LGBTQ club, but ultimately refused the request: "I was approached probably two or three years ago about that [creating an LGBTQ club], and I told them no because the only clubs we allow here are academic clubs." While checking Ra's school website, however, there were multiple student extracurricular clubs listed that were not academic, like the p3 club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), and the Bass Fishing Club.

Leia asserted that the first "problem," with creating an LBGTQ club would be that "she would have to find a sponsor and that wouldn't be easy." Leia assumed that teachers at Ra High School would not be supportive and therefore not sponsor the club. Also, there was another

scenario where Leia chose not to advance inclusion for transgender students. Leia referred to the transgender student who wanted access to the bathroom as “an issue at one point,” that was helped by the creation of the new wing to the school that included private bathrooms that could be locked. Leia described the issue:

We had an issue where the “boy” [air quotation marks by Leia] didn’t want to change with girls, so we had him change in the nurse’s office, and there was a bathroom in there he could use if he needed to.

Leia did not see this as a problem of access from a school perspective, however, because ultimately it was “the student kind of isolating themselves and that’s ok, but that’s their choice.”

Finally, while Leia insisted that positive relationships with students were crucial to ensuring equity and advancing opportunities, and she was “always trying to think of ways to best serve kids,” she did not model the positive relationships she wished for students and teachers to have by admitting to only knowing students’ names if they were discipline problems:

I don’t know all [student population] students’ names, and maybe some principals are like that, but not me. I don’t do that anymore. When my kids were here, I knew a lot more names but not as much anymore unless I see some students regularly for discipline reasons.

Research Question 3: What are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differential student outcomes?

Thus far, Chapter 4 has included the within-case analysis of each of the four schools that participated in this study by addressing the first two research questions. For this portion of the study, a cross-case analysis will address research question three by comparing the equity

practices of principals with student outcomes. While demographics and student outcomes were given under each school, Table 7 illustrates all four schools.

The four schools that served as cases for this study were in a southeastern state. All four were public high schools providing instruction in grades 9-12. The schools varied in population and student outcomes but were similar in terms of demography. While principal experience, practices, barriers, and student outcomes were given under each school, Table 8 illustrates all four schools for points of comparison.

There was a range of principal experience from 17-29 years, but all four principals had similar practices, such as pedagogy, with others possessing more practices directed towards equity than others. Also, some had similar barriers as others, but overall each principal demonstrated their own set of unique barriers to ensuring equitable educational opportunities to marginalized students.

Cross-Case Analysis

The following section applies to all four schools selected as a part of this study. A cross-case analysis will address research question three, what are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differential student outcomes, by comparing the equity practices of the most and least effective principals with student outcomes. Most effective and least effective is based on student outcomes found in Table 6. Comparing the equity practices of principals with student outcomes will provide a good point of comparison for what equity practices principals employ with high student outcomes to those with low student outcomes.

Table 7

Comparison of student demographics, graduation rate, and student achievement data: 2017-2018 Data

Student Ethnicity & Demographics	Hovito High School	Tanis High School	Ra High School	Shiva High Schools
Ethnicity				
European American	77-79%	81-82%	74-76%	81-82%
African American	18-20%	1-2%	5-6%	10-11%
Hispanic or Latino	1%	15-16%	19-20%	5-6%
Asian	>1%	1%	>1%	1%
Demographic				
Economically Disadvantaged	75-80%	30%	60%	45%
Immigrants	1%	12%	7-10%	>10%
LGTBQ	1%	1%	2%	3%
Student enrollment				
	350-450	1000-1100	700-800	850-950
Graduation Rate				
	96%	92%	94%	97%
Literacy-Numeracy Composite				
	3	5	3	5

Table 8

Principal Experience, Practices, Barriers, and Student Outcomes

Participant	Years of Experience	Practices	Barriers	Graduation Rate	Literacy/Numeracy Composite
Luke	17	Pedagogy	Scope of responsibility	96%	3
		Modeling	Staff diversity		
		School culture	Staff attitudes		
		Empowering Teachers	Autonomy Attitudes of community		
Han	26	Pedagogy	Teacher expectations	97%	5
		Professional development	Student perceptions		
		Hiring staff	Professional development		
		Changing curriculum			
		Cooperation with district			
		School culture			
		Empowering teachers			

Table 8 (Continued)

Participant	Years of Experience	Practices	Barriers	Graduation Rate	Literacy/Numeracy Composite
Lando	24	Pedagogy	Autonomy	92%	5
		Modeling	Staff resistance		
		High Expectations	Student expectations		
		Cooperation with district	Inclusive environment		
		School culture	Attitude of community		
Leia	29	Pedagogy	Professional development	94%	3
		Empowering teachers	Scope of responsibility		
		School culture	Geography		
			School culture		
			Self-inhibiting		

Practices

All four principals attempted to end pullout programs at their schools. While all four principals attempted to end pullout programs, the most effective principals emphasized the importance of tier-one instruction to remove pullout programs. Both principals believed tier-one instruction, was an effective way to ensure all students could stay in the classroom. In addition to providing tier-one instruction, the most effective principals, Han and Lando, provided different avenues for students who needed extra academic help, like academic support blocks and mandatory tutoring. As a result of ending pullout programs, both principals believed they had increased opportunities at their schools, and both had awards from the College Board for increasing AP course opportunities for underserved student populations. The least effective principals did end pullout programs in their schools but one, Luke, faced faculty resistance when he tried to do so. The other least effective principal, Leia, attempted to end pullout programs by creating a “skinny” block schedule where students could receive extra academic help from teachers, but the strategy led to many “skinny” classes serving students of color with little integration from other student demographics.

All four principals asserted that their uniform discipline policies as another practice they implemented that helped ensure social justice, but evidence showed that their discipline policies were not always applied equally. For example, teachers at Hovito were observed in the hallways confronting students of color about dress-code violations, while white students wearing the same kind of garments were not confronted. While each principal insisted that discipline was handled the same for each student, marginalized or not, data from the southeastern state puts into

perspective the rates of suspension for marginalized students compared to others in the schools included in this study. The rates of suspension are illustrated in Table 9.

All principals increased opportunities at their schools, but the most effective principals developed a collaborative relationship with their districts to do so. Han wanted to address the negative perception of Shiva's CTE program that students, staff, and the community had acquired over time. Han was successful in changing the CTE's negative perception by working with his district to provide industry tours to faculty and increased available transportation to the CTE building. As a result, student enrollment in CTE courses increased by over 20% in two years. Lando viewed Tanis's lack of updated technology and limited AP and CTE offerings as a barrier to providing more student opportunities. Lando wrote a grant proposal with his administration team that included district personnel, that was selected for \$250,000 to address the lack of technology at Tanis. Also, working with the district, Tanis built a new CTE building that included the latest technology equipment for drafting, a health science wing with a fully functional ambulance, and over 20 different course offerings. Consequently, over 92% of students took a CTE course at Tanis in the 2017-2018 school year.

While the least effective principals did attempt to increase student opportunities, they did not demonstrate the same collaborative relationships with their districts that the most effective principals did. Overall, the least effective principals believed they were limited in their abilities to increase student opportunities because of geography. Luke was proud of the increased marginalized student population in Hovito's AP, dual-enrollment, and CTE courses, but he was frustrated that he could not provide more opportunities by providing more teachers and course offerings because of financial limitations. Likewise, Leia wanted to implement a 1:1 initiative for

Table 9

Rate of In-School and Out-of-School Suspension

School	Student group	In-school suspension rate	Out-of-school suspension rate
Hovito High School	White	28%	0%
	African-American	28.3%	0%
	Hispanic/Latino	29.4%	0%
	Students of poverty	35.2%	0%
	Students with disabilities	34.4%	0%
Shiva High School	White	.1%	3.7%
	African-American	0%	8.2%
	Hispanic/Latino	0%	0%
	Students of poverty	0%	11.7%
	Students with disabilities	.8%	9.8%

Table 9 (Continued)

School	Student group	In-school suspension rate	Out-of-school suspension rate
Tanis High School	White	13.9%	7.3%
	African-American	24.2%	18.2%
	Hispanic/Latino	24.3%	9.2%
	Student of poverty	27.2%	15.7%
	Students with disabilities	27	13.2%
Ra High School	White	19.4%	2.8%
	African-American	27.6%	17.2%
	Hispanic/Latino	17.1%	2.4%
	Students of poverty	35.3%	7.3%
	Students with disabilities	26.3%	9.3%

years but could only get the financial support to do so in 2018. In addition, Leia acknowledged that the 1:1 initiative could take time to be effective in her school because many of her students did not have internet access at home.

While all the principals attempted to increase student opportunities, the most effective principals, Han and Lando, also made efforts to provide more post-secondary opportunities to marginalized students. Working with the district, Han created the Graduation Access Program (GAP) to specifically help students, many marginalized, who “fall through the cracks.” Han believed that as a result of GAP, many marginalized students had access to more opportunities, and a head start to secure a job afterward because the program provided students with the ability to earn industry certifications in a variety of fields. To facilitate post-secondary opportunities, Han purchased computer software, AnalyzeEd, to help students improve their ACT scores. Han knew many of his students could not afford the program on their own, so he worked with the district to provide students with the service for free. One goal of Lando’s was to increase participation in the ACT to promote post-secondary opportunities among Tanis’s marginalized student population. ACT goals were in every classroom, and there were posters of students displayed who had done well on the exam. Also, there were posters throughout the school that showed the university’s minimum requirement on the ACT for admission.

The most effective principals used professional development to help ensure equity and promote more positive student outcomes. Han and Lando used professional development to change negative perceptions regarding CTE courses and to train teachers on how to create positive student-teacher relationships. In addition, through his creation of “DIY PD BINGO” Han provided professional development opportunities that focused on promoting positive

relationships, while giving his staff autonomy in choosing professional development opportunities. Lando used professional development to raise awareness among staff about students of poverty. Lando worked with the district to provide poverty and ACES (adverse childhood experiences) training to help educate staff about the opportunities the CTE programs could provide to students of poverty. The least effective principals, however, did not provide professional development that addressed positive relationships or ensuring equity. Instead, the least effective principals used professional development to help increase student academic achievement or to train teachers about technology. Luke was required by his district to provide professional development that focused only on increasing academic achievement, whereas Leia had the autonomy to choose Ra High School's professional development but chose to offer sessions that trained teachers on how to use new technological programs offered with the 1:1 initiative.

Only one principal, who was the most effective of the four included in the study, tried to improve their school by hiring teachers through an equity lens. By focusing on hiring teachers who provided 'high-quality tier-one instruction,' Han believed he addressed equitable opportunities and created more positive outcomes for marginalized students. Han believed that hiring quality teachers and supporting them was an effective way to improve the curriculum at Shiva and help ensure equity.

Three of the principals, Luke, Lando, and Leia believed that high expectations were important in providing equity for marginalized students. All three modeled high expectations to influence the improvement of the curriculum at their schools and to advance opportunities for marginalized students. The most effective principal of the three, Lando, was thankful for

mandatory state testing because the accountability helped facilitate teacher buy-in with his attempts to push high expectations across the board. Lando believed that high expectations provided “more opportunity,” to marginalized students and he displayed high expectations throughout Tanis in the form of posters displaying school academic goals. The less effective principals, Luke and Leia, also believed high expectations helped provide more opportunity, but they implemented their expectations differently. For example, Luke provided professional development that focused on achieving high academic achievement through high expectations. Leia promoted high expectations through shared ownership of the school. Leia believed that distributing responsibilities to faculty and staff in the form of extracurricular duties, like attendance at football games, was the most effective way to foster high expectations among the staff.

All four principals made efforts to create a positive school culture, but the most effective principals made extra efforts to ensure that their school environments were inclusive. For example, Lando promoted the Positive Peer Pressure (p3) club throughout Tanis and students of the p3 club were observed speaking with other students during lunch about the signs of abuse and suicide. Leia, a least effective principal, also addressed student victimization by promoting extracurricular activities and displaying anti-bullying posters throughout the hallways of Ra High School. Lando, however, implemented additional steps to ensure that student victimization was limited at Tanis High School by creating an anonymous bullying hotline for anyone to report student harassment.

The most effective principal, Han, partnered with the community to promote an inclusive environment at Shiva. The community worked with Han to provide housing for students who

were impoverished, but Han believed that the community's attitudes about marginalized students did more to promote inclusiveness at Shiva than what they did. Han allowed an LGBTQ club on campus, and there was never any objection from the community. Shiva had about 4-5 transgendered students who participated in various extracurricular activities, but the community never objected about their involvement in the school or its public activities. Lando's community, however, was not as accepting as Han's. Lando believed he had to be a "shield," between the community and LGBTQ students. Lando allowed the LGBTQ club to exist, but he renamed it to the Diversity Club so that it would not cause a negative reaction within the community. The communities surrounding the least effective schools were similar to Lando's, but the principals used the expected community reaction as reasoning to limit certain extracurricular clubs, specifically LGBTQ clubs. Whereas Lando allowed an LGBTQ club on campus under a different name, neither of the least effective principals did, effectively banning the clubs on school grounds.

All four principals believed that modeling positive relationships were important to creating an inclusive environment. The less effective principals spoke in the hallways with students and staff in a jovial manner and, at times, about personal issues. Luke believed he promoted positive relationships by attending student extracurricular activities, like plays, athletic events, and chorus performances almost every night. Leia asserted that she helped develop positive relationships through empowering teachers and sharing leadership decisions. The most effective principals, however, did all those things and more. Han volunteered to cook breakfast for students before school on Thursdays when many students of poverty arrived at school 30 minutes before everyone else; an idea first presented to him by a group of teachers.

Furthermore, teachers at Shiva wanted to start clothes closet for students and raise money for students of poverty for Christmas presents and Han agreed and used district money to help get them started. Lando insisted on free breakfast for all students as a measure of equity for providing students with what they needed. Lando did not want students of poverty singled out because they received a free breakfast, so he provided breakfast for free to the entire student body before and after 1st block. Lando's school was the only school included in this study that provided free breakfast for all students. In addition, Lando empowered teachers by including them on important projects, like the writing of the technology grant. Teachers were observed sitting with the administration in the cafeteria for both lunches provided, in which, teachers engaged in conversations with Lando and administration about strategies to improve Tanis. In addition, teachers in both schools were observed eating lunch with students in the cafeteria, unlike the other two schools included in this study. Han and Lando also decorated their schools to help promote positive relationships with posters that said, "We're all in this together" and each principal had an open door policy, in which, students and staff were free to enter at any time to discuss an issue with them.

Research Question 3: What are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differential student outcomes?

Theoretical Framework

This multi-site case study investigated rural principal practices for promoting socially just leadership for marginalized students. The study was designed to answer the following research question: What are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differential student outcomes?

The following section will address research question three through the lens of Theoharis's (2009) seven keys for effective social justice leadership (for definitions of Theoharis's seven keys see Table 2 in Chapter 2):

1. Acquire broad, reconceptualized consciousness/knowledge/skill
2. Possess core leadership traits
3. Advance inclusion, access, and opportunity for all
4. Improve the core learning context: both the teaching and the curriculum
5. Create a climate of belonging
6. Raise student achievement
7. Sustain oneself professionally and personally

As stated in Chapter 3, a priori coding of interview transcripts, observations, and artifacts was completed using Theoharis's (2009) framework. This section addresses the differences in social justice practices of the four principals included in this study by specifically examining the social justice practices of principals. Examining data through the lens of Theoharis (2009) produced clear findings and illustrated considerable differences in the social justice practices of the most effective and least effective principals. Han and Lando, based on student outcome scores, are characterized as the most effective principals in the four cases examined in this study. Seven of the seven keys were found to some extent in their practices, whereas the least effective principals, Luke and Leia, differed in their practices of creating positive student outcomes for social justice and did not meet all of the keys provided in Theoharis's (2009) social justice framework. Table 10 illustrates the application of Theoharis (2009) to the practices of principals included in this study.

Table 10

Application of Theoharis (2009) to Principal Practice

Keys	Luke-Hovito	Han-Shiva	Lando-Tanis	Leia-Ra
Acquire broad, reconceptualized consciousness/knowledge/skill base	X	X	X	
Eliminate pullout programs	X	X	X	
Provide professional development on equity		X	X	
Reach out to marginalized families		X		
Possess core leadership traits	X	X	X	X
Arrogant humility	X	X	X	X
Passionate vision	X	X	X	X
Tenacious commitment to justice		X		

Table 10 (Continued)

Keys	Luke-Hovito	Han-Shiva	Lando-Tanis	Leia-Ra
Improve the core learning context: the teaching and curriculum	X	X	X	X
Address issues of race	X	X		
Provide professional development addressing equity		X	X	
Hire and supervise through an equity lens		X		
Adopt common research-based curricular approaches	X	X	X	X
Empower staff	X	X	X	X

Table 10 (Continued)

Keys	Luke-Hovito	Han-Shiva	Lando-Tanis	Leia-Ra
Raise Student Achievement	X	X	X	X
Increase access to core learning	X	X	X	X
Improve core learning	X	X	X	X
Create a climate of belonging	X	X	X	
Sustain oneself professionally and personally	X	X	X	X
Communicate purposefully and authentically	X	X	X	
Develop a supportive administration network	X	X	X	X
Work together for change	X	X	X	

Theoharis, G. (2009). *The school leaders our school children deserve: Seven keys to equity, social justice, and school reform*. Teachers College Press, NY.

Acquire Broad, Reconceptualized Consciousness/Knowledge/Skill Base

Three of the four principals implemented practices that tried to expand the knowledge base of social justice among faculty members. In other words, their practices attempted to illustrate and teach faculty about social justice, thus expanding the knowledge base of social justice within the school. As a result of expanding the knowledge base about social justice among faculty, the principals provided a reconceptualized consciousness of equity or a new perspective of what social justice is and how its implementation improves student outcomes. Each tried to upset the status quo was by eliminating pullout programs. Four principals ended pullout programs by implementing a new schedule system that allowed for extra academic support to be built into the school day, so any marginalized students were not pulled out of regular education classrooms for intervention purposes. A least effective principal, Luke, faced staff resistance when he eliminated pullout programs at his school, but the staff eventually embraced the inclusive classrooms because they saw improved student outcomes and attitudes. Another least effective principal, Leia, also tried to create an academic support block to eliminate pullout programs, but many of the classrooms observed were not integrated but instead had high concentrations of students of color with few other student demographics represented. The most effective principal, Han, however, used his cooperative relationship with the district to build more academic supports than the other principals included in this study. For example, Han receives \$40,000 each year to offer mandatory before and after school tutoring. In this way, Han eliminated pullout programs by mandating that students who struggled in certain academic core subjects, like math, English, and science, participate in tutoring outside of the regular school day.

Other academic supports, like the GAP program, were created by Han and his district to give at-risk students another path to graduation and to raise student academic achievement.

Only the most effective principals used the practice of providing professional development focused on equity to expand the knowledge base of social justice among their staff. Lando was concerned about the interactions between economically disadvantaged students and staff, especially because 30-40% of his students were students of poverty. Working with his district, Lando provided poverty and ACES (adverse childhood experiences) training so that staff could better understand how to support students of poverty and develop positive relationships with them. Like Lando, Han used professional development as an effective method to address ensuring equity for marginalized students, but he targeted the negative perception that surrounded Shiva's CTE department. The negative perception of Shiva's CTE department was particularly troublesome to Han because many marginalized students were interested in and took those courses. Han used professional development to address the negative perception and required teachers to go on industry tours and visit the CTE building (off-campus). Han believed his professional development efforts were the reason CTE enrollment had increased in the last two years.

Possess Core Leadership Traits

To expand the knowledge base and thus reconceptualize social justice consciousness among staff, social justice principals possess core leadership traits, like a passionate vision, to upset the status quo and establish social justice as a priority at their schools (Theoharis, 2009). All four principals demonstrated at least some of the core leadership traits described by Theoharis (2009). Each principal demonstrated "arrogant humility" (Theoharis, 2009) by

acknowledging the positive changes that had occurred under their leadership but insisting that their success was the product of a group effort that included students, staff, and district personnel. Each principal developed a passionate vision concerning equity and used their practices to implement changes they believed made their schools more equitable. Luke's passionate vision centered on increasing inclusive classrooms at Hovito, while Leia's passionate vision concerned technology. Leia understood that many of her Hispanic and students of poverty did not have access to technology outside of the school. Working with her district, she implemented a 1:1 initiative that gave each student at Ra High School computers every school day, but she refused to allow students to take their devices home. Lando's passionate vision centered around improving the technology at Tanis High School. Working with a collaborative team that included teachers and district personnel, Lando wrote a grant that was accepted for \$250,000 and improved the technology throughout Tanis with the money.

Unlike the other principals, however, Han combined his passionate vision with another leadership trait, "tenacious commitment to justice" (Theoharis, 2009), to create a more equitable school. Han had a passionate vision to end the negative perceptions of Shiva's CTE program because he maintained a "fierce commitment to his vision of social justice." (Theoharis, p. 147, 2009). He used professional development to change teacher perceptions of the CTE program, but working with the district, he expanded the CTE programs by adding more equitable transportation to the equation, specifically purchasing two additional buses and hiring two drivers so that students would be able to access the vocational programs more equitably. As a result of Han's vision and practice, the CTE programs experienced a 20% increase in student enrollment, many of them marginalized students.

Advance Inclusion, Access, and Opportunities

All four principals increased academic rigor and provided greater access to opportunities. To help improve ACT scores, Luke implemented ACT “bell ringers” to be completed at the beginning of each block regardless of the course’s subject. Also, Luke created a specific academic support block to give ACT pre and post-tests to determine where students needed more academic supports. With help from the district, Luke created a partnership with a local college to grant certifications to students once they completed Hovito’s health science program. Luke believed the students who completed the program were more competitive in college applications because they already had an industry certification, and thus increased their opportunity for post-secondary education. Luke, however, was the only principal who was frustrated by his inability to increase student learning time. Luke wanted to change from a traditional schedule of seven periods per day to a block scheduling format of four periods a day because he believed it would increase student learning time. While other schools in his district were allowed to adopt the block scheduling format, Hovito was not allowed to adopt the scheduling format.

Han increased academic rigor by creating mandatory tutoring services for students who struggled in certain core academic subjects like math and English. Han’s district provided more than \$40,000 a year for tutoring, but ultimately Han believed the academic rigor of Shiva was maintained by the high quality of tier-one instruction present in every classroom. Likewise, Lando and Leia asserted that academic rigor in their high schools was high because of the quality of base instruction at their schools. Han, Lando, and Leia believed that technology also helped improve both academic rigor and access to opportunities. All three adopted 1:1 initiatives and believed they helped marginalized students, especially students of poverty, have greater access to

academic materials and opportunities provided through the school. Leia, for example, was concerned about her high Hispanic population that did not have access to technology at home. Her impetus for adopting the 1:1 initiative was to give those students a better shot at academic success and opportunities.

Improve the Core Learning Context: The Teaching and Curriculum

All four principals demonstrated practices to improve the core learning context of their schools. Each principal adopted common research-based curricular approaches. For example, tier-one and quality base instruction was cited by all four principals as important to improve the learning at their schools. All four principals believed in empowering teachers to improve the core learning context as well. The least effective principals empowered teachers by including them in leadership decisions, like starting a lunch detention policy at Hovito, and both Luke and Leia “communicated authentically” (Theoharis, 2009) with staff in the hallways, through faculty meeting notes, and over the phone. The most effective principals, however, empowered teachers more by implementing more of their ideas and including them on important school projects. For example, Han implemented morning breakfast, a student clothes closet, and a Christmas present programs because teachers brought him the ideas and he thought they should be implemented. When Lando wanted to change the technology at Tanis, he included teachers in the grant writing process. Lando used grant money to help change the core learning context and offer student opportunities simultaneously. He implemented a 1:1 initiative and expanded CTE courses, both of which Lando believed helped ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students.

Theoharis (2009) contends that one of the most effective practices a principal can use to improve the core learning context is to hire through an equity lens. Three of the four principals included in this study did not hire through an equity lens. One of the least effective principals, Leia, admitted that when she hired teachers, she primarily looked for applicants who had a strong record of high academic achievement. The most effective principal, Han, attempted to change his school by hiring through an equity lens. Han used his hiring practices to influence the teaching and curriculum at Shiva High School. Han replaced about 40% of Shiva's staff since becoming principal, and he believed that his hiring practices were central to the increase of opportunities, specifically dual enrollment and AP courses, and academic success of marginalized students at Shiva.

Create a Climate of Belonging

Three of the four principals included in this study worked to create a climate of belonging. One principal, Leia, who was also one of the least effective principals did not use her practices to create a climate of belonging using Theoharis's (2009) conceptual framework. Leia believed that marginalized students were the same as other students and refused to acknowledge that their needs were any different than others. For example, she insisted that expectations for students were the same whether they could access technology at home or not; something she admitted was a problem for students of poverty. While Leia took bullying very seriously, she only did so after some time had passed with documented evidence of victimization. Leia used peer mediation to address bullying and harassment at Ra High School because she believed that students could reach other students better than adults. She admitted, however, that bullying and harassment were a problem at Ra High School despite her efforts, and she confirmed that threats

of suicide were common at Ra High School, while dismissing suicide threats as something “all of them [students] do.”

The three principals who did use their practices to create a climate of belonging worked at creating a welcoming environment for all students. Luke, Han, and Lando spoke with students and staff in the hallways in a jovial manner, but students and staff also approached them with personal issues in which each principal tried to help. In one instance, Luke took a student to the hospital and stayed with the student until parents could arrive because he believed that his job as principal was to love and care for students. Han announced with celebration the selection of the homecoming queen, a special needs student, in the cafeteria and then purchased a dress for the student to wear. Lando was the only principal to establish a bullying hotline so that student harassment could be reported anonymously and was the only principal who provided free breakfast to all students so students of poverty would not be singled out. All three principals took proactive approaches to discipline. Each principal had uniform discipline policies and stressed the importance of consistency when dealing with discipline, but they also worked with teachers to address discipline proactively. For example, Luke created the “lunch detention list,” where teachers sent names to him concerning a students’ lack of academic progress or missing assignments. Luke ate lunch with students on the “lunch detention list” every day to ensure that students reached the expectations of their teacher(s).

All three principals created a climate of belonging facilitating the creation of student clubs. Lando facilitated the creation of over 20 different student extracurricular clubs at Tanis, and Luke created an EBONY club at Hovito for students of color. The most effective principal, Han, was the only principal included in this study who allowed an LGBTQ club by name on

campus. The communities surrounding Lando and Luke's schools were resistant to an LGBTQ club on campus, and the principals had to adjust their practice accordingly. Lando allowed an LGBTQ club but only under a different name, whereas Luke rejected the club's presence on campus outright even though there were LGBTQ students on campus and, by his admission, some students who were too afraid to identify as LGBTQ.

Theoharis (2009) asserts that reaching out to marginalized families is an effective practice principal could use to increase equity in their schools. Of the four principals included in this study, only the most effective principal, Han, reached out to marginalized families in the community. Han started "Senior Legacy Day," where students from Shiva work with the community to provide whatever they needed for one day. Seniors help local community businesses, while also going to impoverished areas of their communities to deliver food, help complete a housing project, or pick up trash. Han also started "Community Awareness Night," where members of the community viewed student work at Shiva, with an open invitation to everyone. The event is well attended by the community surrounding Shiva, and Han believed it was important to help bring some recognition to the accomplishments of students who are often not pictured in the local newspaper or other media outlets. Finally, to make incoming families feel welcome, Han hosted an 8th-grade night each spring where future students and families were invited to the school so that Han and the guidance counselors could set up "6-year plans" for them. Han believed that it was Shiva's job to prepare students not only for high school but for the years afterward. At the event, Han made it a point to shake every student and their family's hand and have a personal conversation so that they would know he was invested in their child's success.

Raise Student Achievement

All of the principals raised student achievement. Each principal increased access and improved core learning through the introduction of technology or by creating an academic support block during the school day that focused on core subjects like English and math. Lando believed the introduction of technology and ASB (academic support block) were the primary reasons behind increases in student achievement, especially among marginalized student populations. Unlike the most effective principals, Luke and Leia used professional development to address student achievement and ultimately believed that their professional development helped teach and nurture the high expectations that were necessary for student academic growth. Han, however, went a little further in his attempts to raise student achievement than other principals included in this study. He developed multiple levels of academic supports to ensure that students were staying on track and making progress towards graduation. He used technology software, like AnalyzeEd, to help improve ACT scores. He mandated tutoring for all students who struggled in core academic courses. He created programs that tied student responsibility to achievement, like [City Name] Promise, which was a pledge signed by all incoming freshman to graduate in four years. He held parent nights so there would be an open line of communication between parents and teachers about student academic progress. He expanded the CTE program and implemented the GAP program so students outside of academic courses would have a path to industry certifications for job placement after graduation.

Sustain Oneself Professionally and Personally

The practices to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students is difficult, and principals cannot do it on their own. As a result, Theoharis (2009) contends that

social justice principals must be able to sustain themselves professionally and personally or they may leave the profession. All four principals worked to sustain themselves professionally and personally by developing a supportive administration network. Each principal demonstrated great relationships with their assistant principals and delegated responsibilities to them that helped ease their burden of responsibility. Leia and Han distributed leadership responsibilities to their administration teams and head teachers. Whereas Luke and Lando attended almost all of the extracurricular activities at their schools, Leia and Han did not because they delegated those responsibilities to others. Assistant principals frequently spoke with the principals, Luke, Han, and Lando, about school issues and ate with one another in the cafeteria where they continued to discuss school issues. Luke, Han, and Lando had a supportive administrative network that worked with them to implement social justice in their schools. Leia's administrative support, however, was all but absent during the observation and it appeared that Leia handled most of the issues in the school on a day-to-day basis.

Summary

Chapter 4 detailed the within-case analysis of principal practices for social justice and barriers faced by rural principals when practicing social justice at Hovito, Shiva, Tanis, and Ra High Schools. A summary of cross-case findings between the four cases was shared explaining the similarities and differences across case studies. Also, cases were analyzed through the lens of Theoharis's (2009) seven keys to effective social justice leadership. Chapter 5 will outline the discussions and implications of the study and how principals practiced social justice, the barriers they faced when doing so, the differences in social justice practices among principals with

differential outcomes, and the application of Theoharis's (2009) conceptual framework to rural schools.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Studies have examined principal practices to ensure equitable educational opportunities in urban and suburban contexts (Blanksteiin, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Furman & Shields, 2005; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002; Quinn, 2002). Scholars have noted that principal leadership practices that do not prioritize equity have the potential to reduce positive student outcomes (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Birkett et al., 2009; Comer, 1997; Edmonds, 1979; Furman & Shields, 2005; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Riester et al., 2002; Irvine, 1990; Lee, 2002). However, there have been few studies conducted on principal practices for equity in rural contexts and scholars have noted the discrepancy (Brown, 2004; DeMatthews, 2015; Hlalele, 2012; Howley & Eckman, 1997; Larson & Murtadha, 2002a; Riester et al., 2002; Theoharis, 2007). This multi-site case study investigated rural principal practices for promoting socially just leadership for marginalized students. The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What practices do rural high school principals employ to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students?
2. What aspects of rural schools do high school principals perceive hinder the enactment of equity?
3. What are the variations in equity practices for high school rural principals in schools with differential student outcomes?

Rural principal practices and barriers varied from principal to principal but there were common themes shared by all four principals included in this study (see Table 8). In addition,

this study examined the variation in equity practices among rural principals with differential student outcomes through the lens of Theoharis's (2009) seven keys to effective social justice leadership. Only the most effective principals, based on student outcomes, were most closely aligned with the seven keys provided under Theoharis's (2009) framework. This chapter will include a discussion of the findings, the implications of the study and conclude with the recommendations for research.

Discussion

The findings from this study contribute to the field of research in principal leadership, specifically rural principals and their practices to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students. Findings include the following: (1) rural principals expressed the importance of ensuring equitable educational opportunities, but what they articulated was not what they practiced in all circumstances; (2) rural principals professed high expectations for marginalized students, but limited many of these students in some cases to vocational courses from CTE departments; and (3) while Theoharis's (2009) conceptual framework using seven keys to effective social justice leadership was developed using urban schools, not all seven keys aligned with rural contexts, and some keys require amending for application to rural principal practices for social justice. This section will conclude with recommendations for how rural principal practices for social justice should be supported by district, staff, and community members.

Finding One: Actions speak louder than words.

Studies have pointed to Theoharis's (2009) conceptual framework to demonstrate how rural principals profess support for social justice while undermining social justice in schools

through their leadership practices (Albritton, Huffman, & McClellan, 2017; Bishop & McClellan, 2016). Throughout this study, all four principals spoke to the importance of equity in their schools and its positive effect on student outcomes. Their practices, however, were not always socially just. Luke and Leia spoke about the importance of inclusion and opportunities for marginalized students and were proud of their roles in eliminating pullout programs, but there remained students of color and students with disabilities isolated in classes for intervention or remedial instruction. Furthermore, Luke created the “Lunch Detention List” so that teachers could assign students to have lunch with him every day if they were falling behind in their academic progress. The “Lunch Detention List” was a form of pullout program that isolated predominantly marginalized students from their peers. One of the most effective principals, Lando, spoke about ending pullout programs as well, but classrooms remained isolated in different areas of the school for those students in vocational or basic academic courses, many of whom were marginalized, while students, mostly white, took AP or dual enrollment courses. The two groups rarely interacted. The most effective and equitable principal in this study, Han, had completely inclusive classrooms and a mix of courses offerings in every hallway of Shiva.

Studies have shown that students of color have higher student outcomes if there are diverse teachers present at the school (Egalite & Kisida, 2017). All of the schools included in this study were diverse in student demographics compared to other rural schools from the same region. In addition, each principal admitted to almost complete autonomy in hiring staff and to understanding the importance of equity in their leadership practice. Hovito and Ra had one of the highest percentages of students of color of the schools included in this study, yet the faculty was

almost entirely white. The most effective principal included in this study, Han, had the most diverse faculty of the four principals in the study.

Discipline was another area where the principals said one thing but did another. Gregory, Cronell, and Fan (2011) found that students of color had higher rates of suspension at rural schools. Studies have also confirmed the higher rates of discipline in rural schools for immigrant students (Tajalli & Garba, 2014) and LGBTQ students (Albritton, Huffman, & McClellan, 2017). Each principal articulated a uniform discipline policy that aligned with district policies. Furthermore, each principal claimed to treat all students equally and equitably. Data from the state listing the number of suspensions from each school included in this study illustrate a discrepancy between what the principals said and did (see Table 9). While rates of suspension were not available for LGBTQ students, this study confirmed the findings of Gregory, Cronell, and Fan (2011) that students of color have higher rates of suspension at rural schools. Every school included in this study had higher rates of suspension for students of color than white students. Also, each school suspended a significant number of students of poverty (11.7%-35.3%) and students with disabilities (9.3%-34.4%).

Studies using Theoharis's (2009) framework have examined the importance of creating a climate of belonging for positive student outcomes among marginalized student populations in rural schools (Albritton, Huffman, & McClellan, 2017; Auerbach, 2009; Bishop & McClellan, 2016). All four principals expressed a desire for an inclusive school, but some principals demonstrated practices that worked against a climate of belonging. Luke was proud of creating the EBONY club for female students of color at Hovito, while simultaneously not having a teacher sponsor of the club and allowing its description on the school website as a "WHITE

CLUB.” Furthermore, Luke admitted that there were probably more LGBTQ students at Hovito than he realized, but they were too afraid to speak up. Despite this knowledge, Luke continued to refuse the presence of an LGBTQ club on campus. Lando proclaimed the importance of treating all students the same and addressing bullying with his bullying hotline only to mock transgender students in the cafeteria, along with fellow administrators. When LGBTQ clubs came to Leia to ask permission to start an LGBTQ club on campus, Leia refused, claiming that there was no place on campus for non-academic clubs, while allowing a Bass Fishing Club to meet at the school weekly. Leia’s actions, however, seemed to confirm Bishop and McClellan’s (2016) findings that rural principals often excuse their practices towards marginalized students, especially LGBTQ students, because of their moral beliefs. Leia was upfront about her beliefs and how absurd she believed it was that students could be transgender. She viewed a transgender student who needed access to a bathroom as a nuisance, not as her responsibility to nurture and demonstrate care.

Studies have shown the relationship between a climate of belonging to the creation of positive student outcomes for marginalized students (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010; Theoharis, 2009). This study confirmed those findings in that Han led a school while demonstrating “a tenacious commitment” (Theoharis, 2009, pg. 147) to nurturing an inclusive school culture that produced the highest student outcomes of any school included in this study. Auerbach (2009) found that rural social justice principals persevered because they possessed an ethical commitment to the most marginalized. That was the difference between Han and other principals included in this study. Han’s practices to create a climate of belonging stand in stark juxtaposition from the other principals in this study. The other principals spoke of equity

and demonstrated some social justice practices, but for an end that usually involved increasing student achievement. Han, however, spoke of equity and practiced social justice because he believed it was the ethical path for him as a leader. When he served students of poverty breakfast, he did not do so begrudgingly or to receive something in return. He made pancakes with cafeteria workers because he believed that his fundamental job as a leader was to be committed to whatever was best for the students. The job of making pancakes and serving students of poverty breakfast on Thursday mornings was so important to Han that this was prioritized over planning for the governor's visit that afternoon.

Finding Two: Lower expectations.

Scholars have found that high expectations for marginalized students can lead to higher student outcomes (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Landsman & Lewis, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). While studies have shown the importance of high expectations for creating positive student outcomes, they have also noted the struggles of rural schools to foster high expectations (Bryk et al. 2010). One study found that the poor conditions of rural schools create educators with lower expectations who believe that “generational poverty limited personal and institutional horizons to such a degree that social mobility was beyond the school’s capacity to address” (Howley & Howley, 2010, p. 42). Each principal in this study spoke to the importance of high expectations for all students, and on the surface, each principal demonstrated high expectations. All four principals had extensive CTE departments in their schools. Tanis had a multimillion-dollar CTE wing addition built last year, while the remaining schools, Ra, Hovito, and Shiva, all had impressive complexes with over 20 different vocational offerings. Each worked with their districts to finance the CTE programs, and they were proud of the

opportunities that the courses afforded to their marginalized student populations. However, interview responses uncovered some unconscious bias that could affect how they apply their high expectations to certain students. I asked each principal, “What do you think are the most effective practices that you use daily that affect student outcomes for marginalized students?”. Each principal began their answer in the same way: addressing CTE programs and the opportunities they provide marginalized students. Studies have recognized that good intentions for marginalized students are often not enough to overcome the unconscious bias that informs practice (Fiarman, 2016). This study confirmed the findings of unconscious bias regarding high expectations for marginalized students because each principal in the study believed vocational offerings were inherently more valuable to marginalized students than other student demographics.

Finding Three: Application of Theoharis (2009) to rural schools did not always align.

This study was an examination of principal practices for social justice in rural schools. This study used Theoharis’s (2009) seven keys to effective social justice leadership which was developed using urban schools. As mentioned in Chapter 2, however, rural schools are unique. Rural schools are geographically isolated which could present challenges to rural principals because their districts have lower tax bases (Autio & Deussen, 2016; Bauch, 2001). Because rural schools have smaller tax bases, they do not have the same financial resources that urban and suburban schools have resulting in less money for rural principals to provide resources to students and professional development to teachers that emphasize promoting equitable educational opportunities (Carey, 2004; Chalker, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jimerson, 2007). Rural schools also have difficulty retaining staff or hiring more diverse faculty members

because their school districts usually provide lower pay and fewer benefits (Autio & Deussen, 2016; Chalker, 1999; Starr & White, 2008). Also, rural schools are greatly dependent on their surrounding community. Urbanization and globalization of rural communities have exacerbated poor conditions of rural schools to the point that rural teachers feel hopeless in their mission to educate rural students (Howley & Howley, 2010). Studies have underscored the importance of rural school-community partnerships and the role rural principals must take in rural communities unlike their urban and suburban counterparts (Bauch, 2001). An examination of the four principals indicated that Han, the most socially just and effective principal, was the only principal with several levels of support: district, community, and staff. Therefore, looking at the student outcomes, a main finding of this study is that social justice practices in rural schools cannot be limited to the person that is the principal.

Furthermore, in rural schools because of the nature of their operation, there must be additional supports to successfully work for social justice. As a result, I offer an additional aspect to Theoharis's (2009) seven keys to effective social justice leadership which would apply to effective social justice leadership in rural schools. The additional aspects added does not negate the seven keys provided by Theoharis (2009) but adds an additional consideration for rural schools. My additions to Theoharis's (2009) seven keys to effective social justice leadership are illustrated in Figure 2.

In addition to Theoharis's (2009) seven keys to effective social justice leadership for application to rural schools:

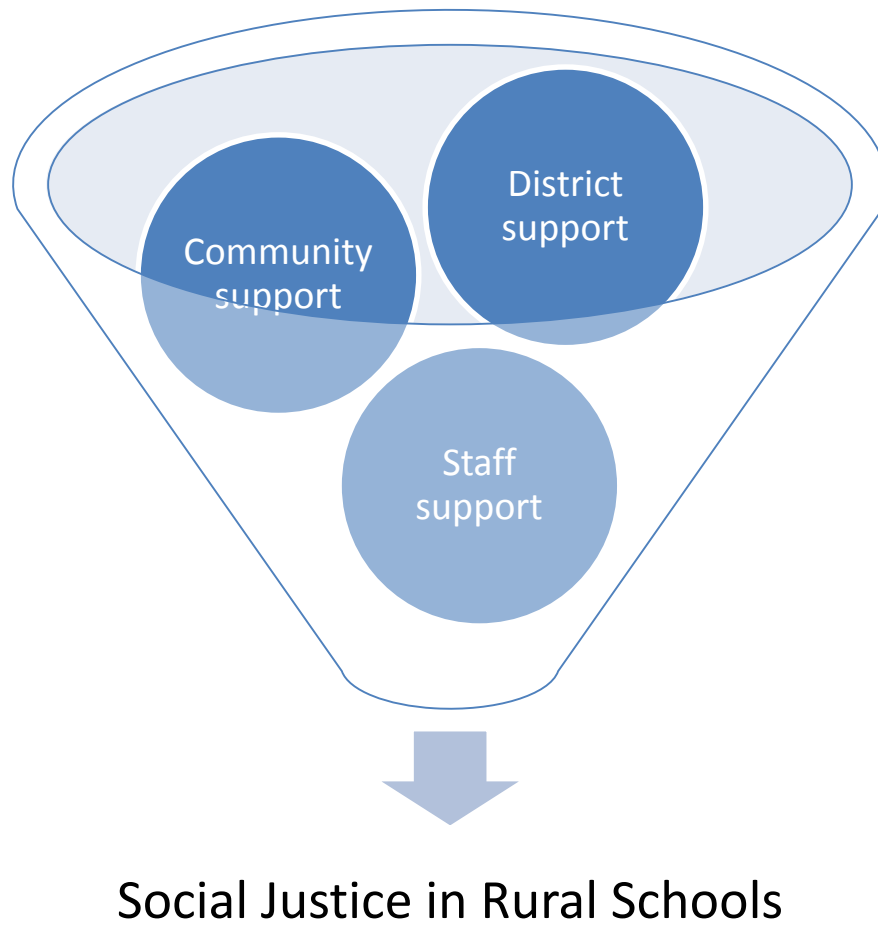


Figure 2: Additions to Theoharis (2009) Social Justice Framework for Application to Rural Schools

District Support

The most effective principals in this study worked collaboratively with their districts to implement strategies that ensured equitable opportunities for all students. The most effective principals also came from city school systems, in which, they were the only high schools funded through their district office. City systems generally have more funds at their disposal for education because of their large tax bases compared to county school systems, and that was the case in this study. Han and Lando benefitted from those additional financial resources by working collaboratively with their district to address areas of need. Lando worked with his district to provide free breakfast to all students so students of poverty would not be singled out. The district had the extra financial resources to grant his request, whereas many other rural school districts, like Luke's, did not have the funds to do so. Also, when Lando wanted to write a grant to update the technology at Tanis, the district sent him personnel to help with the process.

Han and Lando were given autonomy from their districts to choose professional development for staff, in which, both Han and Lando chose social justice offerings to address areas of concern regarding equity in their schools. Studies have shown that social justice professional development offerings at rural schools could lead to high student outcomes among marginalized students (Bishop & McClellan, 2016). In contrast, Luke and Leia had to provide professional development that centered on raising student achievement and did not demonstrate collaborative relationships with their districts. Luke wanted to change from a traditional schedule to a block scheduling format, and even though other schools in his district had block scheduling, Luke's request was denied by his district. Luke seemed personally committed to social justice, and he took pride in the gains he thought Hovito had made regarding social justice since he

became principal, and he seemed frustrated by the district's approach to professional development and the financial limitations that limited the number of teachers he could hire and courses he could create.

Overall, Han displayed the best collaborative relationship with his district in the form of professional development offerings, more academic support structures for students, and a commitment to serving all students at Shiva High School. Because of the respectful relationship Han had with his district, he was empowered to ensure social justice in a way other principal included in this study were not. When Han wanted to provide more equitable transportation to the CTE building on campus to give more opportunities to marginalized students, his district provided the money. When Han wanted to provide more academic help to struggling marginalized students, the district purchased AnalyzeEd and allocated over \$40,000 for Han to provide before and after tutoring services. When Han wanted to address the students who “fall through the cracks” and didn't graduate, many who were marginalized, the district worked with Han to create the GAP program so students could receive industry certifications and have another path to graduation. One reason Shiva was the most socially just school in this study was because of Han's collaborative relationship with his district, a relationship that was not present in other schools. District support directly impacted the practices of rural principals included in this study. The more district support was present, the more likely the principals were to practice social justice in their leadership. As a result, a missing component of Theoharis's (2009) framework with its application to rural schools is district support and its role in helping facilitate social justice during school hours.

Community Support

Other studies have underscored the importance of community support in rural schools for the presence of social justice using Theoharis's (2009) framework (Auerbach, 2009). Other studies have shown that rurality can negatively impact rural schools and create conditions "that make the social exclusion of already marginalized groups that much more likely" (Burton Brown, & Johnson, 2013, p. 35). Bauch (2001) identified several effective principal community leadership behaviors that help in the development of positive student outcomes in rural schools including the encouragement of parent involvement, facilitation of school-business-agency relationships, and using the community as a curricular resource. The most effective principal in this study, Han, demonstrated all three behaviors described by Bauch (2001) whereas others did not. Compared to other principals included in this study, Han created multiple opportunities for parental involvement at Shiva High School. Han believed the parental events helped to create a valuable partnership between the home and school, which may be related to higher student outcomes. Han facilitated "school-business-agency relationships" (Bauch, 2001, p. 34) by using professional development to send teachers on industry tours to raise awareness of employment opportunities in the community. In addition, Han used the community as a curricular resource by creating school-business partnerships that worked with teachers in the CTE department of Shiva. Also, Han created "Senior Legacy Day" where students are sent by Shiva into the community to complete service projects. By creating a partnership with the community, Han built up social capital and trust within the community regarding his leadership practices. This could be one explanation for why Han's community was more accepting of Han's practices to ensure social justice for marginalized students unlike other communities included in this study.

Community support had a large effect on the social justice practices of principals included in this study. Luke, Lando, and Leia all had relationships with their communities but not in the same way that Han had developed with his community. Community relationships seemed secondary to Luke, Lando, and Leia, while Han viewed his partnerships with the community as an important part of his leadership practice. Luke, Lando, and Leia all believed that their communities would react negatively to an LGBTQ club on campus because of their conservative, religious beliefs. Lando did allow an LGBTQ club on campus but only under a different name, while Luke and Leia used the community excuse to prohibit the club completely. better relationships with the communities that surrounded their schools might have built up social capital and trust regarding their leadership decisions. However, there was a difference between Luke and Leia, who both did not have an LGBTQ club on campus. Luke wanted a club but believed the community would not accept it, while Leia did not want the club on campus because of her religious beliefs and used the community perspective as an excuse to prohibit it. There is a fundamental difference between the two, in that, Luke at least wants to practice social justice for LGBTQ students, while it can be assumed Leia would never have had a desire to practice social justice for LGBTQ students, regardless of context. Overall, Han was the only principal who allowed an LGBTQ club on campus and there were transgender students at Shiva who participated in public events for the school, like drama plays or chorus performances. Han did not have negative opinions from the community regarding either. The clubs' presence on campus and transgender students' inclusion in public events demonstrated Han's ethical commitment to social justice, but also the importance of community support for social justice in rural schools for equitable opportunities to be present. For the schools included in this study, the

more community support was evident, the more social justice practices the principal used. Therefore, a missing component of Theoharis's (2009) framework with its application to rural schools is community support and its role in helping to facilitate social justice during school hours.

Staff Support

Literature underscores the importance of leadership and staff support for marginalized student populations (DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Furman & Shields, 2005). Specifically, rural principals face challenges concerning staff support when working to ensure equity for marginalized students (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2002a, 2007). Findings from this study seem to confirm the importance of staff support to the practice of ensuring equitable educational opportunities. One of the least effective principals in the study, Luke, had several problems concerning staff support. When Luke implemented his plan to end pullout programs, his staff resisted. They complained that the inclusion of either students into their classes would slow down the pace of the curriculum and put teachers behind in delivering content. Convincing his staff that the changes were good was a lengthy process, and they did eventually embrace the change, but only after their experiences in the classroom alleviated some of their fears. Also, Luke was proud of his uniform discipline policy, but teachers were observed reprimanding students of color for dress code violations of which many white students were also in violation. Lando wanted Tanis to better prepare its students for post-secondary opportunities, so he implemented a college readiness initiative. Staff members were resistant to the initiative; however, because research articles about how college readiness initiatives don't improve schools were highlighted and publicly displayed in the teachers' lounge. Also, staff was upfront with

Lando about their displeasure concerning professional development by arguing with him in the hallway, and in some ways, pushed back against Lando's professional development priorities by displaying papers publicly in the teachers' lounge that spoke against professional development topics used by Lando and his district. Leia was open about how she did not allow an LGBTQ club on campus because of her own beliefs and the reaction of the community. Leia also stated, however, that she could not have the LGBTQ club at school because there would be staff resistance, and no one would sponsor the club.

The most effective and socially just principal, Han, had staff support and worked collaboratively with his staff in ways that the other principals included in this study did not. Many of the social justice practices that he developed at Shiva, like the Thursday morning breakfast, clothes closet, or Christmas presents for students of poverty were the ideas of teachers that he implemented. In general, Han had a better professional and personal relationship with his staff, and consequently, they were receptive to his social justice practices. The other principals included in this study, especially Luke and Lando because they seemed more ethically committed to the cause of social justice, could benefit from involving their staff more in leadership and school decisions. By delegating more responsibility to staff, like Han, perhaps Luke and Lando could improve staff support that would result in greater acceptance of the social justice practices. Therefore, again like district and community support, this study seemed to confirm that staff support for rural principals was important to the practice of social justice. Therefore, a missing component of Theoharis's (2009) framework with its application to rural schools is staff support and its role in helping facilitate social justice during school hours.

Implications

The findings from the study have implications for rural principals who wish to improve equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in their schools and promote more positive student outcomes.

All rural principals included in this study believed their practices worked to ensure equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students, but this study's findings have indicated that not all of the principals' practices were socially just, demonstrating lower expectations for marginalized students. In addition, all of the rural principals insisted that there were not any problems with equity in their schools, but suspension of marginalized student populations was higher than their peers, according to discipline data provided by their state's department of education. The implications of this are similar to other studies completed on rural principal social justice practices (Bishop & McClellan, 2016), in that, rural principals perceived that their practices helped facilitate social justice for marginalized students when their practices in some cases did not.

The most socially just principal in this study, Han, used professional development to help provide education to administration and staff about social justice and its importance. The implication from this finding informs rural principals of the need for social justice professional development for administrations and staff to raise awareness of what social justice is and looks like in a school setting. By increasing education and awareness about social justice, staff could better recognize what practices are or are not ensuring equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students. In addition, through social justice professional development, rural principals understand what social justice practices look like in leadership practice, how to

recognize any prejudicial practices, and work to correct them. Moreover, this study has implications for rural principals in the importance of working with their districts to provide socially just oriented professional development offerings to their staff members. Instead of offering professional development that addresses the immediate need of improving student outcomes, implementing professional development that encourages empathy and opportunities for marginalized students would go further in increasing student achievement.

The study's findings also highlight the challenges of rural principalship. Rural principals must deal with a scope of responsibility, limited financial resources, staff turnover, and outside factors that often work against their practices in the school. Rural principals who ensure social justice do so because they are ethically committed to their students, not because there are outside factors that force them to do so. Han practiced social justice because he was ethically committed to marginalized students, but his practices were aided by outside factors that were not present in the other three schools included in this study. District, community, and staff support are essential for rural principals to enact social justice practices. Specifically, Han developed a cooperative relationship with the community surrounding Shiva High School. As a result of their cooperative relationship, the community trusted Han's leadership decisions resulting in Han's implementation of social justice practices that would not have been accepted by the communities of other schools included in this study. The implications of this are that rural principals must be school and community leaders. Rural principals must be highly visible and accessible for the community to trust their leadership decisions. This implication is similar to the findings of Bauch (2001), and Budge (2006), who found that rural communities are more trusting and rural schools produce more positive student outcomes if the principal is a community leader. Rural principals

should work to create community partnerships that seek to involve community stakeholders in the school so that they relate the school's success to the communities' success.

Han had district support for his social justice practices whereas other principals with lower student outcomes did not. However, one principal, Lando, who had the second highest student outcomes of the principals included in this study, also had district support similar to Han's. Specifically, Han and Lando were both principals of high schools in city systems. As a result, they did not have to share financial resources with other high schools and their tax bases were larger than the other two rural schools included in this study. Studies have underscored the financial disadvantage many rural schools face because of the lower tax base in sparsely populated communities (Autio & Deussen, 2016; Bauch, 2001). Also, because they were the singular high schools in their districts, they received more specialized instruction and developed a more cooperative relationship with their districts. The implications of this are that rural principals have more financial resources to address equity in their schools if they come from a city school system or a district with a larger tax base. Rural principals do not need financial resources to use socially just practices, but financial resources provide more academic and social supports to ensure equitable educational opportunities for student populations, including marginalized students. Implications from this study point to the need for rural principals to work closely with their districts to ensure that social justice is a priority. Rural principals should develop a cooperative relationship with their districts and advocate for social justice priorities.

Unlike other principals included in this study, Han developed a supportive and cooperative relationship with his staff which supported his social justice practices. Studies have underscored the pessimism surrounding rural school teachers as a result of urbanization and lack

of resources (Howley & Howley, 2010; Johnson, 2013). Specifically, rural teachers often feel hopeless in their abilities to increase student outcomes for their students (Johnson, 2013). Rural principals must motivate rural teachers by developing a cooperative relationship and allowing for shared leadership decisions. By developing a supportive network among staff and administration, rural principals can better facilitate discussions about social justice practices and their importance to promoting more positive student outcomes.

This study indicted a possible link between socially just leadership in rural schools and more positive student outcomes. While student achievement data was used to choose the samples included in this study, the most effective principal had higher student outcomes. This does not necessarily reflect causation but does indicate a possible link between social justice leadership and student outcomes similar to other social justice scholarship (Blanksteiin, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Furman & Shields, 2005; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002; Quinn, 2002).

Recommendations for Research

This study sought to investigate rural principal practices for social justice, the barriers they encountered when practicing social justice, and the differential student outcomes of rural principals who practiced social justice. While there has been research on rural principal practices for social justice (Bishop & McClellan, 2016; Gholson, 2015), there are only a few research studies on the phenomenon. While this study added to the literature on the phenomenon, more research is needed for a better understanding of rural principal practices for social justice to inform principal practice. Specifically, future researchers should look to expand understanding of social justice practices and their practical uses in rurality. While much of social justice

scholarship is theoretical or focused on urban or suburban contexts, rural principals need practical applications of social justice to help them meet the federal mandate of ensuring equitable opportunities for marginalized students.

Shiva and Tanis High Schools were both schools in city school systems compared to Hovito and Ra High Schools which were both high schools in county systems. Shiva and Tanis produced higher student outcomes than the two rural schools from the county system, and their principals were generally more socially just. A similar study investigating rural principal practices for social justice but specifically the differences between rural schools in city systems versus county systems would be valuable. In addition, rural schools that produced the highest student outcomes also provided more professional development opportunities focused on social justice. A study of social justice professional development offered in rural schools underscoring the differences in student outcomes would be valuable as well. Likewise, a study comparing the financial resources available to rural principals, their social justice practices, and differences between student outcomes would be valuable.

The importance of outside supports, specifically district, community, and staff, became evident during the data collection of this study. There is little research completed on rural principal leadership for social justice, specifically the importance of outside factors aiding their social justice practices. This constitutes a significant gap in the literature, and studies addressing the phenomenon would help expand the scholarship concerning rural principals, their leadership practices, and social justice in rural schools.

This study found a link between social justice leadership and positive student outcomes. Exploring the link using quantitative analysis could better reveal the effects of social justice

leadership across schools and provide more information about the link between social justice and student outcomes.

Concluding Thoughts

Ensuring equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students is mandated by the Department of Education and will continue to be a priority goal for the foreseeable future. As rural communities have urbanized and more marginalized families move into rural schools, principals are told to lead for social justice and create more opportunities and positive student outcomes for marginalized students with little instruction on how to do so. This is problematic because there is little practical scholarship that has examined how rural principals practice social justice and what practices are most effective to ensuring equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in rural contexts. Regardless, with each academic year, expectations of student outcomes grow higher and rural principals are expected to meet the bar.

The goal of this study was to illustrate the specific practices rural principals could use to help their schools. I am confident that by highlighting the practices and barriers faced by rural principals in this study through the lens of Theoharis's (2009) seven keys to effective social justice leadership will provide helpful steps rural principals could take to increase equity in their schools immediately. Future research should build from this study with the focus of providing practical applications of social justice in rural schools because there is scant existing literature and because the impetus of educational leadership scholarship is to improve the educational systems that serve students, including those often most forgotten: rural, marginalized students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Introduction Letter to Principals

To All Principals:

I would like to invite you to an interview examining the rural principal practices for marginalized students. The research is being conducted by Alex Oldham, a Ph.D. candidate from the University of Tennessee, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department.

Before collecting any information from you, I must receive your signed consent. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on either your current status or your future relations with your employer or this project. There are minimal risks for participation in this study as your identity and information provided will be kept confidential and held on by me. If you agree to participate in this research, please complete the signed consent form attached to this email.

Following your agreement to participate in the study, you will be sent an email to gather demographic information. Gathering together demographic information before our interview will save you time and help the interview process run smoother. The information will not be linked to individual principals in any way, even if you choose to participate in personal interviews. All identifiable information will be kept confidential throughout the duration of this project and no one except me will have access to any of your responses. The questions should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Questions asked include information on your background as a principal and how long you have lived, if ever, in a rural community. In addition, a list of researched factors, in no specific order, that affect the education of marginalized students has been provided. Please rank, in order, from most impactful to the least impactful, issues in school that affect marginalized students. If you believe any of the following does not apply, please respond with "NA".

If you have any questions or would like more information about this project, please contact Alex Oldham (aoldham5@vols.utk.edu) or 615-448-7510. If you have any question about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at the University of Tennessee at 865-974-3466.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely

Alex Oldham

Ph.D. Candidate

The University of Tennessee

Appendix B

Demographic Information Email sent to Principals

[Date]

Dear [Principal],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study investigating the principal practices in rural settings that address equity for marginalized students. Before our initial interview, I would like to get some demographic information from you to save some time for both of us when we meet in person. Please return the information via email to me by [exact date].

1. How old are you?
2. How many years have you been a principal?
 - a. What is your background in education? Was it your major in college?
3. Do you live in the same community as majority of the students in your school?
 - a. Did you attend a rural high school?
 - b. Were you raised in a rural environment?
4. If possible, please tell me what specific measures, if any, that your school has implemented to better serve marginalized students.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to our in-person interview.

Alex Oldham

Ph.D. Candidate

The University of Tennessee

Appendix C

Principal Interview Protocol

The purpose of this study is to investigate how rural high school principals ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. I will ask you about how you address the needs of marginalized students. For the purpose of this study and interview, the term marginalized students will be used to indicate students who are designated as LGBTQ, students of color, students of poverty, and immigrants. In addition, positive student outcomes for this study are defined as increased rates of academic achievement and post-secondary enrollment, as a result of increased participation by these students in advanced educational opportunities, for example AP classes and college visits, provided by schools.

1. What, in your opinion, is the greatest single challenge to being a principal at a rural school?
 - a. How much autonomy do you have when it comes to leadership decisions for the schools?
 - i. I will probe for further detail and specificity regarding leadership autonomy in hiring teachers, providing professional development, teacher compensation, discipline, and school goals/mission
2. What do you think are the most effective practices that you use daily that affect student outcomes for marginalized students?
3. How does ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students relate to your school's vision?
4. To what degree has the district assisted you in ensuring equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students?
5. What are the biggest challenges of leading to ensure equity for marginalized students in your school?
 - a. To what degree, if any, has your perspective changed on leadership practices due to your experiences with marginalized students?
6. Tell me about some of the things you have done to help lead your teachers to ensure equity for all students?
 - a. Probe for further comment on influencing teacher practice in the classroom to promote equity, and whether they have been successful in doing so

7. What interactions have occurred between the school and community concerning the promotion of equitable opportunities for all students?
 - a. Has the community reacted either positively or negatively to the school's efforts to promote equity for all students?
 - i. Probe for further detail concerning interactions between school and community regarding marginalized students
8. To what degree are students accepting of marginalized students at your school?
 - a. Probe for further detail concerning any incidents involving students and marginalized students
9. How have your efforts to provide equity for marginalized students affected the school, the students, and their learning?
10. If you were given the choice between accepting a position as an administrator at a rural school with a greater degree of marginalized students and urban school with a more homogenous population, which school would you choose?
 - a. Why?
 - i. Probe for further detail about why the choice was made
11. What advice would you give to other rural principals who are addressing equity for all students?
 - a. To a new principal taking the helm at a rural school, is there anything specific you would advise him/her about in regards to marginalized students?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about ensuring equity for marginalized students and its implementation in rural schools?

Appendix D

Observation Protocol

Based on Theoharis, G. (2009). *The school leaders our school children deserve: Seven keys to equity, social justice, and school reform*. Teachers College Press, NY.

Social Justice Leader Characteristics	Frequency Count	Observation notes
Places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect and understanding of that diversity		
Ends segregated and pull-out programs that block both emotional and academic success for marginalized students		
Strengthens core teaching and curriculum and insures that diverse students have access to that core		
Embeds professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make sense of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability		
Knows that school cannot be great until the students with the greatest struggles are given the same rich academic, extracurricular, and social opportunities as those enjoyed by their more privileged peers		

Demands that every child will be successful but collaboratively addresses the problems of how to achieve that success

Builds and leads coalitions by bringing together various groups of people to further agenda (families, community organizations, staff, students) and seeks out other activist administrators who can and will sustain her/him
Builds a climate in which families, staff, and students belong and feel welcome

Sees all data through the lens of equity

Knows that building community, collaboration, and differentiation are tools for ensuring that all students achieve success together

Combines structures that promote inclusion and access to improved teaching and curriculum within a climate of belonging

Beyond working hard, becomes intertwined with the school's success and life

VITA

Alex Nathan Oldham was born in Gallatin, Tennessee and resides in Maryville, Tennessee. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in History in 2008 from Lee University. After graduating in 2008, he immediately began a job as a high school history teacher at 22 years old. He earned his Masters in Arts in Education degree from Cumberland University and his Master of Arts in History from Western Kentucky University. During his decade of experience in the classroom, Alex taught AP European History, AP United States History, AP Human Geography, English 11, American Government, and United States History. During this time, Alex also taught as an adjunct professor at several colleges including Lincoln Memorial University, Volunteer State Community College, Walters State Community College, and Rowan Cabarrus Community College. In 2019, Alex completed his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education with a concentration in Leadership Studies from the University of Tennessee.