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# Perceptions of Administrators in Facilitating Change and Establishing a Positive School Culture in a New School

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Elizabeth Anne Gotcher entitled "Perceptions of Administrators in Facilitating Change and Establishing a Positive School Culture in a New School." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

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Perceptions of Administrators in Facilitating Change and  
Establishing a Positive School Culture in a New School

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Elizabeth Anne Gotcher

May 2017

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## **ABSTRACT**

This narrative inquiry examined the perceptions of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive culture in a new school. This study was guided by the theoretical framework of Lewin's (1951) force field theory. Data were collected qualitatively through interviews with six administrators who led the opening of the new school. The time period for the study focused prior to the school opening and throughout the first year the new school was opened. Data revealed administrators facilitated change in a new school through establishing trust, blending of staff, and the leadership attributes of the administrator. Administrators built a positive culture by demonstrating a commitment to creating buy-in, developing a vision, and strategically hiring. Implications for practitioners and policy makers regarding the opening of new schools were also discussed. Recommendations for future studies involving new schools were proposed.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2015), between the 2001-2002 school year and 2011-2012 school year, there was an increase of approximately 4,200 public schools in the United States. Between the years 1985-2013, public school enrollment rose 26% from 39.4 million to a record enrollment of 49.8 million (NCES, 2015). The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) projects continued record levels of student enrollment in U.S. public schools increasing from 49.8 million students in 2013 to a projected enrollment of 52.1 million in 2023. This increase in student enrollment will require opening many new public schools. Each new school creates significant changes that impacts administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Administrators will face challenges of helping teachers successfully transition to a new school environment, establishing new routines and traditions, and building a positive school culture. The manner in which school stakeholders respond to the challenges of the change that opening a new school can bring will impact students, teachers, administrators, parents, support staff, and even the broader community.

Organizational change is inevitable and at times can be significant. Teachers and administrators are certainly not immune to organizational change and must frequently adapt to change. Adapting to the change of opening a new school requires a significant amount of time and planning, from developing the curriculum and configuring schedules to planning bus routes and managing traffic flow. Administrators, teachers, and students from many different schools come together as one school, each with their culture and their own way of managing day to day procedures. Procedures, expectations, or schedules may be different from what teachers and administrators were accustomed at their previous school which may present challenges. Fullan

(2001a) concurred that change agents will face challenges moving individuals away from entrenched conventions to adopt new and unfamiliar routines.

When opening a new school, the beginning of a new school year can set the tone and culture of a school for the entire school year. According to George and Tipperman (1983), “the success of a new principal depends largely on what happens at the beginning of the school year” (p. 66). George and Tipperman also stressed the impact of events at the beginning of the year because at the start of the year an administrator is striving to build relationships with teachers which affects school culture for the entire year and sets the tone for the willingness of the faculty to work together. Uniting all stakeholders within a new school is by no means an easy task. Helmbreck (2002) summed up the challenges in designing and building a successful new school by stating that, “Creating a physical space that nurtures students, satisfies teachers, pleases parents, and projects a sense of what the school wants to be can become a difficult, expensive and, sometimes divisive process” (p. 11).

As a result, the manner in which the change process during the opening of a new school is implemented becomes extremely important. Research supports the value of teachers developing positive, nurturing relationships and working with one another to create a positive school culture (Coatney, 2004; Franks, 2004; Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011; Sparks, 2004). Therefore, planning upfront to consider the culture of a new school is necessary. In addition, administrators play a major role in facilitating and managing elements of change that occur within a school (Glover, 2007; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Martin, Shafer, & Kragler, 2009; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). In fact, Glover (2007) suggested it is the moral responsibility of an administrator to explore and examine areas of change with teachers. Therefore, the role of

an administrator in influencing change, overcoming challenges, and establishing a positive school culture when opening a new school is studied in this research.

According to Sergiovanni (1991), within every school are rules which are considered norms that define what is right, acceptable, and is expected. When striving to understand how these norms develop and work, the metaphor of culture can be beneficial. Sergiovanni (1991) described school culture as a “reflection of the shared values, beliefs, and commitments of school members” (p. 3). In addition, Schein (1985) felt the term culture “should be reserved for the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization and that operate unconsciously” (p. 6). The concept of culture is necessary to consider based on the influence it can have on individuals. Sergiovanni concurred in that the dimensions of culture are significantly more likely to direct what individuals think and do than is the official management system. Positive cultures have also been shown to have an influence on students’ academic success. For example, healthy and strong school cultures correlate strongly with higher student achievement and motivation as well as with teacher productivity and satisfaction (Stolp, 1994).

While researchers agree on the importance of establishing a positive school culture and the role of the administrator in facilitating change there is a lack of research examining specifically how administrators do this in a new school. Sarason (1996) proposed that a barrier to understanding school culture and how it develops is the lack of systematic, detailed, and objective descriptions of the natural history examining the change process in schools. This study will address that barrier by providing rich descriptions of the development of school culture in new school settings.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Challenges and barriers associated with change as well as strategies to aid teachers moving through the change process have been supported in the research literature (Boody, 2008; Briscoe, 1991; Coatney, 2007; Franks, 2004; Margolis & Nage, 2006; Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011; Sparks, 2004). In addition, research supports the influence of administrators in facilitating change in their schools (Glover, 2007; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Martin, Shafer, & Kragler, 2009; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). However, as Sarason (1996) and Ryan (2010) point out, there is little research existing on new schools. More specifically, there is a dearth of literature on an administrator's influence on facilitating change during the opening of a new school and establishing a positive school culture. The process of opening a new school is one in which an administrator plays a vital role and needs to be examined further.

Although there is substantial literature addressing the concept of change and teacher change in general there is a lack of research and analyses describing new schools and the building of culture (Sarason, 1996). Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings (2011) recognized the need and importance for research to capture the story of building a new school culture from inception through implementation from involved stakeholders' perspectives. To tell their story, Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings formed a faculty writing group to describe the process of building culture in the school from an autobiographical viewpoint. This study will continue to address this gap by allowing the voice of administrators to be heard regarding how they built school culture in the new school. In addition, describing experiences from administrators in multiple newly opened schools allows for comparisons across new schools.

Sarason (1996) emphasized there are unique challenges that administrators face when opening a new school. For example, in a new school setting administrators must spend a



majority of their time on housekeeping issues such as creating master schedules, ordering textbooks and furniture, and interviewing personnel (Sarason, 1996). Within a new school, administrators face the challenge of establishing new routines and procedures. This example of “change undermines existing structural arrangements, creating ambiguity, confusion, and distrust. People no longer know what is expected of them or what they can expect from others” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 383). In addition, administrators face the challenge of developing a positive school culture in a new school environment. According to Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings (2011), team culture within a school changes when team members change. With the opening of a new school year, the culture for teachers changes with groups of teachers coming together for the first time. Rhodes, Steven, and Hemmings pointed out that once team culture changes, if the culture is not rebuilt it will weaken or tear. Instead, the old and new cultures need to be weaved together in a deliberate manner which fosters trust and builds community. A clearer, more detailed understanding of how these challenges are overcome to build a positive culture is needed and will help to break down the barrier as Sarason (1996) suggested to have a deeper understanding of culture.

The administrator plays a significant role in creating a positive culture within a new school. In fact, Habegger (2008) stressed that while all the roles and responsibilities of a principal are important, building a positive school culture is imperative. Administrators also face the challenge of bringing a group of teachers together for the first time. Therefore, an administrator who is opening a new school must plan professional development opportunities for teachers who are coming from different schools to learn to work together and develop the culture of their new school (Martin, Shafer, & Kragler, 2009). While research has shown the challenges for administrators when opening a new school, there is a lack of research providing first-hand

narratives of administrators' experiences overcoming these challenges and building a positive culture within a new school. Therefore, this study addresses the gap in literature on new schools (Ryan, 2010; Sarason, 1996) by specifically focusing on the experiences of administrators during the first year of the new school.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry of administrators who led the opening of new schools was to examine the perceptions of administrators in how they facilitate change and establish a positive culture when opening a new school. The experiences of the administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive school culture prior to the school opening and throughout the first year of the school were examined.

### **Research Questions**

This research utilized a qualitative narrative inquiry design which investigated the role of administrators during the opening of a new school.

To achieve the purpose of the study, the research was guided by the two research questions below:

1. How do administrators perceive they facilitate change when opening a new school?
2. How do administrators establish a positive school culture when opening a new school?

### **Definitions of the Terms**

To better understand this study, a definition of key terms will be provided. This research study was conducted using the following definitions.

1. Change: The context for change for this study will be the change experienced firsthand by the administrators when opening a new school. The participants were each either an administrator of the new school the first year the school opened.

2. School culture: The culture of an organization is observed through the assumptions, beliefs, expectations, traditions, and routines that make up the norm of the organization (Eaker & Keating, 2008; Peterson & Deal, 1998). A culture is created over time as individuals work together, solve problems, and overcome challenges (Peterson & Deal, 1998).
3. Positive school culture: In a positive school culture, there is a shared sense of purpose, fundamental norms are collegiality, improvement, and hard work, student rituals and traditions celebrate student achievement, teacher innovation, and parental commitment, and success, joy, and humor flourish (Peterson & Deal, 1998).
4. New school: In this study, new school referred to a school that was within its three years of being opened for the first time. New school does not refer to schools that had undergone reconstitution or refurbishment.
5. Administrator: For the purposes of this study, the administrator was defined as the leader of the school who is responsible for day to day decision making within the school. In this study, administrator may include a principal or assistant principal.
6. Blending: Bringing staffs from multiple different schools together to create a unified staff at the new school. This study examined the role the administrator played in facilitating this change.

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

#### **Delimitations**

The researcher has identified certain delimitations that define this study. Participants in the study were delimited to the administrators at the new schools which were directly involved in the study. The study was delimited to a purposeful sample of administrators in one southeastern

state of the United States who led schools that were within three years of being opened. Multiple administrators were selected to allow for cross-case analysis of the data and to examine the data for common themes among the participants. The study was delimited to schools in one southeastern state based on the location of newly opened schools. Since this research only examined administrators in one southeastern state the findings cannot be generalized to all administrators in the United States. In addition, the findings represent a small sample of new schools and cannot be generalized to all new schools.

### **Limitations**

There are clear limitations to this study. First, a limitation to this study is it is solely qualitative in manner. More specifically, the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection as opposed to an inanimate mechanism such as a survey in a quantitative study (Eisner, 1991; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990; Lincoln & Gubba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). As Merriam (2009) pointed out the human instrument has limitations and biases that could impact the study. These biases need to be identified and monitored throughout the study. In addition, there is a limitation to the collection of data which occurred through interviews. Interviews were only conducted with the administrators of the new school. Therefore, their perceptions could be different than those of the teachers within the same school. In addition, the researcher did not spend any time in the school to observe any aspects of the culture of the school. The description of the culture of the new school is only from the perspective of the administrator. Finally, since, the opening of the new schools happened in the past, there is the possibility of the administrator misremembering information.

## **Significance of the Study**

Few studies are found on new schools specifically focusing on the influence of administrators while opening a new school. This study will address that gap by examining the role of administrators in facilitating change when opening a new school. In addition, the study describes the experiences of administrators in striving to build a positive culture in a new school setting and the influences of these strategies on the school's culture. A deeper understanding of the change process associated with opening a new school will benefit administrators who find themselves in similar positions to gain knowledge of approaches fellow administrators found to be both successful and unsuccessful. Administrators can implement strategies used by administrators in this study to develop a positive culture within their own new school. The study can also make administrators aware of potential challenges to building a positive school culture through the challenges faced by administrators in this study.

In addition, the results of this study are significant because they can be useful for school districts that are in the planning or implementation process of opening a new school to see approaches used by other schools in the same situation. This study can also be beneficial for teachers if their administrator uses the experiences of these administrators as a guide when opening their new school. Therefore, this study is significant for administrators, teachers, and school system leaders to provide a deeper understanding of the administrator's role in facilitating change when opening a new school and how an administrator establishes a positive school culture. Finally, this study will contribute to the literature by addressing a gap regarding the experiences and challenges faced by administrators who are opening a new school. Sarason (1996) pointed out the need for systematic and detailed studies to better understand the development of school culture. This study will add needed research describing the first-hand

accounts of administrators who have experienced the process of opening and leading a new school.

### **Organization of the Study**

In Chapter 1, an introduction and overview of the research was provided including the problem, purpose, and significance of the research along with limitations and delimitations. Research questions and definitions of key terms within the study were also explained. In Chapter 2, a review of current literature examined the administrator's role in facilitating change, creating a positive culture, barriers to creating positive culture, and experiences of opening a new school. The theoretical framework of Lewin's (1951) force field theory was used as a lens to examine this research study. Next, Chapter 3 explains the methodology chosen to implement this study. A qualitative research method was chosen, and data collection occurred through in-depth interviews. Chapter 3 includes a detailed explanation of the methods used to collect data for this study. Following an explanation of methodology, data analysis is discussed in Chapter 4 on the administrators studied in this research. The results of the interviews were qualitatively examined within each case and also through cross-case analysis to determine common themes by all administrators. After analyzing the results, Chapter 5 involved a discussion of the results of the study through the lens of the theoretical framework. Finally, a discussion of implications for policy makers and practitioners as well as recommendations based on the results of this study for future studies took place.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To achieve the goal of examining the experiences of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive culture when opening a new school, it is necessary to first explore the literature describing the role of administrators in facilitating change, the building of school culture, and experiences of opening a new school. This literature provided the foundation for the research questions which guide this study including:

1. How do administrators perceive they facilitate change when opening a new school?
2. How do administrators establish a positive school culture when opening a new school?

Multiple studies have been conducted which examined elements of change in the school setting and the influence administrators have on change. In addition, various research studies have been conducted on the development of a positive school culture and the administrator's role in that process. This chapter begins with an overview of the search process used in collecting pertinent literature on the topic of facilitating change and building school culture. Initially this review will examine the role of administrators in facilitating change. Next, this literature review will examine strategies for creating a positive school culture as well as barriers to building culture. Following a discussion of studies in a new school setting will occur. After which will be an explanation of the theoretical framework chosen to guide this study. Finally, the review of literature will conclude by demonstrating the gap in the literature which this study will address.

## The Search Process

To search for sources to complete this literature review, educational databases on The University of Tennessee library website were utilized. The databases ERIC and Educational Full Text were selected to research information. The search limits of full text and peer reviewed were selected to ensure that all sources came from credible sources. Google scholar was also used as a search tool for sources and was linked to the University of Tennessee library database.

The search topic of *facilitating change* was first attempted and yielded valuable sources for the literature review. Next, *teacher transition* and *school transitions* were used as search terms. However, the results focused on teachers transitioning from pre-service teachers to classroom teachers or students transitioning from different grade levels such as elementary to middle school. Therefore, the results were not appropriate for this study. *Change and new school* were tried but again focused on students experiencing a school with new grade levels but not necessarily a new school building. However, *principal's role and change* produced beneficial sources on the influence principals have on change.

*Culture change* and then *barriers to change* were two different searches that produced some valuable articles to use in this study. *School and transition* were then tried but again focused on students moving grade levels in different school such as from middle school to high school. Next, three individual searches each produced studies that were useful to incorporate in this literature review: 1) *change and new school*, 2) *principal support and change*, and 3) *new school culture*. The search terms *creating a positive school culture* and *building school culture* were also used to find additional sources. Upon reading and analyzing sources, it was noted that further sources were needed for the section of barriers to change. Therefore, additional search terms were used: 1) *challenges and opening a new school*, 2) *challenges and new school*, and 3)



*opening and new school*. A very limited number of articles pertaining specifically to the opening of a new school were found. Finally, the search terms of *barriers to change* were used to locate some final sources for the literature review.

A search process also took place for finding sources to describe the theoretical framework used in this study. Initially the search term *force field theory* was used to locate sources for the theoretical framework. The term *field theory* was used as well as *Kurt Lewin and force field theory* since he is the researcher credited with developing force field theory. These searches provided valuable information to incorporate into the explanation of the theoretical framework.

### **Administrator's Role in Facilitating Change**

As the leader of a school, administrators have the ability to influence significant change among their teachers, students, parents, and even community. An administrator is looked to as the guiding force within the school. "Who a principal is- what he or she does, attends to, or seems to appreciate- is constantly watched by students, teachers, parents, and members of the community" (Deal & Peterson, 1990, p. 31). According to Fullan (2001a) when people are asked to brainstorm words to describe change, their list includes a mixture of negative and positive terms. On one side are fear, anxiety, loss, and panic while on the other side are excitement, energizing, exhilaration, and risk-taking. For good or for bad, change arouses emotions, and when emotions increase, leadership is key (Fullan, 2001a). Following will include an overview of the literature which discusses factors needed of administrators in order to successfully facilitate change in their schools.

## **Professional Development**

Professional development opportunities such as Professional Learning Communities or PLCs are ways administrators can successfully facilitate change in their schools (Hoy & Tschannan-Moran, 2004; Martin, Shafer, & Kragler, 2009; Mullen & Hutingger, 2008). PLCs provide an opportunity for teachers to learn and grow together with a common purpose. In a PLC, individuals have a clear sense of the mission they are striving to attain and a shared vision of the conditions that must be created in order to accomplish their mission (DuFour, 2003). By providing professional development through teacher collaboration, principals can cultivate a supportive culture for change (Zimmerman, 2006). For example, by sharing successes during faculty meetings or common planning times, respected teachers promote self-efficacy in their colleagues by serving as role models and a source for feedback (Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Fullan (2001a) suggested this peer pressure combined in conjunction with peer support is the most effective in creating a culture of change in schools.

One component within an administrator's role in change is the administrator's active involvement in professional development. Mullen and Hutingger (2008) found principals experienced positive results in their school by taking an active role in the school's PLCs. More specifically, Mullen and Hutingger examined the role of principals in supporting teacher study groups as a part of PLCs. Study groups involved teachers with varying levels of experience with the focus on improving student learning. By engaging in PLCs at their schools, principals helped create open dialogue between teachers which, in turn, helped teachers build relationships with one another. As a result, principals who supported an expanded definition of community and provided opportunities for dialogue built organizational capacity (Mullen & Hutingger, 2008).

When used correctly, professional learning and development can be successful in uniting two schools into one. Martin, Shafer, and Kragler (2009) examined the two year transition process of the opening of Wes-Del Elementary, a rural school in Indiana which was built to consolidate two elementary schools into one. The school's principal, Tracy Shafer, saw an opportunity to incorporate professional learning to create a community focused on student learning. Principal Shafer recognized the challenges associated with teachers coming together from different schools and implemented a plan to ease the transition. In the two years prior to the opening of Wes-Del, Shafer was responsible for organizing professional development for both schools. Shafer realized both schools had their own individual culture and therefore planned common professional development meetings to allow teachers to learn to work together and develop a Wes-Del culture (Martine, Shafer, & Kragler, 2009). According to Principal Shafer, the first step toward bridging the gap between two schools was for teachers to develop mutual trust for one another and understand how much they had in common.

Bringing two different schools together as one is a task that requires time and involvement of all individuals affected. To bring two schools together, professional development projects were implemented in various forms: by individuals, by teams with common interests, and as a school-wide effort to implement curricular change (Martine, Shafer, & Kragler, 2009). Therefore, this two-year initiative to bring two schools together as one through professional development can be used as an example for schools to follow in similar situations.

Fullan (2001a) provided a set of assumptions to consider when facilitating change. One of which is that people will only change if there is pressure to do so, a supportive environment, and occasions for individuals share their own experiences with those in similar situations.

Professional development in a new school can allow teachers going through the same experience to share with their peers and support one another during the change.

### **Trustworthiness**

One of the most important characteristics of administrators in facilitating change and overcoming obstacles is to build trust among the teachers (Duke, 2004; Kotter, 1996; Kouzes & Posener, 1993; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) defined trust in a school setting as the willingness of individuals to be vulnerable to one another based on the confidence that the other party is kind, reliable, competent, honest, and open. Building this sense of trust is not something that can be developed overnight but must be supported and cultivated by the administrator. Fullan (2014) emphasized that trustworthiness goes beyond integrity to also include real competence meaning leaders must be true to their word but also competent at their job. When building trust, leaders of great organizations are those who hold themselves accountable when problems develop but are also quick to share credit with others when they achieve success (Collins, 2001).

In studying a new school, Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings (2011) recognized a positive school culture is filled with norms that encourage relational trust. According to Bryk and Schneider (2002), relational trust is organized around relationships between teachers and students, teachers and teachers, teachers and parents, and teachers and their principal. Relational trust depends on behaviors individuals observe and whether these behaviors are deemed appropriate. The criteria in the new school for determining appropriate behaviors were respect, competence, care for others, and integrity (Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011).

Garza, Murakami-Ramalho, and Merchant (2011) also supported the necessity of the school leader developing trust in their case study of the transition process of a principal at a new

school in Texas. In this study, the principal did not have the opportunity to hire any teachers for the new school. Instead, teachers were involuntarily reassigned from schools that were closing in the district or from those that had a surplus of teachers due to redrawn attendance boundaries. In order to gain the teachers' trust and support, the principal asked the teachers to share things from their previous schools which worked well. This allowed teachers to integrate some of their favorite activities and procedures into their new school culture. In addition, the principal's sensitive approach helped to create an environment where stakeholders felt welcomed and valued (Garza, Murakami-Ramalho, and Merchant, 2011).

### **Moral Purpose**

One component which Fullan (2001a) described as necessary for leaders who are leading in times of change is a moral purpose. According to Fullan (2001a), a moral purpose is defined as "acting with the intentions of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole" (p. 17). In addition, a moral purpose is focused on direction and results or both "ends and means" (p. 26). Fullan provided an example in the education setting to explain the importance of both ends and means in that an essential end is to make a positive difference in the lives of students. However, the means to accomplish this end are equally important. For example, if an administrator does not treat teachers well and equitably then the individual because a leader with no followers (Fullan, 2001a).

Fullan (2001a) further described moral purpose as not merely a statement but as something that must be accompanied by strategies for achieving the purpose. These strategies are the actions of the leader that inspire individuals to achieve a desired goal. Sir Michael Bichard, the permanent secretary at the Department for Education and Employment in England conveyed a similar view in an interview in the *Times Education Supplement* (2000): "For me

leadership is about creating a sense of purpose and direction. It's about getting alignment and it's inspiring people to achieve" (p. 28). Fullan (2001a) went on to emphasize that while moral purpose occurs naturally, that purpose will thrive only if nurtured by leaders. Therefore, the growth and development of a moral purpose among the staff in a school setting begins with the administrator.

Research also supports the increase emphasis on moral purpose in our society presently and in years to come. For example, Garten (2001) pointed out that people want their place of work to be a good citizen and have a social conscience. Furthermore, Bolman and Deal (2000) anticipated that "core values will be increasingly recognized as the vital social glue that infuses an organization with passion and purpose. Workers will increasingly demand more than a paycheck. They'll want to know the higher calling or enabling purpose of their work" (p. 185).

Bezzina (2008) conducted a pilot study which examined the connection between shared moral purpose and shared leadership in the pursuit of learning. According to Bezzina a shared moral purpose has consistently been identified in the literature as one of the necessary components to bring about change and improvement. Bezzina studied nine schools, four secondary and five primary schools. Each school in the case study identified an area for improvement within their school and planned and implemented a strategy to address this area. The schools also participated in professional development sessions over an 18 month period.

Bezzina's (2008) study supported the importance of a shared moral purpose and Andrews's and Lewis's (2004) belief of the need to be extremely explicit about the moral purpose. Bezzina proposed accomplishing this by establishing a detailed conceptual framework with a common vocabulary. In addition, Bezzina found the context of a shared moral purpose allowed for decisions to be based on ownership, commitment, and shared leadership as opposed

to individual struggle. Within the study, the relationship between moral purpose and shared leadership was shown to allow a school to change “from a place where individually and collectively teachers were almost paralyzed by fear, to a confident and proactive learning community pursuing a deep moral purpose in an environment of trust” (Bezzina, 2008, p. 53). Therefore, in this case, a shared moral purpose not only had an influence on facilitating change but also positively contributed to the culture of the school as well.

### **Consideration of Mental Models**

Zimmerman (2006) suggested for principals to consider individual and organizational mental models when moving through the change process and striving to understand why teachers resist change. Senge (1990) defined mental models as “deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting. Very often, we are not consciously aware of our mental models or the effects they have on our behavior” (p. 8). Zimmermann described mental models as maps which individuals follow in order to understand their context or world as well as to make sense of their reality. While mental models are typically viewed at the individual level, they can also function at a team or group level as individuals collaborate together overtime (Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson, & Daly, 2008).

However, these mental models can have a negative influence on implementing change if they are not considered or recognized. In fact, established mental models can keep educators from closing the gap between the learning that is necessary to succeed in new contexts and their outdated methods of handling change which results in nonproductive behaviors (Calabrese, 2002; Duffy, 2002; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, & Smith, 1999). In addition to considering the mental models of their teachers in times of change, administrators must also consider their own mental models. Administrators must be careful not to give in to their own

flawed mental models which is often seen by blaming teachers for resisting change without considering any fundamental systemic problems which could instead be where the problem lies (Calabrese, 2002; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, & Smith, 1999). Therefore, consideration of the mental models that both teachers and administrators bring to a new school is necessary in order to successfully facilitate change.

Elements of change can impact individual teachers in different ways. Some teachers may be able to quickly adjust to change while others may need additional time or help coping with the changes of moving to a new school. Reflection can be a useful tool for the transition process. Typically teacher reflection has been categorized into four main categories: retrospection, problem solving, critical reflection, or reflection-in-action (Boody, 2008). Boody (2008) went on to characterize teacher reflection as leading to teacher change. Therefore, the use of teacher reflection could be implemented by teachers during the process of transitioning to a new school. Through Boody's (2008) research the teacher being studied underwent dramatic changes in her instruction through the use of reflection and attributed much of her reflection to the obligation she felt for her students. When opening a new school, teachers will more than likely experience changes different to what they are used to in the past. Reflection could be an approach to keep the main focus on students' needs as opposed to teacher wants.

### **Approach to Leadership**

When leading the opening of a new school, administrators may take various leadership styles in different situations from a more authoritative approach to ensure certain tasks are accomplished on time to a shared leadership approach in other instances where input and decision making involves a variety of stakeholders including teachers and parents. According to Zimmerman (2006), by allowing opportunities for teacher collaboration and involvement in



decision making, principals can also create a supportive culture for change. Rhoads (2011) agreed emphasizing for principals to not attempt to do all the work alone. Instead, by increasing leadership capacity a principal lets go of some of the work, creates more buy-in, and moves the staff towards a shared vision by having more people involved and working towards the vision (Rhoads, 2011). When leaders involve teachers and stakeholders in creating a shared vision along with goals for reaching the vision, their actions provide meaning, a mutual purpose, challenge, and motivation to all stakeholders in the school (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, 2005; Schmoker, 1999; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, & Smith, 1999).

Inclusive leadership is another type of leadership which Ryan (2010) explored when he conducted a case study examining the attempt of a principal of a new school to introduce and maintain inclusive leadership over the first three years the school was opened. Ryan (2006) referred to inclusive leadership as schools including teachers, students, and parents in many aspects of the school's daily operations. In his study, Ryan (2010) pointed out obstacles that leaders face when trying to establish inclusive environments. For example, Ryan found it was challenging for principals to introduce inclusive practices into individuals with longstanding traditions or cultures. In a new school, teachers often have traditions or cultures from their previous school that they bring with them to their new school setting.

Ryan's (2010) case study examined a new school over the first three years the school was opened. The initial principal had the opportunity to hire every faculty member at the new school except for one, who was a transfer from another school. During the interview process, the principal asked questions that inquired into the teachers' attitudes regarding aspects such as inclusion and collaboration. Therefore, the principal was able to hire individuals who shared his

vision for the school (Ryan, 2010). At the conclusion of the three years, Ryan found both positive and negative aspects involving inclusive leadership in the new school.

An unexpected challenge the school faced was the original principal left after the first year and was replaced by a second principal. The second principal shared the previous leader's philosophy of inclusive leadership but had a different leadership style which was not accepted by some teachers (Ryan, 2010). Fullan (1991) suggested that the departure of charismatic principals who are significantly changing schools can disrupt the change process. Another challenge was the increase in student enrollment which negatively impacted involving the community in the school's operations. Positive impacts of the inclusive leadership approach in the new school were students had an opportunity for their voices to be heard and teachers were able to share their knowledge and expertise to collaborate with their peers (Ryan, 2010). Ryan's study provides an example of the influence of an administrator's approach to leadership, the impact on involved stakeholders, and unexpected circumstances that arise which influence school culture.

Not all approaches to leadership are beneficial to facilitating change and building a positive culture. Goleman (2000) identified six leadership styles: coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and coaching. Of these six leadership styles, Goleman suggested two negatively affect culture: coercive where leaders demand compliance and pacesetter where leaders set high expectations for performance which can lead to burn out. Therefore, leaders must consider their approach to leadership in order to successfully facilitate change or achieved desired results.

### **Creating a Positive School Culture**

According to Habegger (2008), establishing a positive school culture is necessary and administrators who focus their time establishing a positive school culture allow other areas

within the school to succeed. Characteristics of strong, positive cultures according to Peterson and Deal (1998) are schools where the staff has a shared sense of purpose, where the underlying norms are collegiality, improvement, and hard work, and where success, joy, and humor overflow. A strong school culture allows for increased commitment and performance above expectations which allows the school to better be able to succeed and reach its goals (Sergiovanni, 1991). Peterson and Deal stressed the role of school leaders when molding the culture in that leaders must uncover and articulate core values considering what is best for students along with identifying aspects that are destructive as well as constructive to building culture. Leaders then work to reinforce elements of the culture that are positive and modify those that are negative. Building a positive culture, even in a new school may not be a blank slate. Instead, the “new teachers and students will carry cultural imprints from their previous place- as will the principal” (Deal & Peterson, 1990, p. 25). Therefore the culture from which students and teachers come is valuable for administrators to consider when building a new culture. Following is an examination of strategies supported in literature to help create a positive school culture.

### **Building Positive Relationships**

The relationships that teachers and administrators have with one another are contributing factors to establishing a positive school culture. Studies have shown the importance of teachers developing positive, trusting relationships and collaborating with one another to create a positive school environment (Franks, 2004; Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011; Sparks, 2004).

Additional research supports the importance of not only developing positive relationships among students but also nurturing positive relationships between teachers and students, parents, and the entire community (Habegger, 2008). Similarly, Barth (2006) stressed the importance of the

relationships between teachers within a school in that these relationships define all relationships within the school's culture.

Kouzes and Posner (1998) identified seven essentials to developing relationships: “1) setting clear standards, 2) expecting the best, 3) paying attention, 4) personalizing recognition, 5) telling the story, 6) celebrating together, and 7) setting the example” (p. 18). The responsibility falls on leaders to initiate these steps in order to build positive relationships with their followers. Kouzes and Posner (1998) stated what truly separates effective from ineffective leaders is how much they “really care about the people they lead” (p. 149).

When transitioning to a new school, it can be valuable for teachers to interact with one another outside of school to begin building relationships. Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings' (2011) study of an urban STEM high school in Ohio that was preparing to open showed the benefits of a faculty mixer at a local restaurant. Some of the teachers of the new school had been involved in the planning process while others were new hires. Therefore, the meet and greet at a local restaurant was an opportunity for all individuals to come together as one school. In addition, the entire teaching staff participated in outdoor team-building activities which allowed teachers to get to know one another on a deeper level, work together to accomplish tasks, and build a sense of community (Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011). This approach was also one that allowed teachers to develop relationships in a more low risk atmosphere outside the walls of the school building.

Building true collegiality in a school also positively contributes to the culture. “Schools are full of good players. Collegiality is about getting them to play together, about growing a professional learning community” (Barth, 2006, p.10). Barth (2006) described examples of collegiality among teachers as educators sharing with one another about their practice and their

craft knowledge, educators observing one another while they are teaching, and educators rooting for one another's success. Little (1982) found that principals nurture collegiality among teachers by modeling through actions such as visibly cheering on others to succeed. Similarly, Barth (2006) suggested that there is no more critical role for school leaders than to support collegial relationships in the school. Therefore, collegiality is more than teachers getting to know one another but teachers developing meaning relationships where they encourage and support one another.

According to Sparks (2005), the relationships that adults have with one another in the school have a significant impact on the quality of relationships students have with not only adults in their school but also with fellow students. Since many teachers desire to have positive relationships with their students, this is an important concept for administrators and teachers to keep in mind when establishing the culture of a school. The focus by principals should be on professional learning which includes collaboration among teachers to lead to improvements in student growth as well as personal relationships (Sparks, 2005).

Similarly Habegger (2008) determined the importance of relationships through his interviews with principals at three high-performing schools of low economic status regarding their role in the culture of the school. These schools and principals had been able to achieve success even though students came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. According to Habegger, some of the challenges these schools faced included poverty, lack of resources, under-qualified teachers, and students whose primary language was not English. The goal of the study was to determine what made these three schools high-performing despite these obstacles. Habegger (2008) found these achieving principals created a school culture which empowered and instilled teachers' confidence as they prepared for achievement testing, promoted

professional dialogue and research, valued students and teachers, and enlisted the help of parents and community members to improve the school's effectiveness. Therefore, promoting school success did not occur solely within the school building but by reaching out to parents and the community as well.

In fact, a key component in facilitating a positive school culture is to facilitate a sense of belonging on the part of students, teachers, parents, and the community (Habegger, 2008). When asked about the major goals for their building the three principals hoped for students to develop positive relationships with adults in their school. A sense of belonging for teachers was ensured through common planning time for teachers in the same grade level and the implementation of PLCs (Habegger, 2008). Having a common time to plan during the day eliminates having to work around many individual schedules before or after school to find a convenient time to meet.

The importance of building relationships was additionally found in Mitchell and Castle's (2005) study which examined the leadership of twelve elementary principals in Ontario, Canada. Based on interviews, focus-group discussions, and in-school observations, they categorized three main components of leadership. One of these categories was informal culture building. The two overarching strategies Mitchell and Castle observed to build school culture were informal daily conversations with teachers and the use of praise and encouragement with both teachers and students. The study supported the use of informal dialogue between principals and teachers to build relationships and a positive school culture.

When building the culture of the school, positive elements may come in unlikely situations. Rhodes, Stevens and Hemmings (2011) found that "stress bonding" a term coined by Rhoads actually helped build culture within the new school by bonding during challenging circumstances. The researchers found the stress of completing pre-opening tasks and the

impending arrival of students and the first day of school actually strengthened the relationships between the merged teaching staff. Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings (2011) described the first year of implementation as being on a half-built plane during a storm and the stress bonding along with assurances from the principal helped to keep everyone together.

When teachers are moving to a new school some teachers may know one another but others, especially if they are new teachers, may not know anyone. Therefore, a beneficial approach is to narrow the knowledge-of-others gap (Evans, 2012). If teachers are going to establish a positive culture in their new school, they must first establish relationships with one another. Narrowing the knowledge gap does not refer to simply getting to know each other but also getting to know fellow teachers' instructional styles to learn and work together with one another. A way to accomplish this is through pair visiting where teachers spend a class period observing one of their peers and then a half an hour debriefing on their visit (Evans, 2012). Pair visiting could be valuable in new school settings to allow teachers to learn from and collaborate with one another.

Successfully building relationships between principals and teachers is also important to facilitating change in a new school. According to Fullan (2001a), "the single factor common to every successful change initiative is that relationships improve" (p. 19). If relationships improve, situations get better. Therefore, leaders must be excellent relationship builders with a variety of people and groups, especially with individuals different from themselves (Fullan, 2001a). In a new school, an administrator may or may not have any previous relationship with teachers. Therefore, administrators must consider the different relationships they have with various groups of teachers in their school.

## **Collaboration**

Establishing a positive school culture often requires teachers to collaborate with one another with the goal of improving the school as a whole. According to Coatney (2005), collaboration first begins with cooperation, a willingness to adapt and be flexible, and a desire to help others. Teachers must first be willing to work and learn from one another before true collaboration can occur. Cooperation can open the door to collaboration, but if that door is abruptly closed it may never open to that person again (Coatney, 2005). This can apply not only to relationships being built among teachers but also between teachers, administrators, parents, and the broader community when striving to establish a positive school culture. For example, Deal and Peterson (1990) suggested school culture is developed through the experiences and interactions of all key players in a school, of which the principal is only one.

Collaboration is also considered a desirable process to decrease teacher isolation, increase the sharing of pedagogical information, increase cooperation within departments, and promote job satisfaction in general (Ebmeier & Nickalus, 1999). Working in complete isolation in a school setting is not a possibility for most teachers and administrators. Instead, teachers and administrators work and interact with one another on a daily basis and this interaction can influence the creation a positive school culture. One approach to facilitating a positive school culture is known as cooperative education where individuals are most productive when they work as part of a team which leads to positive school growth (Franks, 2004). Cooperative education does not only apply to the relationships teachers have with fellow teachers or their administrators. Cooperative education involves the cooperative effort of all stakeholders including students, teachers, colleagues, administration, parents, and the community, which in turn builds community and enhances the learning process (Franks, 2004).



While collaboration can be beneficial in building a positive school culture, leaders must be aware of the purpose and direction of the collaboration. According to Fullan (2001a) “collaborative cultures which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right thing they may end up being powerfully wrong” (p. 78). Fullan further explained that if in their collaboration teachers are reinforcing one another’s ineffective practices or behaviors than the collaboration could have a negative impact. Jaquith (2013) concurred in that simply providing teachers with time together does not ensure their conversations will be focused in the appropriate direction such as on instruction or student learning. Therefore the role and responsibility of the leader is to make sure that relationships are developed that will produce desirable results (Fullan, 2001a).

The use of teachers working in teams can be a contributing factor to increasing teaching collaboration. However, Jaquith (2013) emphasized for principals to pay attention to the makeup of teams in order to design teams that are capable of learning together. More specifically, teams that have dispersed expertise and relevant knowledge can be a contributing factoring towards creating an instructional culture. For example, having a majority of novice teachers on one team and veteran teachers on another team may not be conducive towards effective collaboration. Jaquith also pointed out that principals must be aware and make adjustments to teams that do not have varied leveled of expertise.

Peterson and Deal (1998) have conducted multiple studies on components and characteristics of leadership and building school culture. After identifying common components of a positive school culture, Peterson and Deal described case study examples of schools which exhibited a positive school culture. In one example, a secondary school in New York City, the school’s staff showed a passionate professionalism and enjoyed multiple opportunities for shared

dialogue, problem solving, and community building. In this case example, collaboration among teachers was a contributing factor to the positive culture of the school.

### **Shared Vision**

When building the culture of a school, having a shared vision among stakeholders contributes to building the culture of the school. In fact, when facilitating change, Firestone (1989) and Firestone and Corbett (1988) identified six leadership functions. The first of which is providing and selling the vision of the change. Fried (1999) described a clear vision as a shared sense of the direction in which the school is headed. Bolman and Deal (2008) defined effective leaders as those who can help communicate a vision, establish standards for performance, and create focus and direction. Knowing the vision and goals for their school is often important to many teachers. According to Lewin and Regine (2000), “most people want to be part of their organization; they want to know the organization’s purpose; they want to make a difference” (p. 27).

Senge (1999) pointed out in order for leaders to transform personal visions into shared visions requires uncovering “shared pictures of the future” which promote true commitment as opposed to merely compliance. In addition, Fullan (1991) stressed the need for the vision that is adopted to fit within the organization’s broader goals in that a following change initiative is more likely to be successful when individuals have an understanding of why they are doing what they are doing. When first developing the vision in a school Kotter (1996) suggested beginning with a small group of supporters which become a “powerful guiding coalition” (p. 57). These individuals then influence their peers until a critical mass is achieved to move the change effort forward (Kotter, 1996).

Within a new school, establishing what the school's culture will be must be considered before the students even enter the building. Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings (2011) described school culture as impacting how teachers, principals, students, and other stakeholders render education into meaningful and actionable practices. When Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings studied the planning process of a new school they discovered the teachers and principals began to plan what they desired their school culture to become before the first day of class. Key components of creating a positive school culture included trust centered on relationships, a strong sense of community which encouraged civility and respect, and strong principal and teacher leadership. Having a shared vision upfront and involving stakeholders in the planning process helped lay the groundwork for creating a positive school culture when the school opened. In addition, once the key components of the vision had been established, the planning team of the new school went back and added core values such as courage, respect, and integrity which supported the vision. These core values were prevalent throughout the school such as in colorful posters displayed in hallways for students and parents to see as well as upheld in teacher hiring processes and professional development (Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011). Therefore, the foundation of the vision became a part of the culture of the school.

Within a school, an administrator's actions and behaviors can have a great deal of influence on support for the vision of the school. Peterson and Deal (1998) described ways in which school leaders shape the culture of the school including communicating core values in their words and actions, speaking of the deeper mission of the school, and celebrating the successes of the teachers, students, and community. Principals' actions are noticed by others and viewed by stakeholders as "what is important". Similarly, in Deal and Peterson's (1990) case study of principals, the actions and examples of principals were determined to be a decisive

factor in building culture. For example, Deal and Peterson found one principal expressed the values he hoped to instill in his teachers through actions such as picking up trash or praising student achievement. Another example included a principal who actions modeled open communication through listening to staff members, showing interest, and walking around the school to be visible to teachers.

Finally, the need for shared vision was vital for the staff of Norfolk Public Schools who experienced significant change from 1998 to 2005 when their school system underwent reculturing. Reculturing refers to changing the invisible factors that influence behavior and, as a result, transforms the organization's culture (Thompson, Clem, Battino, Richter, Reigeluth, Doll, Moore, Hoo, & Malopinsky, 2006). One approach implemented by the Norfolk Public Schools was to establish a "no excuses" philosophy culture (Thompson et al., 2006). The Norfolk Public Schools decided that there are many challenges and changes that they will face throughout the school year, but instead of making excuses they would strive to meet the challenges and adapt to the changes taking place. In addition, the shared vision towards improvement also focused on building trust and encouraging risk taking through actions and words (Thompson et al., 2006). In this study, have a shared vision was necessary for the reculturing process to be successful.

### **Correlation with Student Engagement and Optimism**

Klem and Connell's (2004) study further supports the importance of building positive relationships between students and teachers, support staff, and administrators in order to establish a positive school culture. In their longitudinal study Klem and Connell gathered survey data and analyzed student records from six elementary schools and three middle schools in one urban school district. The purpose was to examine the relationship between teacher support and engagement and student engagement and achievement. The goals of Klem and Connell's study

were to improve relationships between students and adults as well as improve teaching and learning.

The results of this study found teacher support to be important to student engagement in their school. Klem and Connell (2004) found that students need to know adults care about them in their school building. Students who felt their teachers were creating a caring learning environment with clear and fair expectations were more likely to report engagement in their schools. More specifically, middle school students were 65% more likely to be disengaged in circumstances where there were low levels of teacher support and involvement. Elementary students with highly supportive and involved teachers were 89% more likely to be engaged in school than those with typical levels of teacher support (Klem & Connell, 2004). Student engagement refers to characteristics such as staying focused, paying attention, and going beyond what is required. Students that are engaged in learning and the school also help contribute to an overall school culture. Klem & Connell's study pointed out the impact positive relationships between teachers and students can have on student engagement and learning as well as the culture of a school.

McGuigan and Hoy (2006) studied forty suburban and rural elementary schools in Ohio and examined the correlation between academic optimism among faculty and student achievement. The findings of the study supported not only the relationship between optimism and student achievement but also the influence a principal can have on individuals in their school. The study showed that principals have an impact on teachers' optimism about their ability to succeed, and principals are largely responsible for how schools operate as well as the school's policies and procedures (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Therefore, principals have the ability to exert a great deal of influence over their schools. McGuigan and Hoy also pointed out

that there are many things principals can do to increase optimism in the school setting such as allowing opportunities for meaningful collaboration among teachers, seeking professional development that is integrally related to the school's academic goals, and appropriately managing the school's agenda in regards to time and resources. Therefore, this study revealed the strong, positive impact that principals can have on students and teachers.

### **Establishing Rituals and Traditions**

Each school possesses its own rituals and traditions that help define and support the school's culture. According to Deal and Peterson (1990), "ceremonies, traditions, rituals, and symbols are the more visual aspects of culture" (p. 96). These are the aspects of culture that are shown not only to teachers and students but also parents and the broader community. Rituals and traditions are valuable because they create a sense of belonging and safety among individuals of the group (Hallinger, 1996). Deal and Peterson described ceremonies, traditions, rituals, and symbols as representing both a strategy for building and improving culture as well as an expression of a school's culture.

School activities can become rituals when they convey shared values and connect individuals in a shared experience (Deal & Peterson, 1990). According to Peterson (2002) principals need to ask for feedback from their staff regarding a timeline for rituals and ceremonies throughout the year along with what symbols and values are important and represented in the various school rituals. However, an important component to remember is rituals and traditions go hand in hand with a principal's behavior and actions. If a principal establishes rituals and traditions that are inconsistent with his or her own actions, school culture will be weakened rather than strengthened (Deal & Peterson, 1990).

In Kessler and Snodgrass's (2014) study of an urban school in Tennessee the administration used yearly traditions as strategies to recognize teachers in a positive way. For example, every October, each teacher selected a fellow teacher to single out in a positive manner for a specific attribute. At the end of each school year, teachers voted on faculty superlatives for their peers. Kessler and Snodgrass found that through these traditions each faculty member was acknowledged in playing a role in making the school a positive place to work which increased morale.

Similarly, Peterson (2002) examined positive and negative aspects of school culture at one primary and one middle school and found rituals and traditions can be incorporated into staff development to build school culture as well as learning. For example, at Wisconsin Hills Middle School, a tradition is for all staff workshops to start with a time of sharing food and stories of student success. This allowed for each staff development to begin on a positive tone and also contributed to building the culture of the school by allowing teachers to have a time to talk and share with one another.

### **Barriers to Creating a Positive School Culture**

While many approaches are supported in the literature to promote the building of a positive culture, the literature also supports challenges that administrators may face. These barriers can have a negative influence on building a positive culture in a school. As the leader of a school, it is the responsibility of the administrator to find strategies to address and overcome these barriers to build culture within their school.

#### **Avoiding Conflict**

An initial barrier to change according to Evans (2012) is that teachers are profoundly conflict avoidant. In other words, teachers often do not like to risk direct criticism or

disagreement with one another (Evans, 2012). Barth (2006) referred to matters of avoidance in schools as nondiscussables which are subjects that need to be but are rarely openly discussed. While a school where the staff is constantly bickering is by no means beneficial, there are situations where a program or approach is not working effectively and the problem must be addressed.

Therefore, in these situations, it is necessary to recognize the need to change and take steps to fix the problem. Evans (2012) stated that avoiding conflict is not necessarily a terrible flaw because it often allows individuals to talk to one another as opposed to at one another. In addition Fullan (2001a) pointed out that successful change will undoubtedly involve some conflict and disagreement. When Deal and Peterson (1990) conducted a case study examining how five principals built culture in their schools one of the common tactics used by principals was facing conflict rather than avoiding it and, by resolving conflicts, they were able to build unity.

### **Teachers' Attitudes**

Teachers' attitudes can present a barrier to building a positive school culture. For example teachers may not view certain meetings as productive or show resistance to changing parts of the organizational structure that has been in place for many years (Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011). In this case, teachers may be resistant to adopt the organizational structure of their new school especially if the structure is different than their previous school. Peterson and Deal (1998) described these negative attitudes as creating toxic cultures where "negativity dominates conversations, interactions, and planning" (p. 29). When addressing the barrier of teachers' attitudes, Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings (2011) emphasized the need to address teachers' emotional needs. One example is to include a ten minute open forum at the beginning



or end of a meeting where teachers can voice concerns or ask questions. Addressing teachers' concerns and allowing them to provide input can be one strategy to help build teacher support and buy-in.

### **Low Morale**

When opening a new school the goal is to begin the first school year with positive morale among teachers and staff. Therefore, low morale can be a barrier to building culture that administrators must overcome. For example, a school staff that complains excessively and tries to undermine each other creates a negative school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1990). An additional contributing factor to low morale in a new school setting may stem from all components not being up and running when the school opens. Clement (2003) concurred that in situations where elements are not ready on the first day of school, such as lack of technology or e-mail access or the floors being waxed two days before school starts, creates frustration and negativity among the staff. Involving teachers in the decision making process as much as possible and clearly communicating information can be strategies to alleviate low morale.

Similarly, Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings (2011) found that a lack of components being ready when the new school opened, specifically components that met teachers' needs, negatively contributed to the school culture. In the new school, there was no staff lunchroom or breakroom for staff to get coffee which was important to the teachers in this school. A complicating factor was that the teachers also did not have any common planning time. Therefore, teacher teams had no time during the school day to meet, plan, communicate, or have lunch together. These factors were negatively contributing to the building of culture and relationships in the school. Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings found to address the problem a storage area was set up between the two technology labs to create a high-quality coffee bar for teachers. The area was named "Tech

Café”. Teachers were able to start their day there together where they built community and culture. Later, a lunchroom area was also added to Tech Café to continue to strengthen relationships and the culture of the school.

Clement (2003) proposed an approach principals can try when they find themselves facing low morale in their school. In this situation, principal can ask teachers at the end of the year for input and feedback and use their evaluation for planning the next year’s orientation, programs, and professional development (Clement, 2003). Involving teachers in the workings of their school can help make them more receptive to changes by feeling they have input in the decision making process.

### **Adversarial Relationships**

In a previous section building relationships was considered a positive aspect to building school culture. On the other hand what Barth (2006) described as adversarial relationships can present a barrier to creating a positive culture. Barth suggested that teachers can become adversaries to one another by withholding and not sharing their knowledge with each other. Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) also described this lack of collaboration in that some teachers have peers but no colleagues. Teachers possess a great deal of knowledge about their practice including aspects such as discipline, parent involvement, child development, leadership, and curriculum (Barth 2006). Barth referred to these aspects as craft knowledge and if teachers would share this knowledge, schools would be changed overnight. However, some teachers keep this knowledge to themselves and refuse to collaborate with one another which is detrimental to building culture.

In addition, Barth suggested adversarial relationships can develop through competition where teachers become competitive with one another over resources and recognition. The

overarching principles of competition are “the better you look, the worse I look” and “the worse you look, the better I look” (Barth, 2006, p. 11). As a result, adversarial relationships can create division and rivalries among teachers which can be harmful to developing a positive culture.

### **Lack of Support**

Administrators themselves may also face barriers to facilitating change and building culture. For example, Garza, Murakami-Ramvalho, and Merchant (2011) found when Laura Martinez was appointed principal to a new school which had not yet been built she experienced little to no support from the central office. Upon being hired, she was instructed to immediately leave her current school where she had served as principal for the past eight years and was given no time to end her tenure there with her staff. In regards to the new school, she was given no plan for transition. Instead, she was in charge of overseeing the final stages of construction as well as providing input for classroom design and furniture. In addition, she “reviewed attendance boundaries, staffing needs, and worked on the budget to make sure that all materials, supplies, and technology needs were secured” (Garza, Murakami-Ramvalho & Merchant, 2011, p. 436-437). Martinez found herself in charge of making decisions outside her realm of expertise from her experiences as principal. Therefore, in this situation a lack of support and guidance from the district level required a principal to step up and ensure components and details were complete for the new school to open.

### **Implementation Dip**

According to Fullan (2001a) all successful schools experience “implementation dips” as they move forward through the change process. These implantation dips are “literally a dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings” (Fullan, 2001a, p. 52). This experience can result in individuals feeling anxious,

unsure, scared, confused, or overwhelmed (Fullan, 2001a). The way in which an administrator responds and handles the implementation dip can have a positive or negative influence on the culture of the school. For example, leadership styles that Goleman (2000) described as coercive, where compliance is demanded, or as pacesetting, where high expectations for performance are established, would have no empathy for individuals experiencing the implementation dip. Therefore, this would negatively influence the building of culture.

Fullan (2001a) emphasized effective leaders must understand that change is a process that takes time. Leaders must not panic during the first year of a major change initiative when things do not go smoothly or as planned. As opposed to a coercive or pacesetting approach to leadership, Goleman's (2008) authoritative style where a leader unites people toward a vision can be more effective when working through the implantation dip. Fullan (2001a) added that within an authoritative approach the characteristics of self-confidence, optimism, and clear explanation of the vision can motivate people to persevere on. Therefore, administrators must examine their approach to leadership to ensure the implantation dip does not become a barrier to building the culture of the school.

### **Experiences of Opening a New School**

Limited research currently exists examining the process and first-experiences of opening a new school. An examination of the studies that do exist regarding new schools will follow. These studies describe necessary considerations that need to be undertaken by administrators prior to the new school opening.

### **Personal Beliefs and Experiences**

Teachers' personal beliefs and experiences can impact how they address and accept change as well as move through the change process. Analyzing personal beliefs and experiences

can be approaches to help teachers move through the change process (Margolis & Nagel, 2006). Margolis and Nagel (2006) examined the local impact of change, in a new urban charter school in the Midwest, how teachers' responses to change are related to their experiences, and how acquiring a clear understanding of these experiences can either further or hinder school reform. More specifically, Margolis and Nagel's (2006) study examined teachers' prior beliefs and experiences, the struggles of change, and the involvement of teachers taking ownership of the school's development.

Data analysis revealed common themes of cumulative stress, the impact of change, and relationships with the administration. The increase of stress had a negative impact on teachers' satisfaction and job performance. Margolis and Nagel (2006) found relationships to be the most powerful mediator of teacher stress. Teachers felt the most resilient when they were valued and believed their principals considered their personal best interests. Margolis and Nagel's study supports the importance of building relationships in a new school in order to alleviate teacher stress.

Garza, Murakami-Ramalho, and Merchant (2011) also found the need to consider teachers' personal experience in their case study of Laura Martinez who opened a new urban elementary school. The new school was being opened due to redrawn attendance boundaries and low enrollment at other schools in the district. Therefore, a new group of teachers came together from multiple schools. The majority of the teachers on Principal Martinez's staff were involuntary assigned and were upset with their new assignment. Similarly, many parents were resistant to the change and upset with their children's school being closed (Garza, Murakami - Ramalho, & Merchant, 2011). Martinez had to consider the experiences and feelings of the various groups of teachers and parents in order to build collegiality in the new school. For the

new school to come together and be successful, the principal recognized she needed to nurture her teachers to earn their trust and support. Martinez was able to accomplish this by creating a culture of collaboration with her new staff by asking for teacher input and feedback while also being clear about her expectations for the new school. (Garza, Murakami-Ramalho, Merchant, 2011).

Martin, Shafer, and Kragler (2009), in their study of the opening of a new elementary school in Indiana, also supported the need for teachers to have the opportunity to discuss and share their previous experiences. To promote professional trust and respect prior to the opening of the new school, Shafer, the principal of the new school, asked her new staff to reflect on professional experiences in their current schools. Some of the reflections included discussions on changes in technology, teachers' clothing, and literacy instruction. These reflections were often used as icebreakers to begin meetings (Martin, Shafer, & Kragler, 2009). This collaboration allowed teachers to share their own experiences as well as get to know their new colleagues.

### **Staff and Students**

When reflecting on lessons learned from opening a new STEM school in Kentucky, Gott (2011) stated one of the greatest lessons learned was the need to “surround yourself with diversely talented people” (p. 15). Gott further emphasized that no single individual possesses all the necessary experience or knowledge required to run a successful school. Therefore, Gott organized an administrative staff with a depth of wisdom and experience to successfully meet the needs of a new school. His administrative team consisted of more than a principal and assistant principal but expanded to jobs such as director of student life, student counselor, and residential life coordinator to address the many components involved in opening a new school.

In some situations the principal of the new school will have the opportunity to hire his or her own staff. For example in Ryan's (2010) case study on the implementation of inclusive leadership in a new school, the principal of the new school had the opportunity to interview and hire all by one of the school's teachers. Therefore, teachers were hired who believed in the principal's vision for the new school (Ryan, 2010). On the other hand, in some situations principals of a new school may not have the authority or autonomy to hire their own staff. For example, when Laura Martinez opened a new school the majority of her staff was involuntary moved to the new school by the district (Garza, Murakami-Ramalho & Merchant, 2011). Therefore, negativity and resentment from their staff, which Martinez experienced, could be factors principals of a new school may encounter.

When Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings (2011) studied the culture of a new STEM high school one of the key lessons found was the critical importance of having a student disciplinary policy established prior to the opening of the new school. In the new school, a discipline policy was not set prior to the school year beginning and Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings proposed that having a policy in place upfront could have prevented some of the discipline problems administrators encountered at the beginning of the year. Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings also suggested having a disciplinary policy that emphasizes not only appropriate codes of conduct and enforcement procedures but also encourages core values and other components of a positive culture. Therefore, certain components of a new school must be considered before students ever enter the building.

### **Theoretical Framework: Force Field Theory**

To successfully describe the experiences of administrators when opening a new school data must be examined through the lens of a theoretical framework. According to Camp (2001),

conceptualization, conduct, and publication of research require a clear and detailed understanding of theoretical frameworks. As a result, a variety of theoretical frameworks were examined for their appropriate use with this topic and for this study. Camp defined a theoretical framework “as a set of theoretical assumptions that explain the relationships among a set of phenomena” (p. 18). According to Merriam (2009), “all aspects of the study are affected by its theoretical framework” (p. 67). Therefore, the theoretical framework was the tool used to view the experiences of the in facilitating change when opening a new school and establishing a positive school culture. This study was examined through the theoretical framework of Lewin’s (1951) force field theory.

Kurt Lewin is referred to as the father of contemporary theories of applied behavioral science, action research, and planned change (Schein, 1988). Even though Lewin’s theories and own personal studies are over fifty years old they are still considered credible and useful when examining change. For this study, Lewin’s (1951) force field theory was used as the theoretical framework. Lewin (1975) asserted that all change is the result of certain forces in a field or a specific environment. To understand any situation Lewin (1943) felt “one should view the present situation- the status quo- as being maintained by certain conditions or forces” (p. 172).

More specifically, Lewin’s (1951) force field theory defines two opposing forces that influence the change process in an environment: driving and restraining forces. Driving forces initiate the change or move the process in a positive direction encouraging the change to occur while restraining forces create barriers which can inhibit the change from successfully occurring (Lewin, 1951). According to Lewin, all forces have both direction, either driving or restraining, and strength. Strength implies the degree of influence that a force has. For example, stronger forces may influence behavior to a greater extent than weaker forces.



Lewin believed that if one could identify, monitor, and determine the strength of these forces then one would be able to understand why individuals and organizations act as they do as well as what forces need to be decreased or increased in order for change to occur (Burnes, 2004). In addition to considering strength and direction, an individual's habits at a given time must also be treated as part of the field (Lewin, 1943). This is applicable when considering driving and restraining forces in this study in that at the beginning of the year teachers had habits or routines that were representative of their former school but as the school year progressed they were more likely to develop new habits or routines based on their new school.

In addition, Lewin (1947) viewed successful change as a group activity and that in order for the individual behaviors to be maintained, group norms and routines must also be changed. Therefore, successful change was viewed by Lewin as a process not something that happens overnight. This correlates with the design of this narrative inquiry which examined the experiences of the administrators facilitating change over the course of the entire first year the new school was opened.

Lewin's (1951) force field theory also fits with the purpose and research questions for this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive culture when opening a new school. The barriers to building a positive culture described by administrators when opening a new school were restraining factors that impeded the change process. The factors that administrators noted which aided and supported the process of creating a positive school culture in the new school were driving forces.

One of Lewin's studies also relates to the topics that were examined in this study. For example, in one of Lewin's works he worked with Harwood Manufacturing Corporation where the purpose of the research for factory management was "1) why do people resist change so

strongly and 2) what can be done to overcome this resistance” (Coch & French, 1948, p. 512). The factory management wanted to discover strategies to overcome resistance to implemented changes. In this study, similar content was examined through the challenges that administrators faced when facilitating change during the opening a new school and how these challenges were overcome to create a positive school culture.

In addition to force field theory, Lewin (1947) also created a three step model of change that he proposed was necessary to successfully carry out the change process. Lewin viewed this model not as separate from his force field theory but as a part to develop an integrated approach to analyze change at the group and organizational levels (Burnes, 2004). Therefore, combined Lewin’s (1951) force field theory and Lewin’s (1947) three step model of change allowed the perspectives and experiences of the administrators when opening a new school to be more clearly described and analyzed.

The three steps within the change model include unfreezing, moving or change, and refreezing. Step 1, unfreezing, begins by identifying the current need or problem (Bozak, 2003). Lewin (1947) believed that the equilibrium had to be destabilized or unfrozen before old behaviors can be unlearned and new behaviors successfully learned. Lewin proposed that this may cause some concern or unrest among individuals and could “bring about an emotional stir up” (p. 229). At this point, there can be an imbalance or disequilibrium between driving and restraining forces (Lewin, 1947).

The second stage involves moving and is where the change actually occurs. This is the point where either equilibrium has been reached between driving and restraining forces or the driving forces are stronger than the restraining ones (Lewin, 1947). The final stage refreezing refers to the group or organization being stabilized. According to Schein (1996), in refreezing

the group has reached a new quasi-stationary equilibrium which should result in the new behaviors being relatively safe from deterioration. Lewin (1947) used the term quasi-stationary to describe the rhythm of the behavior and processes of a group that can still fluctuate somewhat depending on the forces or circumstances that act upon it.

According to Cummings and Huse (1989), in regards to an organization, refreezing typically involves changes to organizational culture, norms, policies, and practices. Lewin's three stages of change of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing were used in this study to describe how administrators facilitated change in a new school and established a positive school culture. Lewin's model of change in conjunction with his force field theory provided the researcher with a clear understanding of the experiences by the administrators during the opening of a new school.

Following will include examples of studies that have been framed using Lewin's (1951) force field theory. In addition, many of the studies include both Lewin's force field theory as the theoretical framework and also use Lewin's three stages of change: unfreezing, moving, and freezing when describing the change process. This is the same approach used in this study. These studies demonstrate the continued use and application of his theories and provide support for the use of force field theory as the theoretical framework for this study. Lewin's force field theory is also referred to as the force field analysis model. Therefore, both terms will be seen in the studies that follow.

First, an example of a study utilizing Lewin's theory was conducted by Bozak (2003) and applied Lewin's (1951) force field analysis model to implementing a new nursing information system. Bozak's qualitative, descriptive study used Lewin's model to analyze the change process associated with implementing a new technology system in nursing as well as helping to

identify forces that either moved the change forward or created barriers that caused the change to stagnate. As a part of Bozak's (2003) study, she included a table that lists the driving forces to propel the change on one side and then the restraining forces that were barriers to change on the other.

Bozak (2003) also described the change process the nurses experienced using Lewin's three step model of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. In the unfreezing stage, Bozak identified the people who would be affected by the change and the importance of open communication at this stage. Moving involved the nurses, management, and staff recognizing and accepting the change and being able to move forward with the change. Finally, Bozak described the refreezing stage in that the new nursing system had been successfully implemented and what followed was a period of stability and evaluation. In the conclusion section of the study, Bozak found Lewin's (1951) model to be effective in planning, implementing, and evaluating the changes associated with the new nursing information system.

An additional study within the field of nursing also applied Lewin's (1951) force field theory. Baulcomb (2003) examined changes taking place in regard to patients receiving chemotherapy. Data was collected qualitatively at a single site, a chemotherapy unit at a hospital. The force field analysis model was used to show the complexities of the change process and also the process of incorporating both driving and resisting forces during the planning and implementation stages of the changes to the chemotherapy unit. From the study, Baulcomb found benefits of implementing small scale changes for staff, patients, and the organization. Specifically, the change involved altering a shift pattern with the day unit to meet the demands required without additional funding. Baulcomb used Lewin's (1951) force field

analysis model to evaluate the change process of moving from the current, actual situation to the optimal which, in this case, the goal was to ensure staff continuity within the unit.

Similar to Bozak's (2003) study, Baulcomb also included a table of restraining and driving forces. However, in Baulcomb's table, she added weight to each force from -4 to 4 to show the importance of each force. Baulcomb recognized the need for driving forces to outweigh restraining forces as Lewin suggested in order for the optimal goal to be reached. This was achieved by the manager increasing driving forces. In addition to using the force field analysis, Baulcomb also described the change process using Lewin's (1951) three stages of change: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. Unfreezing involved the change of removing ad-hoc allocation, moving included stressing the positive aspects of the change to the staff and increasing managerial development, and re-freezing was when new independent roster allocation had been stabilized.

Elsass and Veiga (1994) examined the acculturation process that took place when an organization was taken over by another and the two organizations merged into one. This process was examined through Lewin's (1951) force field theory. The researchers defined organizational acculturation as the interaction between two opposing forces: 1) the desire of groups to maintain their own identity and 2) organizational integration which is needed for the two groups to work together. As was previously discussed, Lewin (1951) believed all forces have direction and strength. In this study, cultural differentiation between the two organizations was seen as a restraining force because it prevented the merging of two separate groups. On the other hand, forces of integration were considered driving forces because they played a role in forming a united whole from the two groups. Lewin (1951) referred to the result of the interaction of these

driving and restraining forces as a state of equilibrium which is considered the beginning form of adaption.

Elsass and Veiga (1994) found that “acculturation is a process more than an outcome” (p. 451). This process includes a series of adjustments both major and minor by individuals in both organizations with the most important components being time and management’s response to organizational performance. Lewin’s (1951) force field theory supports that in times of change, the change is best achieved by removing restraining forces as opposed to adding driving forces. Elsass and Veiga found this action to be effective based on the results of their study. They did point out, however, the tendency of managers to want to take control of the process by adding additional force. These researchers proposed in situations such as when two organizations are merged together a more effective approach would be to focus on decreasing forces of cultural differentiation through effective organizational integration tactics. These results were applicable to this study because in a new school setting teachers may be merging together from a variety of previous schools.

Rabak and Cleveland-Innes (2006) studied what influences employees’ acceptance and resistance to a new corporate e-learning initiative started by a large retail chain. The researchers used Lewin’s (1951) force field theory as the framework of their study to acquire a deeper understanding of factors that either supported or deterred employee participation in the new e-learning initiative. Rabak and Cleveland-Innes’s (2006) incorporated a mixed-methods approach with data collection including interviews and self-administered questionnaires. An employer in the retail sector who was using the e-learning training for the first time agreed to participate in the study and participants included both employees who had and had not participated in the e-learning trainings.

The results of the study showed that attitudes and perceptions of e-learning were generally positive with three quarters of respondents indicating the relevance of e-learning to their job duties was important or very important. In addition, 89% agreed or strongly agreed that the content presented through the e-learning was easy to understand. A deterring or restraining factor determined from the data was a lack of time to complete the lessons. Rebak and Cleveland-Innes (2006) suggested that knowledge of driving and restraining forces in regards to e-learning provides a better understanding to promote staff participation. For example, the key restraining factor of lack of time was beneficial to know in order to allot additional future time for employees to complete the e-learning. Similar to previous examples, this study also included a table representing driving and restraining forces that influence e-learning in the workplace.

Lee (2006) conducted a descriptive, qualitative study applying Lewin's (1951) force field theory to the perceptions of nurses in using personal digital assistants in their daily routine. Fifteen nurses served as participants in this study where data were collected through one-on-one in-depth interviews. Lee also found that the nurses moved through Lewin's (1951) three stages of change: unfreezing, moving, and re-freezing. Initially, nurses were resistant to the change which is the unfreezing stage. With time, they began to become more accepting to using the digital assistant which is the moving stage, and finally the system became a part of their daily routine which is the re-freezing stage (Lee, 2006). Lee proposed the need for educational programs and strategic planning to be conducted in the early stages of implementing a new policy. In addition, Lee suggested that factors including management style and the culture of an organization must also be considered when interpreting individual behavior. These five studies demonstrate the use of force field theory to examine the change process and support the use for the approach to be used as the theoretical framework in this study.

One of Lewin's (1952) well known saying is "there is nothing more practical than a good theory" (p. 169). In order to have a credible research study, a well-used and respected theoretical framework is necessary. Lewin's (1951) force field theory has been used in literature for many years and is still being used in studies today as the previous five studies showed. Creswell (2014) stated that theory may be used in a research study to explain phenomena that occur in the world. Therefore, Lewin's force field theory is appropriate to use to describe the phenomenon of the change process experienced by administrators during the opening of a new school.

### **Conclusion**

The opening a new school can be a challenging process for administrators and teachers. However, the success of this process is crucial for not only administrators and teachers but for parents, community members, support staff, and most importantly, the students. When reviewing the literature, common themes related to the purpose of the study were found within the topics of the administrator's role in facilitating change, creating a positive school culture, barriers to building a positive culture, and components to consider when opening a new school. Previous research can be beneficial for school systems and administrators who are in the process of opening a new school to examine. The theoretical framework of Lewin's (1951) force field theory was used to further examine the topic of study.

By reviewing a variety of studies and literature related to this topic it was noted that a lack of studies has been conducted which focus solely on the opening of new schools (Ryan, 2010; Sarason, 1996). More specifically, there is a gap in literature describing the experiences of the administrators during the first year the school was opened. While studies exist that examine establishing a positive school culture, the role of administrators facilitating change, and barriers to building culture, there is a need for studies specially giving voice to the experiences of the



administrators in facilitating change and building school culture within a new school. This study will also address the need proposed by Sarason (1996) for thorough and detailed studies in order to have a more clear understanding of the development of school culture. Therefore, this study will be an appropriate contribution to the field of educational research.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will provide the reader with an understanding of the methods that were followed for this narrative inquiry. The research design as well as the role of the researcher will be examined. In addition, the data collection process including the research site, participants, and the type of evidence that was collected will be discussed. Finally, an examination of the data analysis that took place as well as measures to increase reliability and validity in this study will be explained. Following an explanation of methodology in this chapter, analysis and findings are discussed in Chapter 4 from the administrators studied in this research.

The methods for conducting the study were framed in the context of the study's purpose, research questions, and theoretical framework of Lewin's (1951) force field theory. The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was the examination of perceptions of administrators who led the opening of a new school and how they facilitated change and established a positive culture in a new school. To achieve the purpose of the study, the research was guided by two research questions:

1. How do administrators perceive they facilitate change when opening a new school?
2. How do administrators establish a positive school culture when opening a new school?

#### **Rationale for a Qualitative Approach**

A qualitative approach was chosen to carry out this topic of study. A rationale for selecting a qualitative over a quantitative method of study will be explained. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are interested in discovering and understanding how individuals make sense of their world as well as the experiences they have. This concept ties in with the topic of this study which examined the experiences of administrators in facilitating

change during the opening of a new school. A characteristic of qualitative research is an emphasis on process, understanding, and meaning (Merriam, 2009). With this narrative inquiry, the process of establishing school culture when opening a new school was examined in addition to an understanding of an administrator's role in that process.

Creswell (2013), Hatch (2002), and Marshall and Rossman (2011) described a main characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is a key instrument to the study. In qualitative studies, researchers collect data themselves through studying documents, observing behaviors, or interviewing participants. For this study, the researcher conducted interviews with the administrators at the new schools to provide first-hand accounts of their experiences.

Merriam (2009) emphasized a key point in qualitative research is that the understanding of the phenomenon being studied is from the participants' perspective not the researcher's. This insider's perspective is known as emic as opposed to an outsider's perspective known as etic. Through in-depth interviews, the perspectives of the administrators were examined regarding facilitating change and establishing a positive culture in a new school. Finally, qualitative research provides rich descriptions of the phenomenon being studied that is expressed more in words and pictures as opposed to numbers in quantitative research (Merriam, 2009). To produce rich descriptions on the opening of a new school, the perceptions and experiences of the administrators were explored. This analysis could not have occurred as effectively through quantitative measures such as a survey which would have not allowed for an in-depth examination of the experiences of administrators during the first year the new school was opened. Therefore, based on the purpose and research questions of this study, a qualitative method was a more effective approach for this particular study.

## **Research Design**

The research design for this study was a narrative inquiry. According to Riessman (2008), narrative research is a design of inquiry where the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. In this study, administrators were interviewed to share their personal experiences of opening a new public school. As a result of its focus on the experiences and the qualities of life and education, narrative inquiry is placed in the matrix of qualitative research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Creswell (2014) added that the information collected through narrative research is then retold by the researcher into a narrative chronology. In this study, the stories told through the administrators' experiences were put into chronological order describing the first year the new school was opened. Jonassen and Hernandez-Serrano (2002) described stories or narratives as “the oldest and most natural form of sense making” (p. 66). Merriam (2009) defined narratives as how individuals make sense of their experiences, how they communicate, and how, in turn, we develop understanding of the world around us. Through the experiences of these administrators a deeper, clearer understanding of the process of building culture in a new school was achieved.

The key to narrative analysis is the use of stories as data and first-hand accounts of experiences (Merriam, 2009). Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described narratives as studying the ways individuals experience the world. This narrative examined the first-hand accounts of administrators during the opening of a new school. In addition, these experiences are expressed in story form having a beginning, middle, and end (Merriam, 2009). The experiences of the administrators in this study began first with the opening of a new school and ended at the close of the first school year the new school was opened.

For this narrative inquiry, the researcher served as a nonparticipant interviewer; that is, the researcher had no prior involvement with the administrators or the schools being studied. This allowed for a more unbiased approach by the researcher in that there was no previous connection with the administrators or schools involved in the study. Yin (2009) suggested several necessary skills for a researcher, including being a good listener, being adaptive and flexible, and having a clear understanding of the issues being studied. Therefore, actively listening to all participants in all interviews and asking clarifying or follow up questions as necessary was crucial in this study to develop a clear picture of the administrators' experiences.

In addition, prior to beginning data collection, a clear understanding of the context that was being studied was necessary. A well-defined understanding of the context was achieved through current literature regarding the role of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive school culture. In addition, it was crucial to keep a detailed record throughout the entire process of the narrative inquiry. These records involved components such as the interview protocol, informed consent forms, and transcripts of interviews. In order for the study especially the results to be as accurate and reliable as possible, detailed documentation was necessary at each step of the process. Figure 1 shows the research design followed for this study including the study's research questions, data collection steps, and data analysis.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Merriam (2009) suggested a strategy to help ensure the integrity of the qualitative researcher known as researcher's position or reflexivity as it has more recently been termed. According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), researcher's position is "the process of reflecting critically on the self as the researcher" (p. 183). Therefore, the researcher must examine personal preconceived notions and propositions. I have had first-hand experience of being a teacher going

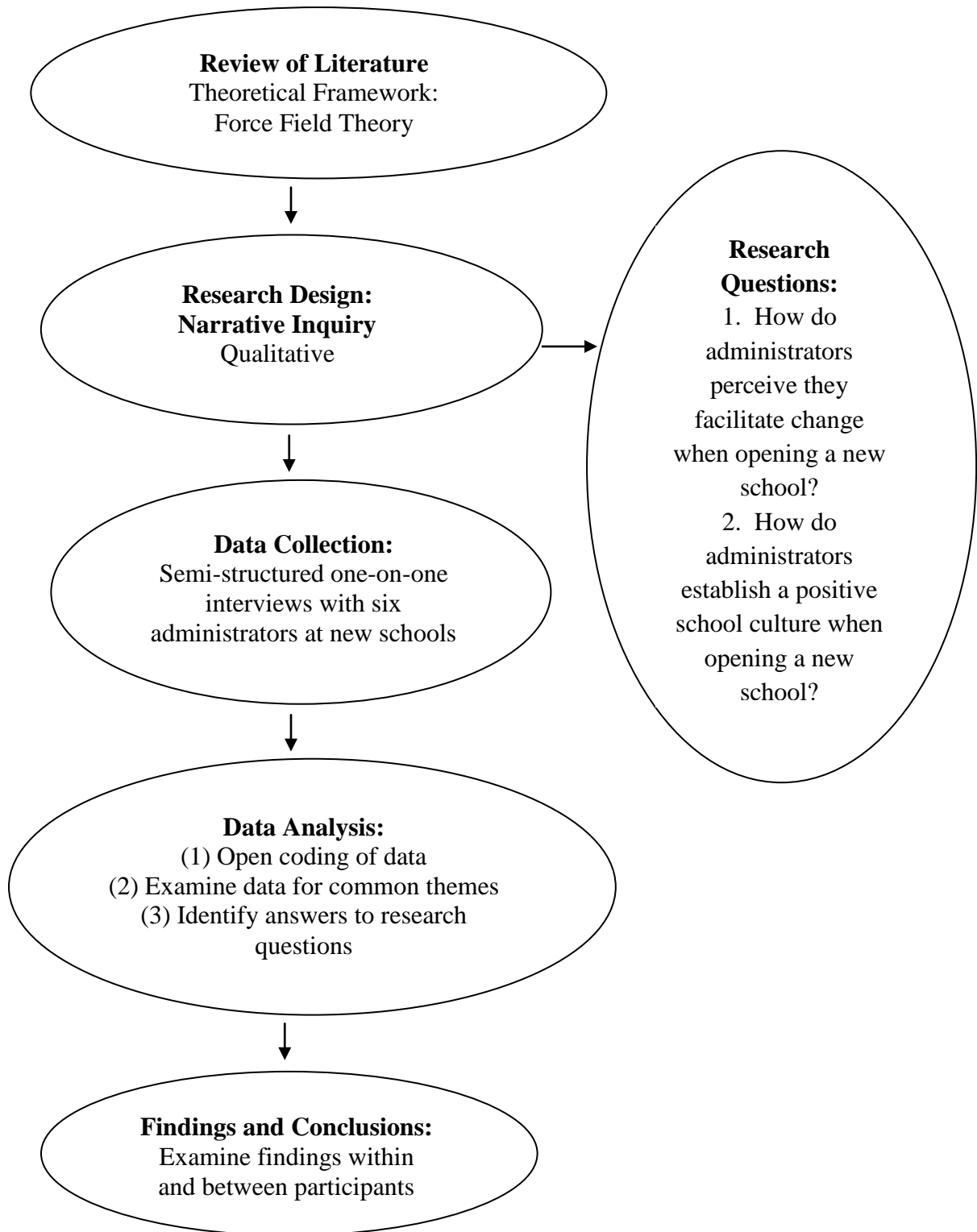


Figure 1. Research Design

through the process of opening a new school and teaching at the school the first year the school was opened. I also served on the design team which provided input on elements such as creating schedules and developing the curriculum for the new school. Therefore, I had some preconceived notions of strategies and approaches that can facilitate change and build school culture in the context of a new school.

These preconceived notions had to be set aside for this study and not influence data analysis and findings. To ensure that any preconceived notions had been set aside, I piloted the interview protocol to check for biases in the wording of the questions prior to conducting interviews for the study. In addition, participants were provided a copy of their interview transcript to ensure data were accurately recorded and researcher bias was not influencing data collection.

### **Site and Participant Characteristics**

#### **Site**

The selected sites for this narrative inquiry were public schools in one southeastern state. Due to the topic of this study, the sample sites were restricted to new schools. These sites were considered purposively, typical samples because they represent the typical instance of the phenomenon of study (Merriam, 2009). According to Patton (2002), “the site is specifically selected because it is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual” (p. 236). The sites selected were typical new schools; that is, the sample sites did not include schools that had undergone reconstitution or schools that were changing their academic focus. For example, a school that was transitioning from being a traditional school to becoming a STEM school would not fit the definition of a new school.

Selection of the sites for this research was restricted depending on where new schools were built and when they were opened. More specifically, site selection occurred in the eastern and middle portion of the southeastern state due to the location of multiple new school sites. Therefore, actually selecting the sites was based on purposively sampling based on whether the schools were newly opened schools (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) described purposeful sampling as based on the belief that the researcher wants to “discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). Since the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of administrators while opening a new school it was necessary to restrict the selection of sites to new schools. In addition, consideration of sites was limited to new schools which had opened within the past three years or less so that the experience was still fresh in the minds of the administrators who served as participants in the study.

The researcher purposively selected new schools that had recently opened in a southeastern state in the past three years. Fullan (2001b) stated that significant change requires to two to three years. Therefore, this was the time frame used when selecting sites for this study. Newly opened schools were identified by utilizing the state’s online school directory which is a product of the southeastern state’s Department of Education. This directory was accessed online and provided information on all active public schools in the state including their opening date and could be sorted by region or district. Sixteen new schools were found that could serve as potential sites for the study based on the criteria of a new public school opened since Fall 2013.

Once a list of the potential sites was created, contact was made with each of the schools by sending an e-mail to the Director of Schools where each school was located, requesting the protocol and procedures for gaining approval to conduct the study. In addition, an overview of



the research study including the study's purpose was included in the e-mail. Sixteen sites were selected to allow for comparisons among the experiences of multiple administrators opening a new school. I wanted to examine whether the findings at each of the sites were consistent or unique which could not have been achieved with only one new school. Multiple sites were also initially contacted in case some schools declined to participate in the study.

If a school declined to participate in the study, contact was made with the next school on the list until contact was made with each school. Following initial contact, six Director of Schools agreed to participate in the study. This represented seven new schools because one of the districts had two new schools that opened within the past three years. One of the sixteen schools was removed from the study because the initial administrator who led the opening of the new school retired. A second school was removed because the system had undergone grade reconfiguration and built a new school but the entire staff remained the same. A third school was removed because the Director of Schools responded the new school was built to replace an old school building but the staff remained the same. Therefore these schools did not meet the qualifications of a new school.

Upon receiving approval from the Director of Schools, contact was made by e-mailing the administrator of each site chosen to obtain consent from the administrator to participate in the study. A table was created to organize information on sites and participants. This table included a list of potential sites, name of school administrator, and name of Director of Schools along with the date approval was received to conduct the study. The table was color-coded to reflect approval status of each school. Green reflected schools that district approval had been obtained. Red reflected schools that declined, failed to respond to the formal e-mail, or the school did not qualify as a new school.

Of the seven news schools in which district permission was obtained, six new schools agreed to participate and served as sites for this study. All schools are located in the same southeastern state. Five of the schools are in the central part of the state and one school is in the eastern part of the state. Two schools opened in the 2013-2014 school year, one school opened in the 2014-2015 school year, and three schools opened in the 2015-2016 school year.

Three of the new schools were considered elementary schools with two schools serving grades Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. These schools were Pineville Elementary with 750 students and Lakefront Elementary with 600 students. The third elementary school, Ridgefield Elementary, has Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Ridgefield Elementary averaged between 755-765 students during its first year being opened. One school, North Station, was an intermediate school with grades 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> and approximately 350 students. The final two schools were middle or junior high schools with Woodson Middle serving 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade and a total of 695 students. The final school, Main Middle, included 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade and approximately 600 students. None of the schools in the study were categorized as high schools. See Table 1 for demographic information on the study's sites.

## **Participants**

Participants for the study included the six administrators at each of the new schools previously selected as sites for the study. Each participant was an administrator of the new school during the first year the school was opened and was currently still an administrator of the new school. An administrator was defined as a leader of the school who was responsible for day to day decision making within the school. In this study, administrator included a principal or an assistant principal.

Of the six administrators who agreed to participate in this study, four administrators were male and two were female. Five of the participants served as the principal the first year the school was opened and was currently still the principal of the new school. One participant was the assistant principal the first year the school was opened and was currently the principal of the new school. Each participant had prior administrative experience ranging from 2 to 17 years. All of the participants had at least 15 years of experience in education with 5 of the 6 participants having at least 20 years' experience. Each school and administrator was given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of the site and the participant. See Table 2 for demographic information of the study's participants.

Table 1

*Demographic Information for Sites*

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Grade Levels</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Year Opened</b>
Main Middle	7 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup>	600	2013-2014
Ridgefield Elementary	K-6 <sup>th</sup>	755-765	2014-2015
Pineville Elementary	K-5 <sup>th</sup>	750	2013-2014
Lakefront Elementary	K-5 <sup>th</sup>	600	2015-2016
Woodson Middle	5 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	695	2015-2016
North Station Intermediate	4 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup>	350	2015-2016

Table 2

*Demographic Information for Interview Participants*

<b>Administrator</b>	<b>School Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years as Administrator</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>
Mr. Miller	Main Middle	Male	2	21
Mr. Matthews	Ridgefield Elementary	Male	2	20
Mrs. Grant	Pineville Elementary	Female	17	26
Mrs. Waters	Lakefront Elementary	Female	5	31
Mr. Williams	Woodson Middle	Male	7	18
Mr. Campbell	North Station Intermediate	Male	4	21

**Data Collection**

In this study, data were collected through semi-structured, one-on-one, audio recorded interviews. Data collection took place in August and September of the 2016-2017 academic year. Each administrator was interviewed during the time frame to allow for an understanding of the experiences of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive school culture in the new school. Based on the results of the pilot of the interview protocol the researcher determined one in-depth interview allowed sufficient time for the research questions for the study to be answered. Therefore, one interview was conducted with each participant. During the interviews, administrators shared their experiences opening and leading the new school and

described the culture of the new school first at the beginning of the school year, at the middle of the year, and, finally, at the end of the first year the school was opened. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. This interview setup also correlated with Lewin's (1947) three step model of change of unfreezing, change, and refreezing which was used as the theoretical framework of the study.

## **Interviews**

Interviews conducted in this study were semi-structured and audio recorded. Administrators at each of the schools served as participants. Each participant was given two copies of the informed consent form prior to conducting the first interview. After the form was signed by the participant, one copy was kept by the participant and the original consent form was kept in the University of Tennessee Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department locked storage. Interviews took place in the administrator's office at their school.

According to Merriam (2009), characteristics of semistructured interviews include flexibility incorporated throughout all questions, no preselected wording or order, and a mix of more and less structured questions included in the interview guide. The type of questions asked and the wording of the questions were carefully considered before conducting interviews. In fact, Merriam proposed that the wording of a question is crucial to gain the type of information desired. Therefore, time and consideration were given to interview questions prior to the first interview based on the purpose of the study; that is, to gain the perceptions of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive school culture. Piloting the interview beforehand, which will be discussed later in greater detail, also allowed interview questions to be adjusted to best fulfill the purpose of the study and answer the study's research questions.

More specifically, the interview questions were composed from the literature discussed in Chapter 2 regarding the role of administrators facilitating change and building a positive school culture. In addition, Lewin's (1951) force field theory was also used to develop the interview questions specifically examining the driving and restraining forces that influenced the building of school culture. Throughout the interviews, the researcher avoided leading questions and refrained from asking yes or no questions (Merriam, 2009). Follow up questions were asked as appropriate based on participants' responses in order to gain a deeper understanding of the administrators' experiences. Interviews continued until common themes were being repeated signifying saturation of data had been reached.

### **Instrumentation**

Prior to data collection, the interview protocol was piloted to avoid researcher bias and provide a validity check. Three current professors at The University of Tennessee were asked and agreed to serve as content validity experts. A draft of the interview protocol was sent to each professor for comments and feedback. The researcher then used the feedback to make corrections to the interview protocol. Next, three principals and two assistant principals were e-mailed and asked to serve as participants in the pilot testing of the protocol. All five agreed and the testing of the protocol was conducted by interviewing the participant one time using the interview protocol. The interviews took place in the office of each principal or assistant principal at their school. Three of the schools were elementary schools, serving PreK-3rd grade and two schools were high schools with grades 9<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup>.

Participants were told the purpose of the study prior to the interview to have a framework for the objective of the interview. The interviews were audio-recorded and the researcher also made notes of participants' responses during the interview. Following the interview the

researcher asked for feedback from the pilot participants regarding whether the questions were clear and addressed the purpose of the study. The researcher made additional notes based on the feedback received from the participants. Feedback from the pilot participants was positive and each participant did feel the protocol was appropriate to fulfill the purpose of the study. Two of the participants commented on one of the questions on the protocol, stating the question was vague and unclear. In addition, the researcher noticed some of the answers to that particular question were not consistent with the researcher’s purpose in asking the question.

Therefore, based on the results of the pilot testing, final edits were made to increase the clarity of the protocol and fulfill the purpose of the study. A copy of the final interview protocol used in this study is found in Appendix A. The same interview protocol was utilized with each participant in the study. Table 3 shows the specific interview items on the protocol and the research questions these items supported answering.

Table 3

*Research Questions and Interview Items*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Items #</b>
1. How do administrators perceive they facilitate change when opening a new school?	2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 12, 13
2. How do administrators establish a positive school culture when opening a new school?	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Merriam (2009) recommended that an interviewer ask multiple types of questions to elicit responses from interviewees. In addition, Patton (2002) suggested six different types of questions. The first type includes experience and behavior questions which ask individuals to

describe their actions, behaviors, and activities. A second type of interview questions are opinion and value questions where the researcher wants to inquire about a person's beliefs or opinions. The next two types of questions that Patton (2002) described are feeling questions which "tap into the affective dimension of human life" (p. 350) and knowledge questions which allow a participant to give actual factual knowledge about an event.

Patton's (2002) next type of questions are sensory questions which are similar to experience and behavior questions but aim to provide more specific data regarding what was seen, heard, or touched. A final question type proposed by Patton is background or demographic questions which refer to demographics of the participant such as age, education, or number of years on the job. An additional type of interview question utilized in this study is described by Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981) as hypothetical. Hypothetical questions ask participants to predict what something might be like or what an individual might do in a specific situation. Table 4 illustrates the types of interview questions and their correspondence to protocol items. A variety of interview questions were included to obtain a thorough, in-depth understanding of the experiences of the administrators in opening and leading a new school.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Merriam (2009), "data analysis is the process used to answer your research question(s)" (p. 176). As the data were collected, detailed organization and analysis occurred. Merriam (2009) strongly stressed working through data analysis along the way and not waiting until the study is complete to begin analyzing. When data collection is finished, researchers should have developed a set of tentative categories or themes, and therefore, have possible answers to their research questions from which to work (Merriam, 2009). That advice was followed with this research study. Following each interview, data were transcribed and



Table 4

*Types of Interview Questions and Correspondence with Protocol Items*

<b>Type of Interview Question</b>	<b>Administrator Interview Items #</b>
Experience/Behavior	3, 4, 5, 7, 8a, 8b, 9, 9b, 9c, 11
Opinion/Value	2, 6, 12
Knowledge	2, 4, 5, 7
Sensory	10, 10b, 10c
Background/Demographic	1, 1b, 1c
Hypothetical	13

examined in comparison to the study's purpose and theoretical framework. The data were studied by going through the interview transcripts line by line and making notes or comments of elements specifically relevant to the study's research questions.

Bogdon and Biklen (2007) provided useful strategies for analyzing data as they are being collected including writing notes about what is being found, planning data collection sessions based on what is noted in previous interviews, and trying out possible ideas and themes on participants. The researcher kept detailed notes with each interview that were analyzed and compared to the study's purpose and theoretical framework. These notes included information on initial findings and raw codes that were determined from each initial interview. The notes were part of the audit trail which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. These strategies were also useful in making the data collection as thorough as possible and managing data analysis along the way.

After all the data had been transcribed and organized, the data were analyzed and coded, placed into categories, and examined for common themes. Merriam (2009) suggested that the whole process of data analysis starts by identifying chunks in the data set that are responsive to the research questions. These segments or units are chunks of data that could potentially answer part or all of a question the researcher has asked in his or her study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that to qualify as a unit, two criteria must be met: the unit must be heuristic, revealing knowledge relevant to the study and secondly, the unit must be the smallest piece of content that can stand by itself.

In this study, the collected data were analyzed line by line looking for segments of data that could potentially answer research questions. A list of raw codes was compiled working through the interview transcript. This form of coding is called open coding since the researcher is open to a variety of possibilities (Merriam, 2009). When open coding, Merriam stated the researcher can use the actual words straight from the data or use concepts from pertaining literature. Both approaches were used when coding data in this study. Once the entire piece of data had been open-coded the researcher went back through and looked for common codes that could then be grouped together. Grouping open codes is known as axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

The same process was repeated with the next set of data while keeping in mind the list of groupings that were created from the first piece of data. In addition, the data were consistently viewed in terms of the purpose, research questions, and theoretical framework of force field theory (Lewin, 1951). After the second set of data were analyzed, the list of groupings was compared to the first. According to Merriam (2009), the patterns that are seen as more data are analyzed develop into categories and themes. In addition, these categories should be exhaustive,

exclusive, and in answer to the purpose of the research (Merriam, 2009). After all the data had been analyzed, these categories provided common themes to answer the research questions. These themes are considered the major findings of the study and were supported by multiple perspectives from participants and specific evidence collected (Creswell, 2014).

Two examples of the coding process will follow in order to better understand the process of data analysis utilized in this study. Mrs. Grant, administrator at Pineville Elementary, stated, “people are not willing to invest in trust with you unless they know who you are.” This quote was coded as building relationships and in the third iteration became part of the theme of establishing trust. Mr. Matthews, administrator at Ridgefield Elementary, stated, “if you are coming to Ridgefield, you’re working as a team. In fact, there are people we are not here who did not work as a team. You are going to work as team.” This quote was coded as team mentality and became part of the theme of strategic hiring. A visual representation of the entire coding process beginning with initial codes and moving to pattern variables and then finally common themes is shown in Tables 5 and 6.

## **Methods of Verification**

### **Audit Trail**

According to Merriam (2009), “reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 220). Specific steps were taken throughout this study to increase reliability as well as internal and external validity. One method suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985) to increase reliability was to create an audit trail to document each step as the study progressed. Merriam (2009) compared an audit trail to an auditor who verifies accounts as being similar to independent readers being able to verify the results of a study by following the trail of the researcher. Merriam described an audit trail in a qualitative study as a detailed explanation of

Table 5

*Code Mapping: Research Question #1*

<b>Third Iteration: Themes: Research Question #1</b>		
How do administrators perceive they facilitate change when opening a new school?		
Establishing Trust	Blending of Staff	Leadership Attributes
<b>Second Iteration: Pattern Variables</b>		
Building Relationships Consistency Honesty	Decrease Anxiety Communication Positive Interactions Team Building	Shared Leadership Transparent Student Centered
<b>First Iteration: Initial Codes</b>		
Trust Relationships Consistency Honesty Input Buy-in Collaborate Listen Informed Support Reputation Caring Inclusive	Blending Anxiety Communication Team Building Interactions Transition Uncertainty Emotions Delays Change Difficult Familiar In-Service	Shared Leadership Transparent Student Focused Experience Refining Knowledge Supportive Honest Role Models Flexible Problem-solving

Table 6

*Code Mapping: Research Question #2*

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**Third Iteration: Themes: Research Question #2**

How do administrators establish a positive school culture when opening a new school?

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Commitment	Developing a Vision	Strategic Hiring
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**Second Iteration: Pattern Variables**

Collaboration Branding Traditions/ Recognitions	Teacher Input Expectations Problem-solving	Right Fit Team Mentality Work Ethic
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**First Iteration: Initial Codes**

Collaboration Branding Traditions Buy-in Voice Teamwork Voice Mascot/Logo Common Plan Cooperation Interaction Recognition	Vision Expectations No Excuses Problem-solving Clear Supportive Input Principles Non-negotiables Consistency Comradery Family	Right Fit Team Mentality Work Ethic Vision Student Centered Values Observe Personality Delegate Depend
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how data were collected, how categories were developed, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry. To develop this trail, “the researcher must keep a research journal or record memos on the process of conducting the research as it is being undertaken” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). Throughout this study, a detailed record of each step of the research process was kept by the researcher to increase reliability of results and ensure trustworthiness.

### **Protocol Piloting**

As previously discussed, prior to conducting interviews, the interview protocol was piloted to increase validity of the instrument. Three current professors at the University of Tennessee agreed to serve as content validity experts and provided feedback on a draft of the interview protocol. Their input was used to develop an interview protocol that was piloted on five current administrators. Feedback from these interviews was utilized to make additional edits to the final interview protocol which was used for all interviews in this study. Piloting the protocol prior to implementation provided a validity check for any bias in the wording or questioning.

### **Researcher’s Subjectivity**

In a previous section, the role of the researcher was examined in greater detail. Explaining the researcher’s subjectivity involves making biases and assumptions of the researcher clear to the reader (Merriam, 2009). A discussion of the researcher’s subjectivity is also a strategy to increase reliability and external validity within a study and was therefore disclosed in this study. In addition, researcher subjectivity was also addressed during the interview protocol to confirm verification that bias did not influence the interview protocol. The researcher disclosed personal experience of being a part of the planning process in opening a new school and teaching at a new school the first year the school was opened.

## **Ethical Safeguards and Considerations**

Before any data collection in this study was conducted, a request to conduct research was completed and approved by The University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board. To ensure confidentiality of participants, names of participants and schools were not reported during data analysis. All participants and the sites involved in the study were given pseudonyms to protect the identity of the individuals and schools. Prior to collecting any data, permission was acquired first through the Director of Schools of the district in which the schools were located.

Additionally, consent forms were provided to all participants to inform them about the research study in which they would participate. Consent forms were kept in The University of Tennessee Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department locked storage following completion of the study. All participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. No compensation or incentive was provided for participation. No students or children were interviewed or involved in this study.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter described the methods that were used to carry out this qualitative narrative inquiry. This approach was chosen to address the purpose of the study of describing the perceptions of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive school culture during the opening a new school. Within this chapter, a discussion of the research design along with the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach was discussed. In addition, an examination of the role of the researcher including possible biases was revealed. The data collection and analysis processes were explained including the sites, participants, and type of evidence collected. Finally, methods of verifications were explored including a discussion of steps that were taken in this study to increase reliability and validity. The following chapter will report the

analysis of data collected from the interviews with the administrators. After analyzing the results, Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the results of the study through the lens of the theoretical framework. Finally, a discussion of implications for administrators, school districts, and policy makers as well as recommendations based on the results of this study for future studies is outlined in the final chapter.



## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, an explanation of the methodology utilized in this study was discussed. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive culture when opening a new school. The research was guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do administrators perceive they facilitate change when opening a new school?
2. How do administrators establish a positive school culture when opening a new school?

To fulfill the purpose and answer the research questions in this study, six administrators who led the opening of a new school were interviewed. The interview was guided by the study's purpose and the theoretical framework of Lewin's (1951) force field theory.

#### **Analysis: Research Question 1**

After conducting interviews and analyzing data, common themes were determined for the study. In this section, the first research question of how administrators perceive they facilitate change when opening a new school will be answered. The main themes for this question include establishing trust, blending of staff, and the leadership attributes of the administrator. These themes will be discussed in greater detail. Chapter 3, Table 2 included a list of demographic information on each participant and site. These schools' and participants' names will be referenced when describing the themes.

#### **Establishing Trust**

The first theme regarding the role of administrators in facilitating change when opening a new school was establishing trust. To facilitate the change process of teachers transitioning to a new school, trust between the administrator and the teachers, students, and parents was essential.

According to Mr. Williams at Woodson Middle, “you can’t do anything unless they (teachers) trust you.” Mrs. Grant at Pineville Elementary described trust as the “foundation of the culture.” To build trust in the new schools, key strategies were discussed by administrators including building relationships, demonstrating consistency, and exhibiting honesty.

### **Building Relationships**

“Relationships are everything and I mean everything. People are not willing to invest in trust with you unless they know who you are” (Mrs. Grant, Pineville Elementary). Similarly, Mr. Campbell at North Station Intermediate asserted that “the most important thing is having that relationship, that the teachers trust you.” When discussing teachers transitioning to Main Middle, Mr. Miller stated that “a trusting relationship with a principal, coming in, being able to rely on them, and know that they are going to be able to give the support they need is extremely important.” Mr. Miller further elaborated that since there were three unique staffs coming together, building relationships from the beginning was important for teachers to feel supported, comfortable, and start to develop trust with their new administrators. At Main, Mr. Miller found collaboration to be effective in building relationships and trust: “The more that we (staff) worked together the more we (staff) gained trust with one another and with myself.”

Since many teachers at Main previously did not know each other spending time together was a crucial piece in building trust. Mr. Miller recognized that to help teachers with the transition to a new school and to build trust with each other and their administrators, teachers needed a chance to collaborate, share ideas, get to know each other, and build relationships. To accomplish this, Mr. Miller discussed he facilitated collaboration with the new staff beginning the first time the entire staff was together during their first in-service day so teacher could begin to get some support from one another. An example of collaboration began with informal

meetings by grade levels to allow teachers to be introduced to fellow colleagues they would be working with on their grade level team.

Before building a positive culture in the new school, trust must first be established. “If they (teachers) don’t trust you then they are going to be compliant and do exactly what you asked. You’re not going to get anymore from them” (Mr. Williams, Woodson Middle). Mr. Williams felt that without the foundation of trust, administrators will receive the minimum expectations from their staff. Therefore, Mr. Williams felt strongly about building relationships and establishing trust and recognized these components take time with the new staff. As a result, he mentioned that he spent his whole first year building those relationships with his teachers. In order for his staff to get to know him, Mr. Williams explained he showed his teachers they were cared for. According to Mr. Williams, “you’re going to get way more out of the people working if they are happy and they want to be there and they know somebody is going to take care of them. Everybody wants to feel loved.” Mr. Williams said to build relationships with his staff at Woodson he strived to make their job easier, “took some of the work off their lap . . . , and tried to create an environment that they liked coming to work.” Mr. Williams provided the example involving Woodson’s mission statement. At the same time the staff of Woodson was working on their mission statement, the state’s Department of Education made curriculum and testing changes. Mr. Williams explained this was a lot on his staff at one time. Therefore, he decided to use a mission statement from some of the teachers’ former school in order to alleviate some of the stress on his teachers.

When asked about helping teachers transition to a new school, Mr. Campbell, administrator at North Station Intermediate, considered trust to be one of the most important factors. Mr. Campbell also described trust as a major obstacle for him as an administrator

coming to the new school because the teachers at North Station did not know him and did not have a relationship with him. He elaborated further that in order to establish trust the teachers had to get to know who he was: “I knew I was going to have to win them over.” To build relationships with his new staff, Mr. Campbell set up meetings with teachers and involved them in the building process. For example, Mr. Campbell allowed the teachers to have input on components of the new school such as paint colors and furniture.

Mrs. Grant had a similar experience when opening Pineville. Even though she came into the position of principal at Pineville with what she described as a very solid reputation, she discovered that there were some individuals that were still sizing her up. To allow her staff to get to know her and each other, Mrs. Grant began with what she referred to as “base conversations.” These conversations occurred in small groups by grade level and as a whole group with the entire faculty. The purposes of these conversations were to allow her staff to begin building relationships with another and for her to be able to communicate her vision and goals for Pineville. For the administrators to gain the trust of their teachers, they first had to establish a relationship with their teachers.

### **Consistency**

Building trust was a necessary component in opening the new school because many teachers were coming together for the first time and had no prior knowledge of each other or their administrator. One approach Mr. Matthews discussed to build trust at Ridgefield Elementary was consistency. Mr. Matthews was consistent from the beginning with his expectations and goals to teachers and parents. Before the school year began, Mr. Matthews held parent meetings to convey his expectations and philosophy to parents.

One example that required Mr. Matthews to communicate clearly and demonstrate consistency regarded zone waivers. With the opening of Ridgefield, rezoning occurred in the community. Some families applied for a zone waiver to be able to attend the new school, Ridgefield. Mr. Matthews communicated to families before the school opened that their address was grandfathered in the first year the school opened but if they moved, even across the street, their zone waiver would be denied. There were some families that moved and their zone waiver was no longer approved. As a result, Mr. Matthews said there were some parents that were upset. However, Mr. Matthews was consistent in standing by his original message and treated all families the same in regards to zone waivers. In turn, he was able to develop trust that he would treat all stakeholders fairly and be consistent of standing by his word.

When situations did arise at Ridgefield or if someone was upset with a decision he made or action he took, Mr. Matthews said he would always make his decisions based on what was best for the students. This consistency allowed teachers and parents who had no prior knowledge of him or his leadership philosophy to know what his values and beliefs were as an administrator. Even though situations did arise where parents or teachers did not agree with every decision Mr. Matthew made, his approach allowed stakeholders at Ridgefield to develop trust that he was consistent with his decision making by remaining focused on the students.

Mrs. Grant discovered consistency at Pineville was necessary to facilitate change and bring her new staff together. Multiple schools from within the district were represented when Pineville opened. While these teachers came from schools within the same district and shared some of the same policies, Mrs. Grant learned there were differences in how these policies were implemented at various schools and to what level of fidelity. Mrs. Grant described getting those district pieces, such as common assessments, more uniform and consistent was a big challenge

her new staff had to overcome during the first year Pineville was opened. One way she helped teachers to develop a common understanding of policies was creating a teacher handbook that she went over at the beginning of the year with her new staff. Mrs. Grant felt having those key conversations brought about consistency and helped build relationships with her staff as well.

### **Honesty**

Exhibiting honesty and having honest conversations was a strategy utilized by Mrs. Grant to build trust. When opening Pineville, there were some decisions when Mrs. Grant solicited teacher input and other times when there were decisions that were outside of her control. Since Pineville was a new school, throughout the first year there were many outside visitors. Some teachers were accustomed to wearing jeans at their previous school every Friday. However, this was not possible for many Fridays at Pineville during the first year because the Director and Assistant Director of Schools wanted the staff looking professional for any guests coming to visit the new school. Therefore, this was a situation where Mrs. Grant could not compromise with her staff but she said having those honest conversations with her staff at Pineville was significant in trying to build that trust factor. Mrs. Grant did point out that there were times when she was not able to explain to her staff why certain decisions had to be made but that when she was able to she did and that it went a long way in establishing trust between the administrator and staff at Pineville.

At North Station, Mr. Campbell was honest with his staff at the end of the first year and admitted he did not have all the answers. There were some concerns by one grade level of teachers at the end of the first year because the upcoming students performed lower academically than in previous years. This caused frustration and anxiety for the teachers. Mr. Campbell admitted, “as an administrator you want to have the answers but sometimes you don’t have the

answers.” He discussed that he was supportive of his teachers and strived to promote a positive attitude. Even though he did not have the answers he discussed with his staff they were going to work together to continue to grow the students at North Station as best as they could.

Not only was honesty shown to establish trust between the administrator and the teacher but also between the administrator and parents. Mr. Matthews explained that he met with every parent who came in to register their child for Ridgefield. During those conversations, Mr. Matthews said he was open and honest with parents which helped to establish trust with his new families: “We are not going to have all the answers. Hey, this is a new school. No, I can’t tell you what that’s going to look like right now. When you are upfront, they (parents) know. It creates not us against them.”

Establishing trust was noted as a common theme administrators perceived to help facilitate change when opening a new school. This theme was noted across multiple participants in this study. In order to establish trust, key factors of building relationships, demonstrating consistency, and exhibiting honesty were utilized.

### **Blending of Staff**

A second theme discussed by all six participants during the interviews was the blending of staff from multiple schools. Blending refers to bringing staffs from multiple different schools together to create a unified staff at the new school and the role the administrator played in facilitating this change. At Pineville Elementary, eleven schools were represented from the district in addition to a small group of new hires that were from out of state in addition to first year teachers. Mr. Matthews discussed merging parents and staff from 4 or 5 different schools. At Lakefront Elementary and Main Middle, three schools came together to open the new school. Staff from two schools merged to create North Station Intermediate. Therefore, bringing staffs

from distinctly different schools together into one new staff with common procedures, expectations, and principles was crucial for the success of the new school. According to Mrs. Grant, blending the staff was a major focus in helping teachers transition to a new school. Strategies used by the administrators to blend their staff included decreasing anxiety, frequent and open communication, positive interactions, and incorporating teambuilding activities.

### **Decreasing Anxiety**

To bring the new school's staff together administrators first considered the teachers' emotions of how they viewed the transition process. Administrators mentioned that teachers faced anxiety and uncertainty when transitioning to a new school. At Main Middle, Mr. Miller discussed that he and the other administrator recognized the apprehension that teachers faced coming to the new school. "We realized how important it was having three different distinct staffs come together and knowing they were coming from different school cultures and that it was going to be a difficult transition" (Mr. Miller, Main Middle). When discussing the opening of North Station, Mr. Campbell stated individuals "were nervous because of the unknown."

Mrs. Grant described the transition process at Pineville in that "everybody was anxious about everything, everything." When setting up grade level teams at Pineville, Mrs. Grant said she tried very hard not to stack one team with multiple people from the same school. Not only did these teachers already have a relationship but they also shared similar experiences and expectations from their previous school and Mrs. Grant wanted to bring her staff from multiple schools together as one new staff.

To address apprehension and the unknowns, administrators discussed first bringing the staff together to ensure everyone had the same understanding of common aspects of the school such as objectives, goals, or principles. Mrs. Waters accomplished this by involving the staff in



developing Pineville's working agreements which would be the guiding principles for the school. At Lakefront, Mrs. Grant described the process of addressing teacher anxiety by "trying to get some uniformity and consistency." Mrs. Grant went on to discuss the beginning of the year as establishing a base in regard to expectations and procedures and that throughout the entire first year she and her staff were refining that base to determine what worked best for their school.

To decrease teacher anxiety and blend the new staff together, Mr. Campbell brought in components and traditions that teachers had at their previous school to make them more comfortable at North Station. According to Mr. Campbell it was important to let "teachers know that things are going to change but not a lot is going to change. We are going to carry on the same things that they did but maybe adapt it a little bit" to fit North Station. Mr. Campbell used the goals, mission statements, and objectives from one of the schools as a model for the goals and objectives for North Station. Having some aspects that were familiar and comfortable was a positive strategy to bring the new staff together.

Anxiety existed not only for teachers but for parents and students as well. Mrs. Grant described the balancing act of striving to meet all stakeholders' needs at Pineville: "We had the apprehension of the staff I was holding on one plate and then we had the apprehension of my babies who were coming places they had never been before." Mrs. Grant faced parents and students at Pineville who were leaving schools and friends they were upset about leaving and coming to a place they did not know. To facilitate the change of helping parents and students transition to Pineville, first Mrs. Grant had to recognize the anxiety and uncertainty stakeholders were feeling about their new school.

Then, Mrs. Grant began addressing the anxiety parents and students were facing when families came to registration. Due to construction delays, registration was not able to be held at

the school but at a nearby community college. Being unable to enter and see the new school contributed to additional stress and uncertainty for stakeholders. Therefore, Mrs. Grant stated she “tried purposively to connect with the students and have them look at the floorplan.” To make students and parents less anxious about Pineville, Mrs. Grant had a blueprint of the school and conveyed to students that they only needed to know two things: 1) Whether they were upstairs or downstairs in the school and 2) what color their hallway was. Each grade-level hallway was colored coded with a unique color to make it easier for students and parents to locate their classrooms. Mrs. Grant felt this approach was very friendly for parents and students and showed the administration truly cared about the concerns and anxiety parents and students were having about coming to Pineville.

### **Communication**

To bring their new staff together, administrators felt frequent and open communication was key. Mr. Campbell often emailed or texted the teachers at North Station to keep them updated throughout the building process. His goal was to keep his teachers informed of everything going on as North Station was being built. Since her staff was not able to see Pineville or their classroom during construction, Mrs. Grant sent pictures to her staff so they could begin envisioning their school. In addition, her teachers asked for information such as the size of a window for a valence or the size of the cubbies in the classroom. So, Mrs. Grant measured these items and communicated that information to her staff as well.

Mrs. Waters took a similar approach to communication at Lakefront Elementary by sending out a weekly newsletter to her new staff starting in the spring before the school opened in August to keep them informed on items such as building progress, new hires, scheduling, and important dates. Mrs. Waters compared the building of the new school to building a new house

where people want to go in and see the progress. However, for safety reasons, the teachers were not able to see Lakefront until the school was nearly completed. Therefore, Mrs. Waters used the weekly newsletter to update her staff on the progress of Lakefront along the way. For example, in one of her weekly newsletters, Mrs. Waters communicated to her staff what items would be in their new classroom such as bookshelves, pencil sharpener, filing cabinets and types of tables to allow teachers to consider how they would set up their new classroom and what additional items they might want to purchase. This communication was beneficial in making the teachers feel they were a part of their new school before Lakefront opened.

Mr. Campbell at North Station and Mrs. Grant at Pineville both referenced a handbook as a way to communicate day to day procedures and information for teachers. Pineville's teacher handbook included components such as how to complete purchase orders, field trip requisitions, and car rider procedures. North Station's handbook covered elements such as attendance and dress code policies as well as the school's mission statement and objectives. These handbooks were additional resources for administrators to communicate with their staff and also have a reference for teachers to refer to as the year progressed and when questions might come up.

Social media was another form of communication the administrators utilized to connect not only with teachers but also parents and students. Mr. Campbell said he runs North Station's Facebook and Twitter accounts and keeps them updated to communicate with his staff and parents. Similarly, Mr. Matthews referenced social media and gave the example of Twitter as a resource to get teachers and parents excited about coming to Ridgefield by tweeting when they saw a Ridgefield magnet on someone's car. In addition, Mr. Matthews posted the class rolls on Ridgefield's website to communicate with parents the class assigned to their child.

## **Positive Interactions**

In all six schools the blending of the new staff began before the school year started. Mrs. Waters began hiring for Lakefront Elementary in January. She began blending the staff together in February with a small core group of teachers who had three initial meetings to begin working on the operating principles to guide the new school. In the spring, Mrs. Waters held optional meetings once or twice a month, open to the whole faculty to come together and interact with one another. Mrs. Waters held these meetings on Friday afternoons to avoid conflicts with any faculty meetings or other obligations at the teachers' current schools.

At North Station, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers came from one school and the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers came from a different school. Therefore, Mr. Campbell stated he would “purposely set up scenarios where we would have to meet for some crazy reason” but the real purpose was so the entire staff could come together to get to know one another and get to know him. At that point all the teachers knew was his reputation. As a former high school administrator, he had a reputation for being rigid and he realized when opening North Station he had to develop a more elementary mindset. “I needed to soften my edges a little bit. I had to learn to be more flexible and hug and eat cupcakes” (Mr. Campbell, North Station). To accomplish this, Mr. Campbell spent time getting to know his teachers and created positive interactions between himself and his staff.

Not only did teachers have a lack of knowledge concerning their administrators but administrators also had a lack of knowledge concerning their teachers. At Pineville only five staff members came from Mrs. Grant's previous school and of that five only two were teachers. At Lakefront, seven of the teachers were from Mrs. Waters's previous school. For Mr. Campbell, there were no teachers from his previous school. When describing her staff at the

beginning of the year, Mrs. Grant stated, “there were so few of them that I had any base knowledge of their work ethic.” Therefore, time spent interacting and building community with the new staff was necessary for both the teachers and the administrators.

To interact positively with his staff, Mr. Williams discussed that he spent time in classrooms each day to get to know each teacher personally as well as their personality. He mentioned that he does his paperwork in the evening and uses the time during the day to get to know his teachers. Mr. Williams explained he conveys the importance of being visible in classrooms to his assistant principals as well in the hiring process.

I tell the APs for sure if you are in your office, I’m going to hire somebody else. You need to be out in the classrooms, not checking on teachers but just because you are part of the team. You’ve got to be there for them to be able to use you when they need you. In Mr. Williams’s and his two assistant principals’ daily schedule there is a portion of their day set aside for them to be in classrooms with teachers.

Bringing stakeholders together did not always involve just positive interactions between the staff and the administrator but also extended out into the community. As North Station was nearing completion, the community held a Grand Opening Ceremony to dedicate and open the new school. The school was named after two influential administrators in the community, one of whom was in frail health. The ceremony was moved up to ensure both former administrators could attend. The new staff, along with parents, students, and the entire community, was invited to celebrate the opening of the new school. Mr. Campbell described it as a great way to bring everyone together.

The community surrounding Main Middle had been planning and preparing for a new school for many years. As a result, the new school received a great deal of cooperation and input

from the community. Once the school was finished, an open house was held at Main for not only students and their families but the community was also invited to attend. Community involvement was encouraged throughout the year as well. Mr. Miller stated the administrators have “always made it an open school such as anytime we have a drama production and we try to encourage community participation in almost everything we do.”

### **Teambuilding Activities**

Incorporating informal and teambuilding activities were also mentioned as beneficial in blending the staffs together. Four of the administrators discussed having professional development opportunities over the summer for the staff to begin building relationships with one another. For example before the school year started Mr. Matthews had the staff at Ridgefield Elementary do a city wide “scavenger hunt” just to get to know people, their community, and have fun. Lakefront Elementary had a get together at a local restaurant to allow teachers to begin building relationships. At Main Middle, the staff had get-togethers and participated in team building activities to have a chance to get to know one another better before the school year began. Before the building was complete, the teachers at Lakefront took a field trip and viewed the progress of their new school. Mr. Matthews also met his new staff a few times at Ridgefield to allow teachers to see the school’s progress. To make the first meeting with team leaders more comfortable at Woodson, Mr. Williams walked with teachers around the building to allow for easier, initial conversations in a more informal setting.

When the faculty came together for the first time Mrs. Grant made lanyards with different colors for each grade level for names tags because most people did not know each other’s names and had no idea which teachers went where. The lanyards provided a visual to allow teachers to learn who else was on their grade level team. In addition, the colors of the lanyards

corresponded with the colors that would be in the hallways of the new school to designate grade levels.

At some of the schools teambuilding began with a small, core group of staff members. At Woodson, Mr. Williams started blending his staff by meeting with his new leadership team. The leadership team included himself, his two assistant principals, school counselors, and librarian. Mrs. Grant called her leadership team at Pineville a guiding coalition and considered this team as necessary in building the culture of the school because they were required to look globally on what was best for the school as a whole not just for their classroom or their grade level. These small core groups were the first steps in blending the entire staff together.

At Ridgefield, construction delays led to unexpected team building that brought the staff together. According to Mr. Matthews adversity makes individuals bond all the time. Due to delays, the teachers at Ridgefield, while in a new school, began the year with nothing. Mr. Matthews compared it Little House on the Prairie because nothing could be delivered before the school passed inspection by the fire marshal. Instead of the previously planned in-service activities, Mr. Matthews had the teachers at Ridgefield come together as a grade level team and plan the first week or two of school. This collaboration under trying circumstances proved to be very successful in allowing his teachers to begin building relationships with one another. “The first week of school when they didn’t have anything was some of the best teaching I’ve ever seen” (Mr. Matthews, Ridgefield Elementary).

At each of the schools, a group of teachers were coming together for the first time to open a new school. As the leader of the school, the administrator was responsible for facilitating this change and blending the staffs of multiples schools together as one school. In order to

accomplish this, administrators decreased anxiety, frequently communicated with their staff, created positive interactions, and facilitated team building activities.

### **Leadership Attributes**

The leadership attributes of administrators was a common theme shown to have a strong influence on administrators facilitating change in the new school. There are various approaches to leadership but in this study certain characteristics of leaders were discussed as having a positive influence on the new school. These included demonstrating shared leadership, being transparent and student centered.

#### **Shared Leadership**

The first leadership attribute administrators described in helping facilitate change in their new school was shared leadership. In this study, shared leadership is where “principals seek others in their school to build partnerships, tap others’ strengths, and jointly move the vision forward” (Burgess & Bates, 2009). Mr. Matthews had previous experience being a part of the opening of multiple new schools both as a teacher and an administrator and he said he used these experiences to help guide his approach to leadership when opening Ridgefield. As a leader, Mr. Matthews strongly believed in being collaborative and being willing to listen to multiple ideas and opinions. From his previous experiences, he learned what did and did not work when opening a new school. However, even though he had an idea of how procedures should go at Ridgefield he was still collaborative and wanted input from his teachers on making decisions in the new school. Therefore, involvement and collaboration from his staff were important components of his approach to leadership at Ridgefield.

You’ve got to be collaborative. I can’t imagine being an authoritative administrator and opening a school and being good at it. That’s personal. It’s just my opinion because



you've got to be flexible and if you are authoritative that will come across to parents and then you're opening the doors and you're doing this, it's us against them.

Mr. Campbell concurred, "you've got to listen to your teachers about what their needs are." An example of shared leadership at North Station was Mr. Campbell listened to his teachers about making changes to the daily schedule. One grade level expressed concerns over an extended period of instructional time in their daily schedule and asked for their recess to be moved to break up the time period. Mr. Campbell worked with his teachers to address their concerns and make changes to their schedule.

Mr. Williams also stressed the importance of a collaborative approach to leadership at Woodson: "It's all about team. It's all about everyone feeling comfortable to be a part of the learning process." Even though he was the leader of the school, Mr. Williams did not feel he had all the answers or always knew the best approach. When describing his approach to leadership, Mr. Williams stated, "I was not dictatorial. I was influential." Mrs. Williams explained the process of facilitating the change in the new school as him working directly with the teachers and parents who wanted to be involved. As a team they collaborated and made decisions for the new school.

In addition, Mr. Williams demonstrated shared leadership with his teachers and showed he valued their knowledge and input. He went on to say that "teachers are way smarter than administrators" (Mr. Williams, Woodson Middle). He pointed out that he had been out of the classroom for multiple years and that he depended on the experts who were still in the classroom. Collaborating with teachers also allowed Mr. Williams to show his teachers they were respected at Woodson.

An example of shared leadership was also evident at Lakefront during the teachers' grade level planning. Mrs. Grant discussed that the district already had a scope and sequence in place for each grade level that all teachers were expected to use and teachers working together during plan time was encouraged. However, Mrs. Grant wanted her staff to take a more collaborative approach and spend time examining the curriculum standards by discussing what the standards meant along with specific strategies to teach each standard. This was not a conversation Mrs. Grant wanted dictated by her but instead a collaborative discussion between the teachers. She or another administrator was present to help facilitate along with the school's academic coaches but she wanted the discussion to be a time where teachers could share and learn from each other. In addition, Mrs. Grant explained that these conversations ensured teachers had a common understanding of what they were expected to teach as well as reduced variability from classroom to classroom.

### **Transparent**

Being transparent was another leadership skill discussed by administrators to help facilitate change in the new school. Administrators demonstrated transparency by being clear and open about their decision making process and ensuring their actions matched their messaging. For example Mr. Williams described himself as being transparent with his staff in that his actions followed through with his words. In addition, Mr. Williams discussed his willingness to reflect upon a situation and address situations in which he was wrong: "If I do something wrong, I'm going to fix it. I just need to know. I need to know they've (teachers) got my back and I've got theirs" (Mr. Williams, Woodson Middle). Similarly, Mr. Campbell commented on wanting to be open and honest with his staff: "As an administrator, I want you to be honest. I want you to tell me the truth." If there were aspects about himself or the school that

needed to be improved upon, Mr. Campbell wanted to know and then follow up with necessary steps to make the situation better. At Ridgefield, Mr. Matthews discussed being upfront and transparent with his teachers and parents in regards to his decision making process. According to Mr. Matthews his decision making process is based on considering what is best for the school as a whole and what is best for students. Mr. Matthews discussed that mutual respect exists between the administrators and teachers at Ridgefield but that he has the respect of his staff because his staff knows he also respects them.

Mrs. Grant discussed her reputation for being transparent: “The parents I’d worked with before knew I would follow up with what I said.” At Pineville, Mrs. Grant continued to demonstrate transparency with her staff and parents and explained that words are not enough but that her actions must match her words. She wanted her to staff to know that she held herself to the same expectations to which she held them: “There was a very rare occasion that I wasn’t right there beside somebody doing something that I’d ask them to do just because that’s the way it’s supposed to be” (Mrs. Grant, Pineville). As the leader of the school, Mrs. Grant felt she should demonstrate the same characteristics and actions that she asked of her teachers. An example of this was when the PTO at Pineville was working at school on a Saturday planting or working on the playground, and Mrs. Grant was there with them in her jeans and t-shirt too.

### **Student Centered**

Being student centered was a final leadership skill mentioned by multiple administrators as helping to facilitate change. According to Mr. Campbell at North Station, “I want our kids to know that we legitimately care about them. They are not just another kid in a row. We know something about them. We are interested in their lives outside of school and so we try to make an effort to get to know our students.” This approach to leadership was discussed repeatedly by

Mr. Campbell as part of his daily routine at North Station in aspects such as speaking to each student when they enter the building in the morning and being in the hallways at dismissal to say goodbye at the end of the day. He also visits each homeroom and says good morning to each teacher. His reasoning was “the kids at my school can’t say Mr. Campbell didn’t talk to me today” (Mr. Campbell, North Station). Mr. Campbell also does lunch duty each day, and he considers this his time with the kids and allows him to truly know the students in his school. Similarly, Mr. Miller concurred in the importance of starting students’ day off in an encouraging manner by trying to have a positive interaction with each student as they come into school each morning.

Mrs. Grant was also clear in her focus on the students at Pineville: “The building stuff will come and go. The personnel will come and go but those relationships that you build with your students are the piece that makes the difference and that’s what we are supposed to be about every day.” Doing what is best for students was also discussed by Mr. Matthews as part of his decision making process at Ridgefield. He said he communicates to his staff and parents: “It’s not based on what you want to do because it’s convenient for you, it’s what’s safe for the child, what’s best for the child” (Mr. Matthews, Ridgefield Elementary). Mr. Miller described the decision making process at Main as not necessarily what is in the best interests of the teachers but what is best for the student. Being student centered was an effective approach the administrators used to facilitate change and allow students and parents to feel welcomed and a priority at their new school.

The leadership attributes of an administrator can have an influence on how administrators are able to facilitate change in their school. Administrators in this study were bringing together staff, students, and parents for the first time. The administrators in this study found

demonstrating shared leadership, being transparent and student centered as the most effective leadership attributes to facilitate change in their new schools.

### **Analysis: Research Question 2**

In this section data will be provided to answer the second research question of how administrators perceive they establish a positive school culture when opening a new school. The culture of an organization is observed through the assumptions, beliefs, expectations, traditions, and routines that make up the norm of the organization (Eaker & Keating, 2008; Peterson & Deal, 1998). The main themes for this research question include demonstrating a commitment to creating buy-in, developing a vision, and strategic hiring.

#### **Commitment to Creating Buy-In**

Commitment to creating buy-in was a common theme throughout the interviews as an approach to build a positive culture. While discussion focused mainly on the commitment to creating teacher buy-in, participants also discussed the importance of promoting parent and student buy-in in the new school. Buy-in refers to leaders guiding their “team or organization to understand, support, and align on a unified approach” (Jenkins & Kelly, 2016). Three main approaches which demonstrated administrators’ commitment to creating buy-in were collaboration, branding, and establishing traditions and recognitions.

#### **Teacher Collaboration**

When describing the first year at Pineville, Mrs. Grant stated, “everything was collaboration.” One strategy used at Pineville to promote buy-in and facilitate teacher collaboration was a book study of Steven Covey’s *The Leader in Me*. Mrs. Grant described the book study as a “safe place to start.” In the beginning she did not mandate any part of the book but encouraged her new staff to pick and choose. She allowed teachers to consider and apply

different components of Covey's book to themselves and their new school. Mrs. Grant described this as a nonthreatening manner to begin collaboration. Initially, the staff of Pineville gathered together for two days over the summer before the new school opened for professional development focusing on *The Leader in Me*.

Teachers were placed in small groups and initially the staff spent time with their table groups having general conversations about the book to begin laying the foundation for collaboration. Then, Mrs. Grant would pull the staff together for some whole group conversations regarding the book and how it applied to Pineville. At this point, most of the staff did not know each other and Mrs. Grant described these initial collaborations as also allowing her staff to gain familiarity with one another. A similar approach was taken with building academic or curriculum components for the new school. Mrs. Grant began by allowing teachers to have initial conversations in small groups then come back together as a whole group to provide a nonthreatening approach to begin the collaboration process.

Mrs. Waters began facilitating collaboration at Lakefront well before the new school opened in the spring by having weekly staff meetings that were not mandated but open to all. These meetings allowed teachers to begin sharing ideas and collaborating with one another. Mrs. Waters discussed that building a new culture was necessary when opening Lakefront and to accomplish this, the staff had to come together and first decide what they wanted their school to look like. This was something that Mrs. Waters wanted input and collaboration from her staff not mandated from her. The teachers at Lakefront began by considering what a perfect school would look like and teachers brainstormed words and ideas to describe a perfect school. Teachers then discussed how these words fit in with what their hope was for Lakefront. As a result, teachers and administrators developed the initial words that became the school's operating

principles. At Lakefront collaboration was fostered by allowing teachers the opportunity to share ideas and give input and feel they had a voice in the principles that would guide their new school.

Grade level planning was a strategy discussed in all interviews to encourage and support teacher collaboration. Each of the six schools had a common time each day set aside for grade level planning. During some days of grade level planning, time was set aside for specific subject level planning. At Lakefront Elementary on Tuesdays grade level planning focused on Science and Math and on Wednesdays the focus was on Reading/Language Arts. An administrator was present at each of these meetings to help facilitate the collaboration process. Similarly, at North Station Intermediate, teachers collaborated during grade level planning three days a week with Language Arts on Monday, Math on Tuesday, and alternating Science and Social Studies on Thursdays. These grade level meetings were viewed by administrators as a tool to increase teacher collaboration and helped ensure everyone was on the same page curriculum wise. Mrs. Waters described the process at Lakefront as ensuring a “guaranteed viable curriculum and ensuring our students get an equitable education from classroom to classroom.”

Mr. Matthews considered collaboration to be integral to the success of Ridgefield. According to Mr. Matthews, collaboration involves having a problem-solving mentality and being able to listen to new ideas from different angles. When problem solving, Mr. Matthews always solicited input from those directly involved: “I always take the ones who are in the trenches, the ones who are actually doing it” (Mr. Matthews, Ridgefield Elementary). An example of this approach that fostered teacher collaboration involved the dismissal procedure at Ridgefield. Mr. Matthews explained the dismissal procedure changed five or six times over the first three weeks of school. They were not major changes but what Mr. Matthews considered

tweaks to improve upon what they were already doing. To make positive improvements, Mr. Matthews brought the teachers involved in dismissal together and asked for their input on what needed to be changed. This allowed teachers an opportunity to let their voices be heard and considered which increased buy-in and collaboration among the new staff. Following the collaboration, Mr. Mathews said he received more compliments from parents than he ever has in the way dismissal was handled in the new school.

### **Branding**

When building a positive culture in the new school another component which increased buy-in was branding. Branding incorporated aspects such as a school mascot, logo, colors, magnets, signs, or theme. Mr. Matthews described branding as huge in developing the culture of Ridgefield. At Ridgefield Elementary two to three logos were developed, licensed, and trademarked. Mr. Matthews pointed out they have remained true to the logo since the opening of the school. A similar approach was taken with the school colors. According to Mr. Matthews, teachers or PTO asked for different colored t-shirts but he was consistent about not straying from the established school colors to maintain the branding of Ridgefield.

Mr. Campbell at North Station Intermediate bought each staff member a t-shirt before the school year began to bring the staff together. He wanted to convey to his new staff “we are on the same team. This is our logo. This is who we are now.” In addition to the logo and t-shirts, car magnets and yard signs were another approach to build the identity of the new school. Mr. Matthews commented he would drive around neighborhoods and see Ridgefield’s magnets on car and signs in the front yard. People would tweet when they were out of town and saw a Ridgefield Elementary magnet on another car. He described the branding at Ridgefield by



saying ‘we’ve almost got a cult.’ The goal for Mr. Matthews was for parents and students to be excited to come and be a part of Ridgefield Elementary.

Lakefront Elementary took the branding of their mascot of a pirate and embedded it into multiple aspects of their school. According to Mrs. Waters, “we built everything around it” (the pirate). Prior to the school year beginning Mrs. Waters had multiple conversations with her teachers and defined the characteristics of what, as a staff, they wanted in a Lakefront Pirate. In addition, the term PIRATE was used to create an acronym to truly embody the culture of the new school. The term PIRATE represented the school’s operating principles of Positivity, Integrity, Respect, Accountability, Teamwork, and Excellence. Lakefront’s specials rotation was built around the term Pirate and each day began with morning announcements that focused on one of the principles such as positivity and examples of how students could demonstrate the trait throughout the day. Mrs. Waters discussed the branding of the mascot as positively contributing to building the culture of the new school.

The branding of the new school was also evident within the school buildings. Entering Lakefront, there are large banners hanging in the main entryway that have each of the operating principles such as respect and integrity written on them. In addition, the mission statement is visible at Lakefront for students, staff, parents, and all visitors to see. The common expectations at Pineville are prominent in the main hallway when you enter. When you walk around Pineville the school is brightly colored coded to represent the different grade levels. Having the color coded system set up was important for Mrs. Grant to allow students and parents to feel more comfortable in knowing where their classrooms were located. In addition, there are pictures of the student leadership groups also in the main hallway at Pineville. These student leadership

responsibilities are a significant part of the culture at Pineville which is reflected upon entering the school.

### **Traditions and Recognitions**

During the first year of the opening of a new school traditions and recognitions were developed and were noted as helping promote buy-in among students, staffs, and parents. Mr. Campbell described these recognitions as small gestures but components that can go a long way in building culture. At North Station, Mr. Campbell rewards perfect attendance with a gift card drawing each month. On each teacher's birthday, Mr. Campbell mails each teacher a card to their home. He did not just want to say happy birthday to each teacher but wanted them to have something personal to feel they are an important part of the school community. At Lakefront Elementary, teachers are recognized monthly and students once per nine weeks for demonstrating one of the school's operating principles such as positivity or integrity. At the end of the first year, both Woodson and North Station held award ceremonies and assemblies to celebrate student achievement. Mr. Campbell described these assemblies as building new traditions in the new school.

Mr. Matthews pointed out that establishing traditions in a new school can create anxiety and uncertainty because staff and parents are coming from different schools that had their own individual celebrations. Some topics of discussion that Mr. Matthews encountered at Ridgefield at the end of the first year were field day and Kindergarten graduation. Mr. Matthews did not hold a Kindergarten graduation at his previous school but the school that many individuals came from did. His reasoning was he wanted students to have one culminating graduation when they graduated high school.

In all Mr. Matthews received only three emails regarding his decision not to have a Kindergarten graduation. He attributed this parental support due to the strong, positive culture and buy-in that had been developed over the course of the year. For those parents who were upset, Mr. Matthews went back to the students. He asked the parents to consider whether the graduation was for them or their child. Mr. Matthews stated he did not change his mind because the decision was about the students not the parents. Therefore, when establishing traditions, a challenge faced was parent concerns based on what parents were accustomed to at their previous school. Instead of a graduation, Kindergarten students performed at the final PTO meeting of the year. Therefore, Mr. Matthews was able to find a middle ground with parents and still establish a new tradition for Kindergarten students and families.

Mr. Campbell faced a similar situation at North Station but regarding 5<sup>th</sup> grade graduation. At some of the teachers' previous schools 5<sup>th</sup> grade was the oldest grade and the teachers were used to having a 5<sup>th</sup> grade graduation. However, at North Station 6<sup>th</sup> grade is the oldest grade in the school. Therefore, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade graduation was not appropriate. Mr. Campbell described the process as stressful in trying to consider teachers' wants and needs and establish traditions but at the same time consider what was best for North Station. He discussed the challenge of finding a balance of having similar traditions at North Station as the teachers' previous schools but not being exactly the same. As a result, he tried to incorporate traditions from teachers' previous schools but make small changes to represent the culture and community of North Station.

When building the culture of the new school, creating buy-in of teachers, students, and parents was essential. Stakeholders were coming from a variety of unique schools that each had their own routines. To bring teachers, students, and parents of the new school together to build a

new culture and create buy-in, administrators utilized collaboration, branding, and established traditions and recognitions.

### **Developing a Vision**

Having a clear vision before the school year started was mentioned as a common theme among participants. Developing a common vision allowed all stakeholders to be on the same page in regards to guidelines and principles to lead the new school. Three main components supported the theme of developing a vision in the new school: teacher input, setting expectations, and a problem-solving attitude.

#### **Teacher Input**

At four of the new schools, teacher input was a part of developing the vision as a way to begin building a positive culture. When describing the process of creating the vision for Lakefront, Mrs. Waters stated, “we developed our vision and our mission together. I had some thoughts. I certainly guided it but I wanted their input. It was their school. It was ours.” A similar approach was taken at Main Middle where Mr. Miller “got some input from teachers on some of the things they would like to see as far as incorporated” into the vision of the school. When developing the vision for North Station Intermediate, Mr. Campbell would write up a draft and then email the vision out to teachers for their input. He asked teachers their thoughts of what needed to be added or changed. Mr. Campbell would then rework the vision statement and send it out for additional teacher input. Therefore, creating the vision was a collaborative process between the administrator and the teachers.

When beginning to consider the vision of their new school, Mrs. Waters led the teachers at Lakefront through a World Café activity. In this activity Mrs. Waters stated teachers “came together and imagined if we had a utopian school, if it was perfect, what would it be like?” Then

the teachers got into small groups and created their own words to describe what they hoped Lakefront would become and how their new school would be described. In addition, the staff considered input they had received from parents about what they would like to see in the new school. Knowing their school would never be perfect, Mrs. Waters stated she and her staff desired to set the tone of being as close to perfect as possible. With her staff, Mrs. Waters also discussed purposeful communities and that sometimes communities were built purposefully. Her goal was to purposefully build the community, vision, and culture at Lakefront with input from staff and parents. Eventually, through teacher and administrator discussion, the terms teachers had created developed into Lakefront's working agreements or operating principles that guided the vision for the new school.

### **Expectations**

At Pineville Elementary, Mrs. Grant established some initial expectations for the new school that she conveyed to teachers upfront as part of the hiring process. Some of the components that Mrs. Grant considered as central to building the vision of the school were “a strong work ethic, family atmosphere, teamwork and collaboration.” Another expectation Mrs. Grant stressed was being student first and incorporating a great deal of student leadership responsibilities. At Pineville there are several student leadership committees for which students must apply and be selected. During the interview process, Mrs. Grant laid out these staff expectations for Pineville and told teachers “if it wasn't cohesive then we need to let HR know because this is the way it was going to happen.”

Mrs. Grant sees the value of being clear with your vision and expectations upfront: “Set your non-negotiables. Set the things that are the most important and make sure they stay most important” (Mrs. Grant, Lakefront Elementary). When hiring new teachers for Woodson, Mr.

Williams conveyed expectations not only for teachers inside the classroom but their responsibilities outside of the classroom as part of the school community. Mr. Miller felt it was the responsibility of the administrator to convey his or her expectations for the vision of school upfront from the beginning to teachers and students as well as the parents.

Similarly, when asked about what advice he would give fellow administrators when opening a new school, Mr. Matthews said “to be flexible but have a vision, have a plan, don’t deviate.” He went on to clarify that “you are flexible with the little things but your plan” remains consistent. After the close of the first year, Mr. Matthews explained that one of the teachers at Ridgefield had a chance to move on to another school for an advancement opportunity. When he left, Mr. Matthews said the teacher gave him a big compliment and said he had “never worked with an administrator who’s stayed true to their vision more than I have.” He went on to compare the vision of the school to a dartboard: “The goal of what you want the school to be is going to move, it’s on a dart board, and it’s not always going to be a bullseye but it’s got to be in that direction” (Mr. Matthews, Ridgefield Elementary).

When developing a vision for the new school, administrators also had to step in and address situations where expectations were not being met. Once the school year began, Mrs. Waters determined there was a teacher who she had hired from outside of the district who was not meeting her expectations and she had to address the areas in which the teacher was struggling. Mrs. Waters pointed out this can be a difficult position for an administrator because the conversation is not positive and often people are upset. In addition, a challenge in this situation was not to allow that one person’s negativity to spread to other teachers which fortunately did not happen at Lakefront. Mrs. Waters approach was to convey the areas where

the teacher was struggling but also she was supportive and helped to guide the teacher to improve.

Mrs. Waters discussed that she did have the option not to rehire the teacher at the end of the first year. She stated, “some principals are really quick to get rid of people who struggle, and I don’t like to do that. I like to give people a second year” (Mrs. Waters, Lakefront Elementary). Mrs. Waters continued to work with this teacher throughout the year and ended up moving the teacher to a different grade level midway through the first year. Transitioning to a new grade level turned out to be a positive move and the teacher was able to make changes and is now meeting the expectations at Lakefront.

Setting non-negotiables included not only expectations for teachers but also for students. For students, the school’s vision allows them to know what is expected of them and how they will be held accountable. At North Station, qualities such as responsibility, accountability, and respect were part of the school’s mission statement. Similarly, at Lakefront, the operating principles that Mrs. Waters developed in collaboration with her staff included characteristics such as positivity, integrity, and teamwork. At both North Station and Lakefront, these expectations were in place before students entered the new schools. Establishing these non-negotiables upfront helped not only to allow all stakeholders, teachers, parents, and students, to have common expectations but also to start developing the culture of the new school from the very beginning.

### **Problem-Solving**

A final strategy noted in developing the vision of these new schools was the need to work together, problem-solve, and not give up. Mr. Matthews described his goal for the culture of Ridgefield as “we are going to problem solve and everyone is going to work through and no

excuses.” In addition, Mr. Matthews felt problem-solving or a problem-solving attitude created responsibility, respect, and a positive culture. From his experience, Mr. Matthews found that problem solving helped do away with complaining at Ridgefield because “it makes things more concrete instead of emotional.”

Similarly, when Mrs. Grant communicated her vision to her new staff at Lakefront she described it as a family atmosphere in that “we are all going to have to give and do our best because if we didn’t we weren’t going to be able to take care of each other.” Mrs. Waters described the culture of her new school as “the belief that we can do it together.” At Ridgefield, Lakefront, and Pineville it was evident the vision was not simply a statement written in the handbook but was embedded throughout the culture of the school.

Prior to the schools opening, developing vision was a common theme to begin building the culture of the new school. In addition, the vision continued to be developed over the course of the first year by consistently being reinforced and referenced by administrators in both their words and their actions. To develop the vision for the new schools, administrators asked for and considered teacher input, established clear expectations upfront, and maintained a problem-solving attitude with their students and staff.

### **Strategic Hiring**

A final theme throughout multiple interviews was the importance of hiring not only the best possible individuals for a position but those that fit the culture and vision of the school. Mr. Campbell explained that he strategically hired for North Station. He went on to describe the influence the hiring process can have on the culture of the school: “You’ve got to get those right people in because if you don’t, they can kill your school in a heartbeat” (Mr. Campbell, North Station Intermediate). Mrs. Waters also cited hiring excellent teachers as having a major



influence on building culture. When strategically hiring, three main components were discussed by administrators: right fit, team mentality, and a strong work ethic.

### **Right Fit**

When hiring teachers administrators described the process as more than applicants coming up with the best answers but for the administrator to consider whether the individual fit with the culture of the school: “Teaching a teacher how to fit in with people is way harder than teaching a young person or an inexperienced person how to teach” (Mr. Williams, Woodson Middle). Mrs. Grant concurred in the importance of the personality piece over the academic piece when hiring new teachers at Pineville: “The curriculum piece ... is trainable. The heart and the drive behind what you do is not.”

In the hiring process at Lakefront for teachers within her district, Mrs. Waters went to the teachers’ current schools to observe them teach to determine if they were the right fit for the new school. In addition, she interviewed potential teachers to get to know them better and in some cases Mrs. Waters mentioned she interviewed teachers a second time if she was not confident about her decision. Strategic hiring was a main goal for Mrs. Waters at Lakefront: “I was very, very determined that I was going to get the best.” While Mrs. Waters did hire some teachers from outside of the district, she purposively tried to hire as many teachers as she could from within the district because she had the opportunity to observe them teach firsthand.

Before North Station opened, Mr. Campbell needed one additional teacher for his 6<sup>th</sup> grade team. He was very purposeful in who he hired for this position because he needed someone who could bring the grade level team together to work cohesively. The teacher he hired was not the strongest teacher academically at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level but was who Mr. Campbell felt was the best fit, based on what she brought to the grade level team and to North Station:

“The purpose of bringing her in was to unify that group and bring some of that elementary mentality to that group” (Mr. Campbell, North Station Intermediate).

To find teachers who were the right fit for Pineville, Mrs. Grant went to the different schools in the district to interview teachers who had expressed a desire to come to the new school. Teachers had the opportunity to submit their top three choices for where they would prefer to work in the district. For some of the schools, Mrs. Grant discussed there was a small percentage of teachers who wanted to move to the new school. As a result, for some of the staff, transitioning to Pineville was their second or third choice. Mrs. Grant described that situation as being more delicate because she had to consider teachers’ emotions and feelings about moving to a new school.

When Mrs. Grant interviewed potential candidates for Pineville, she presented her goals and vision for the new school. Following the interview process, Mrs. Grant did her own ranking of teachers of 1, 2 or 3 with one being a teacher she felt was a good fit for Pineville. Mrs. Grant turned these rankings into the district’s Human Resources (HR) department. In addition, Mrs. Grant discussed that the principals within the district along with the Assistant Director of Schools, and the HR department met and discussed the teachers that ultimately ended up transferring to Pineville. Mrs. Grant pointed out she had to rely on fellow principals when determining whether a teacher was the right fit for Pineville since they knew the teachers better than she did at that point. There were also some compromises that had to take place between the administrators at the various schools because Mrs. Grant might feel that a teacher was good choice for Pineville but the current principal might consider that person a strong teacher in his or her own school.

Even though administrators discussed the importance of diligence on the front end of finding the teachers that best fit with the culture of the school, administrators conceded they also had to be willing to address situations where a new hire ended up not meshing with the desired culture for the new school. For example, Mr. Williams described a situation at Woodson of hiring a solid classroom teacher with 20 years' experience but did not fit in the team.

A great teacher. It was just not a good fit. Then you have to decide is it worth keeping someone in there where it is just not working right with your team but she's doing great in her classroom? No, it's not worth it, you have to move on and we get somebody that fits.

Mrs. Grant faced a similar experience at Pineville of a hire that did not fit with the culture she was trying to build but with one of her office staff. Initially, Mrs. Grant hired someone who was recommended to her and had bookkeeping experience. The bookkeeper came from a middle/high school background. Mrs. Grant described her as having a more aggressive or authoritarian approach and not being open to learning how an elementary setting worked. A different position opened up elsewhere midyear that was a better fit for the original bookkeeper and Mrs. Grant was able to replace her with an individual with a more elementary mindset and who better fit the culture of Pineville.

Finding the right fit when hiring applied to assistant principals as well. When hiring the two assistant principals for Woodson, Mr. Williams stated, "I went out and found the people I thought would fit with me." He went on say that determining the best fit is much more than right or wrong answers: "I think people worry about the wrong things when they hire teachers and leaders. They're looking for all the right answers and all that. I'm looking for what that person is." To truly get to know an assistant principal candidate, Mr. Williams said he would conduct

half of the interview by walking around the school building and see what types of questions the person asked. According to Mr. Williams, “an experienced administrator is going to ask very specific questions.” Mr. Williams took the hiring process seriously and commented that it was a challenge to find the individuals who were truly the best fit to work with him.

Mr. Campbell also stressed the importance of hiring in regard to an assistant principal. When hiring a fellow administrator for North Station, there were other individuals within the district who were in line for the job but Mr. Campbell was looking for someone to complement him: “I was known as the hard edge and I had to have somebody to soften that.” Mr. Campbell described the assistant principal that he hired as being very positive and able to balance the areas in which he was weak.

### **Team Mentality**

A teacher who was collaborative and had a team mentality were important factors for Mr. Campbell when hiring at North Station: “You want a good teacher, but you want a personality that’s going to be part of team, that’s going to work with others” (Mr. Campbell, North Station Intermediate). Mr. Williams described Woodson as “everybody works as a team. You are walking into a community.” Furthermore, Mr. Williams conveyed to his teachers the importance of daily communication with your team members. He provided the example that a 5<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts teacher should be talking daily with the other 5<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts teachers.

Similarly, at Ridgefield being part of a team was a non-negotiable part of the hiring process. According to Mr. Matthews, “if you are coming to Ridgefield, you’re working as a team. In fact, there are people who are not here who did not work as a team. You are going to work as team.” Ridgefield is a STEAM school, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and

Music, which Mr. Matthews described as requiring a significant amount of planning upfront because some of the units can last six to eight weeks. At Ridgefield, being a STEAM school is “full environment immersion” where the grade levels plan and collaborate as a team. According to Mr. Matthews, team planning ensures the standards are being covered and addressed. He did stress that teachers still had the autonomy to then go in their own classroom and teach the content in their own manner but the approach needed to be similar. Therefore, being able to collaborate and contribute to a team were characteristics Mr. Matthews looked for when hiring for the new school.

Just as administrators addressed situations where a teacher ended up not being the right fit for the vision of the school, administrators also addressed situations where individuals were not working as a team. During the first year Pineville was opened, Mrs. Grant described one of her grade level teams as very negative and not working cohesively. Therefore, at the end of the first year, Mrs. Grant recognized she needed to make some changes so that the grade level was functioning more as a team. Some teachers in the grade level ending up leaving for other schools or personal reason and other teachers were not rehired. Mrs. Grant was then able to replace these teachers with individuals with a positive energy who she described as wanting to be at Pineville.

### **Work Ethic**

When hiring for the new schools administrators referenced the need to consider the strengths of those you are hiring. One of these strengths was a strong work ethic. The importance of hiring extended not only to teachers but support staff, office staff, and cafeteria staff. According to Mrs. Waters, when opening a new school you must realize that you cannot do everything by yourself. Mrs. Waters advice to administrators was to “think about what are my strengths but what are the things I’m not as strong as and you’ve got to surround yourself

with people who are strong in those areas.” Considering her strengths and weaknesses was something Mrs. Waters did when hiring positions such as an assistant principal and an academic coach.

Mrs. Grant agreed in the need to have people that you trust to be able to delegate responsibility. “I need to have the best that I know of in some key places because there were certain areas that I didn’t need to worry about” (Mrs. Grant, Pineville Elementary). The cafeteria manager was one of these areas. Mrs. Grant had worked with her previously and she had experience opening a new school as a cafeteria manager. In addition, Mrs. Grant discussed she knew her work ethic and that she trusted her. Therefore, she specifically requested to be able to hire her for Pineville. Mrs. Grant took a similar approach when hiring the nurse for Pineville by hiring someone she had worked with previously because again she knew her work ethic along with how she treated children and parents.

Three administrators specifically mentioned the importance of hiring in regard to office staff. Mr. Matthews described a school’s bookkeeper or secretary and the front office individual as the two main areas where administrators have to make strong hires because these individuals can hurt the culture of the school and even cause administrators to lose their job. Given that the job of bookkeeper or secretary is very detailed oriented, a strong work ethic was necessary when hiring these positions. Since the opening of Ridgefield, Mr. Matthews said he has received only one parent complaint about his office staff and it was from a parent who “complained about everything.” Similarly, Mrs. Grant described the office staff as “the people who truly hold everything together.”

When discussing hiring of her office staff at Lakefront, Mrs. Waters stated “I really tried to hire the best office people because they are the face of the school and they are the first

impression.” Mrs. Waters went on to discuss how patient the office staff must be especially in a new school when parents are learning new routines and procedures that are different from their previous school. At Lakefront, signing in and ID checks were part of the school’s process for visitors. This was different than what some of the parents were used to. Therefore, a great deal of patience and diligence was necessary by the office staff as parents were learning the new routines and procedures.

When hiring for the office staff at Pineville, it was very important to Mrs. Grant to have one individual who knew her well and how she did things: “In the middle of everything going on they would be able to almost know how I react to things which was huge” (Mrs. Grant, Pineville Elementary). Opening a new school comes with a great deal of stress and having someone with whom Mrs. Grant had an established relationship with and whom she trusted was key.

According to these administrators, the hiring process went beyond candidates who sounded good in an interview but also encompassed how their personality and work ethic matched with the culture they were trying to build in the new school. Therefore, when strategically hiring for the new school, administrators considered whether the candidates were the right fit for the school’s culture, if they demonstrated a team mentality, and their work ethic.

### **Answers to Research Questions**

Upon analyzing the common themes of the study, the answers to the study’s two research questions were determined. During data collection, questions were asked during each interview following the protocol to address and answer the two research questions of this study. The first research question for this study examined how administrators perceived they facilitated change

when opening a new school. Through data analysis, three factors were determined in this study to have the strongest influence on facilitating change in the new school.

The first was establishing trust with teachers, parents, and students. To establish trust, administrators built positive relationships with stakeholders, demonstrating consistency in their messaging and decision making, and exhibited honesty to stakeholders. The second factor utilized by administrators to facilitate change in the new school was the blending of the new staff together. Blending of the new staff included decreasing anxiety of teachers, parents, and students, frequently and openly communicating with the staff, maintaining positive interactions with stakeholders, and incorporating team building activities prior to the opening of the new school. Leadership attributes of the administrator were the final factor shown to have a strong influence on administrators facilitating change. Three leadership attributes were mentioned to successfully help teachers, parents, and students transition to the new school. These include the administrator demonstrating shared leadership, being transparent, and student centered.

The second research question in this study examined how administrators perceived they established a positive school culture when opening a new school. Based on the perceptions of the administrators, three strategies were determined that most successfully created a positive school culture in the new school. The first strategy used to build a positive culture was creating buy-in. Administrators demonstrated a commitment to creating buy-in through teacher collaboration, branding which included components such as a school mascot, logo, or theme, and establishing traditions and recognitions in the new school. A second strategy shown to positively contribute to the culture of the new school was developing a common vision. A vision was created by asking for and considering teacher input, establishing clear expectations for teacher and students, and maintaining a problem-solving attitude. The final strategy found in this study



to create a positive culture in a new school was strategic hiring. When strategically hiring teachers and staff for the new school, administrators were looking for the right fit to positively contribute to the culture of the school, a team mentality, and a strong work ethic.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter data from interviews with six administrators who led the opening of the new school were analyzed. Data were examined through the lens of the study's purpose and theoretical framework. Common themes were discussed related to the role of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive school culture in a new school. Discussion of findings in light of the theoretical frame for this study will be offered in Chapter 5. In addition, implications of this study and recommendations for future studies will also occur.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of data and reported common themes regarding administrators' perceptions of facilitating change and establishing a positive culture when opening a new school. Data were analyzed from interviews from six administrators who led the opening of the new school to answer the study's research questions. Administrators facilitated change in the new school through establishing trust, blending the staff, and the leadership attributes of the administrator. To build a positive culture, administrators showed commitment to creating buy-in, developed a vision, and strategically hired for the new school. This chapter will present the findings in relationship to the study's framework of Lewin's (1951) force field theory. In addition, implications for practitioners and policy makers will be explored. Finally, recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Key components in Lewin's (1951) force field theory are two opposing forces that influence the change process in an environment: driving and restraining forces. To determine these driving and restraining forces, participants were asked to explain strategies that positively contributed to building the culture of the new school as well as challenges faced to building a positive culture. The main driving forces discussed by administrators were establishing trust, building relationships, problem-solving, and strategic hiring. The restraining forces administrators faced to facilitating change and building a positive culture in the new school were anxiety and uncertainty, teachers not meeting expectations, and finding the right fit.

Trust between administrators and teachers must first be established to facilitate change and build a positive culture. In a new school, teachers may have no knowledge or relationship with their new administrators, and, thus, have not established trust with them. Multiple studies

also support the importance of administrators establishing trust. In fact, building trust with teachers is one of the most important characteristics of administrators in facilitating change and overcoming obstacles (Duke, 2004; Kotter, 1996; Kouzes & Posener, 1993; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). However, as shown in this study, building relationships is an important component in establishing trust. Granovetter (1985) and Shapiro (1987) described this type of trust as personal trust which is achieved through multiple interactions with individuals and involves familiarity, interdependence, and stability in relationships. In-service and teambuilding activities in the spring and summer before the school year opens provide valuable opportunities to begin building relationships in order to establish trust between administrators and teachers before the parents and students arrive.

However, administrators must recognize that establishing trust with teachers, along with other stakeholders, takes time. Trust cannot solely be established during in-service activities but must be continuously fostered over the school year. To accomplish this, administrators must demonstrate consistency throughout the year on a daily basis through their words and actions. Fullan (2014) concurred in that trustworthiness goes beyond integrity to also include real competence meaning leaders must be true to their word while also competent at their job.

When teachers are required to move from their previous schools with familiar routines and culture and move to a new school, this transition creates anxiety. The lack of knowledge of each other and their new administrator creates apprehension for teachers. Lewin (1947) concurred that, as individuals begin to move through the change process, they may experience concern or unrest. Margolis and Nagel (2006) found similar results in their study examining the impact of change in a new school and how teachers' responses to change are related to their personal experiences. The results revealed common themes of cumulative stress, the impact of

change, and relationships with administrators. Garza, Murakami-Ramalho, and Merchant (2011) found a similar experience in their study of a new elementary school where the majority of teachers were involuntarily assigned to their new school and most of the staff was not happy about the change. Administrators must recognize this uncertainty that teachers experience and that moving to a new school may not be a positive experience for all teachers. Teachers may have built strong bonds with their colleagues, parents, students, and even community at their previous school. Therefore, as was shown in this study, the relationship between teachers and administrators is crucial in alleviating some anxiety because it allows teachers to feel more comfortable and connected to their new school. This also supports Margolis and Nagel's (2006) findings which showed relationships to be the strongest mediator of teacher stress in a new school setting.

Bolman and Deal (2008) described effective leaders as those who can help communicate a vision, develop standards for performance, and create focus and direction. The importance of these characteristics was also emphasized in this study. With multiple staffs coming together as one school, the administrator first had to establish a vision and goals for the new school. Having a clear understanding of the vision and direction of a school before the school year begins is necessary to strategically hire and find those individuals who fit with the vision an administrator is trying to create. Rhodes, Stevens, and Hemmings (2011) found a similar approach taken in their study examining building a positive culture in a new school. They found the core values and vision for the schools were considered and upheld during the hiring process for the new school in their study. Having a clear vision upfront provides a direction of characteristics to look for when hiring new teachers for the school.

Administrators in this study learned that teachers had a variety of previous experiences regarding policies and procedures. As a result, establishing common ground early on was crucial. Findings from this study indicated that administrators need to communicate their vision upfront so that all stakeholders are on the same page concerning the school's vision and guiding principles. Lewin and Regine (2000) supported teacher involvement in developing the culture and vision of the school: "Most people want to be a part of their organization; they want to know the organization's purpose; they want to make a difference" (p. 27). Teacher involvement in developing the school's mission is beneficial because this participation allows teachers to provide input which increases teacher buy-in. This buy-in allows teachers to move through Lewin's (1947) change process by beginning to have positive experiences with their new school and feel connected to their new environment. A well-defined vision statement is necessary to allow all stakeholders, teachers, parents, and students, to have a clear understanding of the school's mission.

Leadership attributes were shown in this study as important for administrators to consider when opening a new school. In a new school, there are numerous decisions that must be made such as selecting furniture, planning curriculum, and defining key operating procedures and policies. When facilitating change in a new school, a shared leadership approach is beneficial because it allows teachers to have buy-in in their new school. An administrator who dictates all the components in a new school can hinder the process of developing trust and relationships with teachers because they feel they have no voice or input. Similarly, Goleman (2000) described the leadership style of coercive, in which the leader demands compliance, as having a negative influence on culture. In addition, due to the significant amount of changes and unknowns, findings in this study revealed transparency on the part of the administrators is essential.

Teachers will have many questions and uncertainties about transitioning to a new school. Clear and open communication along the way, even before the school is opened, is necessary to decrease teacher anxiety.

Administrator hires can have a strong impact on building a positive culture. As shown in this study, administrators must conduct the hiring process with thoroughness and diligence even though this may not be an easy task. In a new school, leaders strive to successfully bring a group of teachers together but often with very little background knowledge of the individuals. As a result, situations may arise where new hires turn out not to be strong, long-term fits for the new school. In these situations, administrators must seek out teachers who would better fit with the vision and culture of the new school. Strategic hiring takes time and, if possible, administrators need to begin the process as soon as possible to have sufficient time for due diligence before the school opens.

A strong driving force to building a positive culture was branding. While an important component of any school, branding is essential to establish a positive culture in a new school. Branding plays a significant part in creating the identity of the school and uniting students and staff together as one group. Moreover, branding creates an enthusiasm about the new school through aspects such as t-shirts and mascots. A challenge administrators and teachers may face is creating excitement among students about coming to school, and branding helps to accomplish this. Once students become eager about transitioning to the new school, the enthusiasm extends to parents as well. The importance of branding cannot be overlooked in a new school.

As with branding, administrators must also recognize the importance of establishing rituals and traditions in facilitating change and building a positive culture. Hallinger (1996) concurred by noting that rituals and traditions are valuable because they create a sense of

belonging and safety among individuals of the group. Traditions allow stakeholders to come together in a shared experience. In addition, creating new rituals and traditions aids in the new culture completing Lewin's (1947) change process and becoming stabilized. However, administrators must also find a way to balance both old and new traditions. Having traditions that are the same or somewhat similar as their previous school creates a sense of familiarity and comfort to teachers. In a new school where there are multiple changes for teachers, having a few components that are similar helps to ease the transition process. This merging of the old and the new is easier if administrators are blending two or three schools together but can become more challenging if there are many schools uniting as one.

### **Implications**

Based on the results of this study, policy and practitioner implications can be found. First, rezoning was discussed by some of the administrators as a challenge they faced. Setting up district lines and rezoning a district or county is outside of the control of the administrator. However, the zone changes influenced establishing a positive culture and helping facilitate the transition because there were some parents, students, and teachers who held negative views about leaving their original school for the new school. Rezoning is evitable due to elements such as population changes or overcrowding. However, first and foremost, policy makers and practitioners must recognize that rezoning is difficult for stakeholders.

To ease the transition, stakeholders should be kept informed both early on and throughout the process. The district may consider holding information and input sessions in the community and post any changes or updates online for stakeholders to access. In addition, when possible, allow families to be grandfathered into their current school. For a child entering 5<sup>th</sup> grade and who has attended the same elementary school since Kindergarten, making the transition in 5<sup>th</sup>

grade to a new school and then again in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to a middle school constitutes several changes for a student over a short period of time. While pleasing everyone is not possible when making zoning changes, keeping stakeholders informed and asking for their input can help ease the transition.

Practitioners may be impacted by the possibility of construction delays. In four of the six schools in this study, teachers and staff were not able to enter their new school until a week or less before the school year started. This resulted in a great deal of anxiety and stress to start the year for teachers, parents, and students. While construction delays are outside of the control of the principal and often the Director of Schools, the impact of these delays on stakeholders is still important to consider. Instead of having time to spend on in-service and team building activities, teachers were scrambling to organize their classrooms for parents and students. These delays, in addition to increased levels of stress due to the unknowns of a new school, made the transition process challenging. When planning for construction and completion dates a buffer of time between the completion of the school and the start of the school year would be beneficial. The challenge is the individuals responsible for building a school may not realize or understand the significant anxiety and stress on staff, parents, and students in being unable to enter the school building until a few days before school starts.

Sarason (1996) suggested that a barrier to understanding school culture and how it develops is the lack of systematic, detailed, and objective descriptions of the natural history examining the change process in schools. A significant amount of research exists on what culture is but less research focuses on how culture is built. However, this study aimed to address that barrier and add to the literature by providing firsthand accounts of administrators facilitating change and establishing a new culture in a new school. The results of this study are also



beneficial for educational preparation programs to discuss strategies that were shown to be effective in positively building the culture in a new school.

The significance of branding in a new school is an important implication for practitioners that cannot be overlooked. As previously discussed, branding was shown to help build the culture of the new school and increase buy-in. Therefore, components such as mascot and logo must first be carefully considered before the school opens in order to support the vision and culture that administrators and teachers are striving to establish in the new school. In addition, branding needs to be purposively and prevalent both as the school is opening but continue on even beyond the first year in order to build a strong identity for the new school.

Opening a new school requires a significant amount of time and energy for the administrator who is leading this change. From hiring to creating schedules to selecting furniture, there are many decisions an administrator is required to make when opening a new school. For administrators to devote time in accomplishing these tasks and completing them well, the new school needs to be their main focus. Therefore, Directors of Schools should consider allowing administrators of the new school to leave their current position some months before the new school's opening to have sufficient time to complete all the tasks required in opening a new school. In addition, having an administrator who is split between two positions is difficult for teachers and students at the administrator's current school because the administrator is unable to give full attention to those staff and students.

The results of this study are important for district level supervisors and superintendents to consider when hiring administrators to lead a new school. Based on the experiences of the administrators in this study, components such as establishing trust, demonstrating a commitment to creating buy-in, developing a vision, leadership attributes, and strategically hiring were shown

to have a positive influence on administrators' abilities to facilitate change and establish a positive culture. Each administrator found similar strategies to be effective when facilitating change and building culture in a new school. Therefore, these are characteristics superintendents should look for when interviewing and hiring administrators to open and lead a new school.

Based on the results of this study, a final implication to consider involves the hiring of assistant principals and is important for district level supervisors and central office personnel to consider. At two of the schools, administrators discussed the ability to hire assistant principals for the new school. Consideration was given to individuals who fit with the personality and leadership style of the principal as well as complement areas in which principals considered challenging. As a result, finding an assistant principal who was the best fit for the school had a positive influence on the culture in the new school. On the other hand, a major challenge faced by one of the administrators occurred when the assistant principals did not positively contribute to the culture of the school. In this situation, the administrator was allowed limited input on selection of the assistant principals. Therefore, when hiring an administrative team for the new school, individuals in charge of hiring must consider more than whether the person is an effective leader but also how that person fits with the principal of the school as well as with the teachers, students, and parents who will make up the new school. Allowing principals to have input on the hiring of assistant principals could have long term benefits for the culture of the school.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study, recommendations for future studies were considered. First, this study solely examined the role of administrators in facilitating change and building culture over the first year the school was opened. However, some of the administrators noted

that the first year encompassed establishing a base or common ground among the new staff and that culture would continue to be built, or stabilized, as Lewin (1947) referred to the process, during the second year the school was opened. Therefore, a study which focused more in-depth on new schools over a two year period to truly see how the staff continued to merge together and build culture over a two year period would be beneficial.

Administrators described the first year, especially the first half of the year, as hectic and mainly about survival especially in the schools that experienced construction delays. Therefore, during an exploration of the second year, the components that come with the newness of a new school would have probably settled, and the focus could be more on developing relationships and culture. Thus, a recommendation for a future study would be to extend the analysis to the first two years the new school is opened.

Data collection in this study was limited to interviews with the principals regarding their perceptions of how they facilitated change and established a positive school culture in a new school. This study commenced after the school had been opened for at least one year and the administrator was reflecting on the experience of opening a new school. A future study could also examine the role of the administrator through shadowing and observation during the first year the school was open. Data collection could take place at three times over the school year in order to examine the change as the process is taking place: at the beginning of the year, halfway through the year, and at the end of the first year. This format would allow for additional evidence to be collected. The researcher could observe situations such as in-service activities, faculty meetings, PTO meetings, or leadership meetings over the course of the first year to acquire a more in-depth understanding of how the administrator facilitated change or built a positive culture in a new school.

An additional recommendation for future studies is to compare the grade levels of the new schools when considering facilitating change and building culture in a new school. In this study, four of the six schools were elementary or intermediate schools with the highest grade being 6<sup>th</sup>. Two of the schools were middle or junior high schools with the highest grade being 9<sup>th</sup>. None of the schools in the study were high schools. Based on the data collected, it was noted the majority of the explicit team building activities took place at the elementary or intermediate levels. In addition, the concept of branding and school identity was a stronger focus at the elementary and intermediate levels.

Therefore, a recommendation for future studies would be an investigation of new middle and high schools and examine the time and activities spent building a positive culture in comparison to elementary and intermediate schools. Similarly, a study could explore whether these factors have an influence on how parents and students feel connected and invested to their school. While parent involvement at the high school is different than at the elementary level, a study could examine what steps high schools take to create buy-in and establish branding in a new school.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to examine the experiences of administrators in facilitating change and establishing a positive culture when opening a new school. The study was guided by the framework of Lewin's (1951) force field theory. Literature was also explored regarding administrators role in facilitating change, creating a positive culture, and experiences opening a new school. Limited research exists exploring the process and administrators' first hand experiences of opening a new school. This study aimed to address that gap in the literature. Data was collected qualitatively through interviews with six administrators who led the opening

of the new school. Data revealed administrators facilitated change by establishing trust, blending the staff, and the leadership attributes of the administrators. Demonstrating commitment to creating buy-in, developing a vision, and strategically hiring for the new school were determined to build a positive culture in the new school. Implications for practitioners and policy makers to building and opening a new school were explored. Finally, recommendations for future research on new schools were suggested.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A Interview Protocol**

- 1a. How many years' experience as an administrator did you have when you led the opening of a new school?
- 1b. How many total years of experience do you have in education?
- 1c. What grade levels attended the new school?
2. Do relationships play a role in helping teachers transition to a new school?
3. How did you build relationships in the new school?
4. How do administrators facilitate the change process of teachers transitioning to a new school?
5. Was teacher collaboration important in the opening of the new school? Did you facilitate the collaboration? If yes, how?
6. How do you define school culture?
7. Was building a new culture necessary in the opening of the new school? If yes, describe the strategies you used to build the culture of the new school?
- 8a. What strategies positively contributed to the culture of the new school?
- 8b. Of all the factors that positively contributed to the culture of the new school which do you feel had the strongest influence on building culture and why?
- 9a. Did you face any challenges to building a positive culture?
- 9b. If yes, how did you overcome these challenges?
- 9c. Were there challenges you were not able to overcome?
- 10a. Describe the culture of the new school on the first day the school was opened. Did the culture change as the year progressed?

10b. Describe the culture of the new school half-way through the school year of the first year.

10c. Describe the culture of the new school on the last day of the first school year.

11. What lessons did you learn through the experience of leading a new school?

12. What advice would you give administrators who are preparing to embark on the experience of opening a new school?

13. If you had the opportunity to lead the opening of a new school again, would you do anything differently?

## VITA

Elizabeth Gotcher was born in Maryville, Tennessee and attended Maryville High School. Following high school, Elizabeth attended Maryville College and graduated in 2007 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Child Development and Learning. In the summer of 2007, she was hired by Maryville City Schools where she has taught for the past 10 years. Elizabeth began her teaching career in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade before moving to 4<sup>th</sup> grade and is currently teaching Kindergarten. She furthered her education and earned a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Lincoln Memorial University in 2010 as well as an Educational Specialist's degree in Educational Administration and Supervision in 2011 also from Lincoln Memorial University. In May 2017, Elizabeth completed her doctorate with a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.