

PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY OF PRINCIPALS IN OVER-  
AND UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS

by

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### **Abstract**

The role of a principal in today's schools includes demanding expectations and requires principals to lead in many different capacities in order to support student achievement. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether a principal's perceived self-efficacy, or the belief in one's capability to lead, correlates with academic achievement at over- performing and underperforming schools in five key leadership areas—establishing a vision and purpose; transforming school culture and climate; improving instruction; managing people, data, systems, and processes; and building capacity in others.

A mixed-methods study was conducted using a survey asking principals in public school districts across the state of California to rate their levels of perceived self-efficacy in the five key areas of leadership. Principals selected for the survey were identified as leading schools that are either over-performing or underperforming when taking into account a composite average on the 2016 SBAC scores for Math and English Language Arts combined and the percentage of free and reduced priced meals with a high percentage of free and reduced-priced meals.

The results of the study showed that the principals' perceived self-efficacy had no significant correlation in four of the five key leadership areas. The key leadership area of improving instruction showed some significant difference in principals' perceived levels of self-efficacy from principals at over- and

underperforming schools. In addition, mastery experience, as a source of self-efficacy, showed some significant difference between principals at over- and underperforming schools.

Based on the results of the study, principal training and mentoring programs should focus on supporting principals in the key leadership area of instructional leadership, especially by providing opportunities for mastery experiences in that area of leadership. Future research could further explore the connection between principals' perceived levels of self-efficacy and instructional leadership to examine areas that may have the greatest impact on both student achievement and improving a principal's sense of self-efficacy.

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times and come out as a person who puts others before themselves. I am proud to call you both my parents.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Introduction**

In 1855, in a letter to an aspiring lawyer, Abraham Lincoln wrote, “Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing” (Lincoln, 1861). Lincoln wrote this to encourage him to believe in his capacity to do what was needed to succeed (Goodwin, 2005). One hundred years before Bandura, Lincoln understood that belief in one’s ability to accomplish a task or a goal was an important component to success. Bandura later defined this belief in one’s capability to accomplish a task successfully as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

The role of the principal entails several leadership roles and key practices. The role includes a myriad of expectations and requires a principal to juggle a variety of tasks and leadership skills in order to lead teachers and staff to improve instruction. In an era of increasing accountability, principals are no longer just managers of a building but are instructional leaders accountable for student achievement. As such, it is important for principals to enter their roles with a strong belief in their capability to lead and improve student achievement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to look at a principal’s perceived sense of self-efficacy and any correlation that self-efficacy may have on student achievement at a school. This study examined a sampling of over-performing and underperforming California school principals, as determined by 2016 Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) scores, compared to the poverty level of the schools. This study determined what correlation a principal’s perceived sense of self-efficacy, as measured by a survey that asks principals to

assess their certainty in their ability to accomplish the variety of tasks and roles expected from a principal, has on student achievement.

### **Background**

The role of the principal is demanding and multifaceted. The principal must navigate several leadership roles and effectively work on a variety of key practices. A principal is responsible for creating a shared vision for the school, improving instruction, building capacity in others to lead, managing people, processes, and data, and transforming school culture and climate (Spiro, 2013). With everything expected of principals, they must enter the role with a strong sense of self-efficacy, or a belief in their capability to succeed. Bandura's work on self-efficacy states that it is people's belief in their capability to accomplish a given role or task (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy, then, when applied to the role of the principal, is the belief in his or her capability to accomplish the leadership roles and tasks of a principal.

### **Context of the Study**

The state of California has a diverse school system in both student achievement data and in poverty levels. In the 2015-16 school year, 6,226,737 students were enrolled in California schools (California Department of Education Educational Demographics Unit, 2016). Of those over 6 million students, 53.97% were Hispanic or Latino; 8.85% were Asian; 5.81% were African American; and 24.1% were white (California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit, 2016). English Learner (EL) students comprised 22% of students (California Department of Education, Data Reporting Office, 2016), and there were 3,568,078 students considered socio-economically disadvantaged based on the number of students receiving free or reduced priced meals (California

Department of Education [CDE], 2017). Using both poverty level data and achievement data, schools throughout California were selected based on SBAC data that showed that they performed well above expectations or significantly below expectations based on a regression chart of poverty levels and SBAC scores developed by the researcher.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in that the results of this study could inform how districts hire principals and how they develop coaching models for principals. The principal's role is an important component of student achievement. As such, principals must believe in their capability to accomplish the leadership roles and practices required of principals in order to ensure that their self-efficacy, which leads to determination to be successful, will push them into a cycle of continuous improvement that will result in increased student achievement (Walker, Sackney, & Walker, 2006).

Social cognitive theory points to observation and modeling as key components to motivating positive behaviors in individuals (Schunk, 1989). Using the findings from this study and the foundations of social cognitive theory, districts could develop and implement leadership coaching models to develop and refine leadership practices in principals.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Albert Bandura's *Social Cognitive Theory* states that there is a reciprocal causation between environmental factors and influences, personal factors such as unique skills and abilities, and behaviors (Bandura, 1999). In social cognitive theory, people's environment, experiences and unique abilities and skills, and behaviors all constantly influence each other and interact with each other and, in

turn, influence motivation (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2003). Self-efficacy plays a major role as one of the constructs of this theory asserting that individuals can monitor their thoughts, motivations, and behaviors rather than just reacting impulsively (Mischel & Shoda, 1999). As such, Bandura's sources of self-efficacy lead to what becomes the collective capability of a person to accomplish a desired result (Bandura, 1994).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Building capacity* in others to lead is to spread leadership around and to develop and empower others, outside of the principal, to be leaders in a school (Mendels, 2012; Spiro, 2013).

*Common Core Standards* were developed in 2009 and adopted by California in 2010 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). They are a set of research-based standards in English-language arts/literacy and mathematics that outline learning goals for kindergarten through twelfth grade students to meet college and career readiness expectations (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.).

*ELA* is an abbreviation for English-Language Arts.

*English Learner*, or EL students, as defined by the CDE (n.d.), are students who do not read, write, speak, or understand English well because English is not their home language. In California, this is assessed annually.

*Establishing a vision* is setting a shared school-wide standard of high standards and goals for student success (Mendels, 2012; Spiro, 2013).

*Free and reduced priced meals (FRPM)* are provided for students in California based on family size and family income level, and qualifying for free and reduced priced meals is considered an indicator of student poverty (CDE, n.d.). The number of students who qualify for free and reduced priced meals at a

school and the overall percentage of those students as compared to the whole are used to determine whether a school has a high or low poverty level (CDE, n.d.).

*Local Control Funding Formula* was established in California beginning in the 2013-14 school year and replaced previous funding systems (CDE, n.d.). It establishes base, supplemental, and concentration grant funding systems available to schools. Supplemental grant funding is provided to support free and reduced priced meals student, foster youth, and English Learners (CDE, n.d.).

*PLC* is an abbreviation for professional learning community. A professional learning community is a group of teachers, who meet regularly, to determine student learning outcomes, create assessments, and analyze student achievement (Schmoker, 2005).

*ROP* is an abbreviation for Regional Occupational Program, which is a career-technical education program that encourages students to explore their career interests and prepare for specific careers in high school (Schools, n.d.).

*SBAC* is an acronym for Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and, in this dissertation, is used as the name of the test administered to California students annually in spring for both English-language arts/literacy and mathematics.

*School culture* is the relationships between beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that influence how a school operates (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

*Self-efficacy* is people's beliefs about their capability to accomplish a given task or role influencing their behaviors, thoughts, motivations, and feelings (Bandura, 1994).

## **Summary**

This study examined the perceived self-efficacy of principals in over-achieving and under-achieving schools in California. Chapter 1 introduced the

study and presented the background, context, significance, theoretical framework of the study, and the definitions of terms. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to five key principal leadership areas and self-efficacy. The methodology of the study, including the instrument used and the participants will be discussed in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

Leadership matters, especially in challenging times. The landscape of K-12 education has been rocky, and administrators have worked diligently to soften the effects of change on their teachers (Ruppert, 2001). The task of running a school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a complex job across the country for all principals (Bossi, 2007; Spiro, 2013). Whether dealing with the new Common Core Standards and connected assessments, response to intervention strategies in working with under-performing students, unique programs to help second-language learners, or budget constraints, principals juggle an increasing number of issues. Ultimately, a principal's number one goal is to increase student achievement for all students (Klem & Connell, 2004). In a 2010 survey of educators and those connected to education, "principal leadership" was second only to teacher quality when ranking 21 important education issues (Mendels, 2012).

The idea that principals influence student achievement through their ability to manage a school site is an emerging area of research. More and more data point to a link between student achievement and effective principals (Porter et al., 2008). For example, in a 6-year study that focused on the effects school leadership plays on student learning, the researchers found that school leadership was the second most important school-based factor in academic achievement, and that few or no failing school could turn around without strong leaders (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

What is it that effective principals do to lead successful schools and how do they do it? A principal must play a variety of roles in order to be an effective leader, and a principal must also understand and navigate several key practices in

order to support improved student achievement. Having an understanding of what good leadership is and what areas they focus on is only one part of the leadership equation. Understanding what their mindset is and how a principal's level of self-efficacy influences decision making is another. With so many leadership and practical demands on a principal, it is important for principals to enter the role with a strong belief in their ability to lead and accomplish the multi-faceted aspects of the role of principal. Those with a strong belief in their ability to be an effective principal, or strong sense of self-efficacy, will be best equipped to fulfill each leadership role and the key practices of effective principals.

This review of the literature will first look at the literature related to the multiple roles and key practices of school principals. Then, the review will focus on self-efficacy and its effects on the ability of principals to lead their schools successfully with five key roles and practices.

### **The Role of the School Principal**

On any given day, the role of principals may vary—they may participate in a student discipline issue, participate in a student awards ceremony, or manage a personnel issue. As a result, principals must possess the ability to multitask. Extensive research relays the importance that leadership plays in a school setting especially when influencing and empowering teachers and students (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Syed, 2014; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). One can, however, boil down the multitude of tasks a principal juggles to a handful of key practices that influence school success (Mendels, 2012). Those practices focus on how establishing a vision and purpose, creating positive school climate and culture, improving instruction, managing employees and budgets, and building capacity in others are key components of a principal's job (Mendels, 2012).

A principal's role as leader is multifaceted. Within each of the key practices for school success, a principal needs to be a transformational leader, an instructional leader, and a facilitative leader—inspiring shared leadership for learning to improve student achievement (Conley, Goldman, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003). At times, leadership calls for a principal to be a transformational leader—inspiring a school to improve student learning through setting a purpose with vision and goals and transforming the culture and the climate of the school to support student learning (Marks & Printy, 2003). The study of effect size on student outcomes of transformational leadership is second only to instructional leadership (Hattie, 2009). At times, leadership requires the principal to act as an instructional leader—supporting collaborative efforts by teachers and encouraging a cycle of continuous improvement in order to meet student learning goals. At other times, leaders need to be facilitative leaders—distributing leadership and building capacity in others to lead (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Each of these leadership roles interweave into the key practices of effective principals that found in the subsections below.

### **Establishing a Vision and Purpose**

Strong school leadership starts with vision and goals. Effective principals work with stakeholders to analyze student learning needs and expected outcomes and set a vision for the school along with measurable goals for student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). These goals should set high expectations for student learning and influence instructional decisions to support student learning (Marzano et al., 2005).

Several studies have identified the methods and importance of establishing a school-wide vision and purpose (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2004; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, Porter, 2006). A peer reviewed meta-analysis

that examined the connection between leadership and student achievement showed that establishing vision and setting expectations had an effect size of .42 standard deviations (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Though this is a moderate effect size for educational research, it is in line with social science research that points to the importance of vision in organizations (Harris & Lambert, 2003). Furthermore, goals derived from the vision provide a sense of clarity and common purpose in a dynamic environment that could otherwise seem too demanding (Locke & Latham, 2006). Having goals focuses an organization toward common student achievement outcomes. In research conducted by the University of Minnesota and University of Toronto, researchers found that successful schools had leadership that set a direction for the school through establishing challenging, yet achievable, goals and monitoring progress toward those goals (Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2004). Setting a clear vision with measurable, attainable goals provides a school with direction, and, in order to continue to focus an organization on the goals, school leadership needs to monitor progress toward meeting those goals.

This idea of setting a vision for a school should not happen in a vacuum (Bandura, 1997). On the surface, the idea of charting the direction used by schools to make decisions may seem simple, especially if principals believe they can tackle this task alone. It is, however, more powerful to take the opinion of key stakeholders into consideration when creating a school vision. The ideas of the collective, which is in line with the new California Local Control Funding Formula's idea of using key stakeholders in determining budget resources, creates a collaborative effort that builds buy-in (Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz- Lazarowitz, 2010). Vision developed for the organization by the stakeholders in that organization also helps to create a sense of unity of purpose and supports a common effort toward meeting the goals. The leadership displayed by principals

influences the positive attainment of goals within a vision (Robinson et al., 2008). Vanderbilt University researchers support this idea, “having high expectations for all, including clear and public standards, is key to raising the achievement of all students” (Porter et al., 2008, p. 5)

A mission statement alone is not enough to have a positive influence on a school, but rather, the re-educational process involved in creating a statement that positively influences an organization. Even when students are not part of the process to create a mission statement there is research to show that they are positively affected by it (Marzano et al., 2005). In a study of 16 university business students, those who attended schools with ethical statements in their missions had higher perceived character traits (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, & Rajadhyaksha, 2007). The principal’s role as a transformational leader guides a staff and student body toward unity under a central mission, vision, and goals. As the principal works with stakeholders to set vision and goals, the principal is also working with stakeholders to embrace the vision and goals and move forward to make the changes necessary to support student achievement.

### **Transforming School Culture and Climate**

An increasing number of studies have been undertaken to analyze the importance and relevance of the effects of negative and positive school cultures on schools, and more importantly, student behavior and achievement (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Mendels, 2012; Spiro, 2013). Generally speaking, school culture describes the relationship between beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that determine and influence every aspect of how a school operates (MacNeil et al., 2009). These beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules shape the decisions and practices of the members of the school community (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). As a result,

effective school leaders focus on building a positive school culture in order to support student learning. School leaders understand that these beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules are based on experiences and meanings shared by members of the school community and develop over time (Cosner & Peterson, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Teachers and staff often share a history that began long before a leader takes on the role of principal. They have a set of stories and customs that have developed over time and inform their decisions and practices. These shared experiences “create a sense of community, family, and team membership” (Wagner, 2006, p. 41). Like a family, a school culture passes its stories and experiences down from generation to generation, and those stories shape teachers and staff members’ perception about themselves and the school. History and perception provide a school with a context and “framework for solving problems” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 6)

Principals, as leaders of the school, must be aware of the factors that contribute to school culture and be part of shaping a school’s culture to support student learning. Understanding the shared experiences that have shaped the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of teachers and staff will help school leaders maintain positive aspects of the school culture. While understanding the context from which perceptions and practices come can also guide a principal in transforming a school culture. The principal is central to maintaining and shaping a positive school culture. In their work, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) focused on contrasting climate from culture. They define culture as the personality of the school and climate as the attitude of the school. When school leaders understand the underlying personality and prevailing attitudes, they can begin to shape the culture of the school. Since the culture of a school is founded on a variety of past, shared experiences, a school leader cannot simply change the culture of the school.

School leaders, however, may begin to shape the culture of a school by addressing prevailing attitudes and shifting the climate of the school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

Some studies have identified a principal's focus on school culture as an important component of transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, 1999; Marks & Printy, 2003). Transformational leaders focus on school culture by "modeling organizational values, strengthening productive school culture, building collaborative cultures, and creating structures for participation in school decisions" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 375). Transformational leaders ensure a supportive collaborative environment for teachers to focus on student learning. They invite shared leadership for change and encourage and reinforce positive climate changes (Cotton, 2003). It is important that school leaders understand that school culture affects student achievement, and as a result, maintaining or building a positive school culture is a key component of a principal's leadership (Deal & Peterson, 1990)

Principals, as the key component of shaping a positive school culture must build that culture on learning. Teachers, leaders, and staff should be focused on student learning, and as a result, focused on their own growth as professionals. Positive school culture is built around learning (Cosner & Peterson, 2003). In order to encourage a culture in which learning is valued, principals must communicate a vision focused on and celebrating both teacher and student learning. In their research out of Vanderbilt University to develop a leadership assessment, Porter, Murphy, Goldring, Elliott, Polikoff, and May (2008) identified several key practices and behaviors important in effective leadership. One of the six core components they identified as influencing student achievement was a culture of learning and professional behavior (Goldring et al., 2009). When leaders

communicate student learning expectations and support teachers' continued professional development, they can shape a positive school culture focused on student achievement. Vanderbilt University researchers also defined several key leadership processes important for supporting student achievement. In their study, they found that leadership support was a key process in "ensuring a culture of learning and professional behavior" (Goldring et al., 2009, p. 3). Leaders who communicate a learning-centered vision and support teachers in both being learners and supporting learners help to redefine and shape the attitudes within the school. When the attitudes within the school shift, the values and norms of a school change to support teachers learning, and the school culture builds to support a cycle of continuous improvement (Cosner & Peterson, 2003; Habegger, 2008).

In a study conducted on 24 nationally selected, restructured schools, the researchers examined the intersection of transformational leadership and instructional leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003). In their findings, they discovered that the highest influence on student achievement happened when transformational leadership and shared instructional leadership coexist. Using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as the measurement for achievement, the study found that schools that exhibited both transformational leadership and shared instructional leadership as part of their culture were higher achieving by .6 standard deviation (Marks & Printy, 2003). The study found that transformational leadership alone was insufficient to create large gains in student achievement; however, they also found that schools that lacked transformational leadership also lacked shared instructional leadership suggesting that transformational leadership may be an important component to a culture that includes shared instructional leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003).

In order to maintain a positive school culture that supports a cycle of continuous improvement, leaders must also focus on building a community of trust within a school. In a school with a positive culture, there is a strong sense of community, trust, and openness (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Wagner, 2006). When teachers feel that they are part of a community, they feel safe to learn and grow as professionals. As a community of professionals, leaders and teachers work together to define student achievement, find strategies to improve student achievement, and assess student achievement (Hord, 1997). Teachers share ownership in decision-making and leadership and feel that they are valued members of a professional team of educators in schools with a positive school culture (Habegger, 2008; Mendels, 2012; Spiro, 2013). Schools with a strong positive culture exhibit three key behaviors—professional collaboration, strong collegial relationships, and self-determination (Wagner, 2006).

Leaders can help shape a positive school culture that supports an environment safe for collaboration centered on student learning by understanding the past and how the past has shaped the present and looking at the present to understand current beliefs, values, and practices (Cosner & Peterson, 2003). Understanding the context that shaped the current culture of the school can guide leaders to discover what they need to do to adjust the climate and transform the culture of the school. By modeling and valuing collaborative learning behaviors, leaders can work to shift attitudes and shape culture (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Leaders can reinforce positive school culture by celebrating practices that support a learning culture, making learning fun, modeling a learning culture, and building a team of instructional leaders (Cosner & Peterson, 2003). Celebration reinforces positive practices and changes and encourages teachers to take learning and teaching risks that support student

learning. By creating a sense of belonging through developing relationships, leaders also help to establish and maintain a positive school culture (Habegger, 2008).

### **Improving Instruction**

The principal plays a key role as the instructional leader, supporting improved instruction through developing teacher leaders, coaches, and mentors, encouraging a collaborative climate, and using the observation process to engage in meaningful conversations about teaching. A principal's leadership is central to improving instruction and "good principals make sure teachers feel safe, valued, and cared for" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, p. 29)

In order to support improving instruction, a principal must acknowledge and understand that the role of being an instructional leader is too large for a single person to accomplish (Harvey & Holland, 2013; Yaffe, 2014). Effective principals support instruction by "spread[ing] leadership around" (Spiro, 2013, p. 30). Principals, as instructional leaders, should encourage and delegate leadership throughout the school (Elgarten, 1991; Yaffe, 2014). By encouraging and developing teacher leaders and shared leadership, a principal gives teachers a sense of ownership in the instructional program of the school and a sense of trust for improving instructional practice as teacher leaders are not evaluators or supervisors (Spiro, 2013; Yaffe, 2014). These peer teacher leaders can act as mentors and coaches for their colleagues modeling strong instructional practices and supporting improved instructional practices for their peers. Peer coaches and mentors can develop strong relationships, determine strengths and needs, help set goals, and provide feedback (Grossman & Davis, 2012). Leaders can work with mentors to align mentoring to school initiatives and needs (Grossman & Davis, 2012). Peer-to-peer feedback can be less intimidating because it is not evaluative

in nature and more specific to the content because peers understand the content area. Leaders can also work with mentors to align mentoring to school initiatives and needs (Grossman & Davis, 2012). When mentors foster discussion aligned toward school goals, instruction begins to align with school goals and support improved instruction toward meeting those goals.

An effective principal also establishes a culture encouraging collaboration for improved instruction. According to research conducted by Vanderbilt University, an effective principal develops a “strong sense among teachers that they are part of a professional community focused on student learning” (Spiro, 2013, p. 29). Through the work of Richard and Rebecca DuFour, professional learning communities, or PLCs, have become a model for promoting collaboration. Principals must help create a professional learning community in order to have the greatest impact on instruction and student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Professional learning communities should focus on student learning outcomes and address DuFour’s four essential questions: 1. What do we want students to know and be able to do? 2. How do we know if they learned it? 3. What do we do if they didn’t learn it? 4. What do we do if they did learn it? (Jaquith, 2015). Professional learning communities should be continually asking these questions to set student learning goals, assess learning outcomes, and support students’ continued learning depending on the outcomes. Teachers, engaged in this continuous cycle, should also be examining best practices that support the highest growth in student outcomes, and by sharing these best practices, supporting each other to implement strong teaching strategies that improve instruction. Leaders encourage strong collaboration by providing time for teachers to collaborate (Harvey & Holland, 2013). They also provide the vision for a professional learning community, empower teachers to act, and

provide the training, information, and structure necessary for effective collaboration (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Researchers from the universities of Minnesota and Toronto demonstrated a link between professional learning communities and higher student scores on standardized math tests (Harvey & Holland, 2013). By using the cycle of continuous improvement and reflective practices that are part of professional learning communities, teachers are able to identify the strategies that work best and target specific skills or concepts for improving. Effective collaborative teams include “consistent and well-defined learning expectations for children, frequent conversations among teachers about pedagogy, and an atmosphere in which it is common for teachers to visit one another’s classrooms to observe and critique each other” (Harvey & Holland, 2013, p. 11) In research conducted in Chicago schools, researchers showed that “schools that show the largest improvement in student learning over time are those where teachers work collectively on improving instruction” (Allensworth, 2012, p. 30). Through professional learning communities, leaders become part of a collaborative team constantly seeking to improve instruction to improve student learning results.

Principals can also improve instruction through a meaningful observation process that engages teachers in conversations about student learning outcomes and improved instruction. Effective leaders improve teaching through monitoring instruction in the classroom (Spiro, 2013). Leaders encourage improved instruction through observing teachers, providing consistent and immediate feedback, and giving them professional development opportunities that support their needs (Harvey & Holland, 2013; Syed, 2014). By consistently being in classrooms, leaders can ensure that instruction is consistent with the student achievement goals and can guide improved instruction by highlighting

instructional strategies that support student learning outcomes and the goals of the school. Leaders can use the observation process to encourage reflective dialogue about instructional practices and student learning. The observation process also allows leaders to encourage continued professional development (Leithwood, 1994).

In order for meaningful conversations about observations to take place between leaders and teachers, the teacher must, first, believe “that administrators have their best interest—and the best interests of students—at heart” (Arneson, 2015, p. 35). Principals can encourage meaningful observation conversations and empower teachers to improve instruction by listening to the teacher’s ideas for improving instruction, encouraging dialogue through feedback, and asking open-ended questions (Anderson & Betz, 2001; Arneson, 2015). In order to create an environment safe for teachers to engage in reflective conversations about teaching through the observation process, leaders must develop trust with teachers and focus post-observation conversations on being reflective rather than evaluative. Effective leaders shifted the focus of observations away from the once-a-year evaluative format to several, informal visits throughout the year designed to collect formative observational data (Harvey & Holland, 2013). Classroom walk-throughs support more frequent, informal visits throughout the year and engage leaders and teachers in continual conversations about improving instruction (Protheroe, 2009) By using routine, focused walk-through classroom observations, leaders can provide relevant, immediate feedback to generate conversation about improving instruction and appropriate professional development (Protheroe, 2009).

## **Managing People, Data, and Systems**

The management of schools has become more and more complex (Bossi, 2007). Principals are faced with the daunting tasks of working with various budgets and evaluating and developing multiple processes for operational standards (Catano & Stronge, 2006). These managerial tasks compete for time with other principal responsibilities like instructional leadership, staff development, student/parent relations, and maintaining a schools culture and climate (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003; Thomas, Grigsby, Miller, & Scully III, 2003). With principals working from 54 to 80 hours a week (Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001) and, ultimately, being held responsible for student achievement (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012), the tasks of managing a school results in a competition for time and energy. Nonetheless, principals are held accountable for everything from student achievement to organizational maintenance.

School leaders, relative to the size and scope of the school, have a responsibility for the day-to-day operations that allow the process of learning to happen. The sense of conflict that principals feel when balancing between a leadership role of school visionary and instructional catalyst, while also attending meetings and addressing management responsibilities, can lead to confusion and frustration (Cascadden, 1998). However, this is what the job consists of, and principals must understand that managing a school properly will, in effect, ensure an orderly and efficient school environment (Catano & Stronge, 2006). In one study, ten key skills were identified for principals; strategic planning, inquiry and information management, day-to-day operations, human relations, financial management, long-range planning, strategies for program development, staff development, media relations, and community partnerships (Furtwengler, 1998).

These skills, grouped together, outline the principal's responsibilities related to organizational management.

Specifically, research points to school finances, operational processes, and people as the most common managerial tasks (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Rayfield & Diamantes, 2004; Spiro, 2013). In a study of beginning principals, the author found that principals reported that they spent much of their time responding to emergencies, resolving staff problems, sorting out the school's finances and budgets (Mallia, 1992). Another article discussing principal burn-out pointed to 25 specific tasks that a principal is responsible for including teacher hiring and evaluation, course scheduling and master schedule, school safety and student discipline, community communication and involvement such as newsletters and attendance at community events, and budgets and fundraising (Rayfield & Diamantes, 2004). With so many tasks to complete, principals can struggle to find ways to be leaders rather than managers.

Additionally, because school systems require attention to student data, principals must manage the variety of data necessary to support teachers as they engage in a cycle of continuous improvement. As schools become increasingly data-driven, principals must themselves manage and interpret the data and, then, help teachers manage the types of data they use, how they get their data, and how they use the data (Guthrie & Schuermann, 2010). A report from the U.S. Department of Education concluded that teachers have a difficult time examining data in order to support student achievement (Means, Chen, DeBarger, & Padilla, 2011). The report noted that teachers were often uncomfortable with unfamiliar forms of data and unable to explore data deeply on their own (Means et al., 2011). Just having access to data may not be enough for teachers to be able to use that data to inform instruction. As a result, principals need to take responsibility for

managing data to support teachers. Principals need to support teachers by providing or having someone provide appropriate, focused data and training for data literacy and by providing a cycle of continuous improvement to guide conversations about data (Marsh & Farrell, 2015).

### **Building Capacity in Others**

Principals are both leaders and managers, and as such, are required to be involved in a variety and number of decisions and actions throughout a day. Effective principals do not try to accomplish all of this alone but, rather, build the capacity for leadership in others. In order for a principal to be an effective instructional leader, the principal needs to build the capacity for leadership into the instructional and content experts of the school—the teachers. Michael Fullan (1993) theorized that the inflated importance of principals is a result of the absence of leadership from teachers. To build leadership capacity in others, principals must be willing to allow others to take leadership responsibilities and understand that they cannot do everything on their own. They need the expertise, experience, and leadership of those around them, but they also need to encourage leadership outside of a defined, formal role and build capacity in others to lead (Copland, 2003).

In a research study conducted by the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto, the researchers found that effective leaders “develop and count on contributions from many others in their organizations” (Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2004, p. 7). Good leaders are willing to spread leadership around to others within a school (Mendels, 2012; Spiro, 2013). Willingness to share leadership influences student learning. In another study, Phillip Hallinger (2011), of the Asia Pacific Centre for Leadership and Change at the Hong Kong Institute for Education, examined the impact on student learning of a number of leadership

practices. He found that, by building the school's capacity for academic improvement, there was an indirect correlation between shared leadership and improved student learning (Hallinger, 2011). The study also found that leaders who focused on developing others' capacity had a larger impact on improving the school's capacity for increasing student learning (Hallinger, 2011). Additionally, researchers from the University of Minnesota and University of Toronto found that, if shared leadership is spread throughout an organization, there are more opportunities for a school to "benefit from the capacities of more of its members" and "capitalize on the range of their individual strengths" while developing a "fuller appreciation of interdependence and how one's behavior affects the organization as a whole" (Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2004, p. 29). The study points to the opportunities that schools have to build upon teachers' knowledge, experiences, and strengths to improve student learning and to increase teacher buy-in through shared decision-making and leadership involvement.

Another study conducted through the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) also found that shared leadership was an important reform measure to improve instruction and student learning (Copland, 2003). In its analysis of findings, the study found that, in order for shared leadership to work, a leader must foster a culture of trust and collaboration. The study found that leaders must develop a culture, over time, that encouraged collaboration, trust, professional learning, and reciprocal accountability (Copland, 2003). In a study conducted about building leadership capacity in mathematics teachers, the researchers also found that fostering collaboration was an important factor to facilitate shared leadership and to build capacity in teachers for leadership (Koellner, Jacobs, & Borko, 2011). Just as principals cannot be effective leaders while working in isolation, teachers cannot share leadership without a

collaborative environment that fosters trust and continuous improvement. In order for shared leadership to impact student learning, teachers must share a set of values and must work in collaborative teams (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

In his theory of distributive leadership, Spillane (2006) challenged perspectives of shared leadership in which principals simply share leadership tasks with other staff who are treated as leaders. Shared leadership, if left at a superficial level of merely giving others leadership responsibilities, may not address the complexities of the interactions among people and situations to develop strong leaders and leadership practices (Spillane, 2006). Spillane emphasized the importance of leadership interactions over leadership actions. Spillane challenged the myth of the principal as hero and school achievement success as the story of an individual principal. Instead, he proposed that leaders engage in leadership practice that fosters distributed leadership. He defined distributed leadership as a leadership practice that is about the interaction between leaders, followers, and aspects of the situation (Spillane, 2006). Distributed leadership focuses on interactions among people and situations. It shifts the focus away from the principal and other formal and informal leaders to the collective interactions among leaders, followers, and their situations (Spillane, 2006). With interactions among people and situations as the center of distributed leadership practice, those in formal leadership roles need to invest time in building capacity in others to lead in the situations that they are in and provide ample collaboration time to foster increased interactions.

Collaboration is an important factor in developing shared leadership and building capacity in others to be leaders. Through collaboration, teacher leaders are accountable to their peers and to one another, and collaborative practices encourage a cycle of continuous improvement. Through a cycle of continuous

improvement, leaders can set goals, examine practices that lead to improved student learning, analyze data to determine student learning outcomes, and adjust instruction to continue to improve student learning. The BASRC study determined that leadership that focused on continual inquiry and included identifying a problem, setting goals and targets, implementing actions toward those goals, and analyzing results to build teacher capacity and ensure improved student learning outcomes (Copland, 2003). Leaders can encourage continued teacher learning and leadership to improve student learning by providing continual professional development focused on supporting teacher leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

In addition to encouraging a culture of collaboration that fosters continuous improvement and professional learning, leaders can build capacity in teachers for leadership through mentoring teacher leaders. The study of mathematics teachers found that modeling and coaching for teacher leaders fostered discussion and encouraged reflection that supported teacher leaders to develop both as teachers and as leaders (Koellner et al., 2011). Teachers mentored to lead their peers felt more connected to a school and reported higher job satisfaction (Yaffe, 2014). In peer-to-peer collaboration and mentoring, leadership is not a role reserved only for administrators (Ash & Persall, 2000). In their Formative Leadership Theory, Ash and Persall outlined several principles to develop teacher leaders. A leader must develop a culture of trust and collaboration fostering two-way communication and empowering people within the school to lead (Ash & Persall, 2000).

### **Self-Efficacy**

The ideation of self-efficacy is relatively recent when compared to the concepts that built its foundation. Human will, or the power of personal beliefs are not new topics to psychologists who have spent time researching human behavior (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Self-efficacy has its roots in

theories that have been part of the exploration of the connection between personal competence and its effect on how humans behave. For instance, achievement motivation looks at behavior that is aimed at developing or demonstrating high ability in the accomplishment of tasks (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). Similarly, social learning looks at how people learn from each other through modeling, observation, and imitation (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Rotter, 1966). The work of Gilbert Ryle (2009) takes a look specifically at human will or volitions and how they affect choice by distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary actions. This research was influenced by the work on self-efficacy by Stanford University professor Albert Bandura. For the past 40 years, self-efficacy has been directly associated with studies on work performance (Barling & Beattie, 1983), research productivity (Taylor, Locke, Lee, & Gist, 1984), career coping skills (Stumpf, Brief, & Hartman, 1987), learning and achievement (Campbell & Hackett, 1986), and the ability to use new technology (Hill, Smith, & Mann, 1987). In education circles, researchers have studied self-efficacy in relation to students, teachers, and, in this case and others, principals (Lyons & Murphy, 1994; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992).

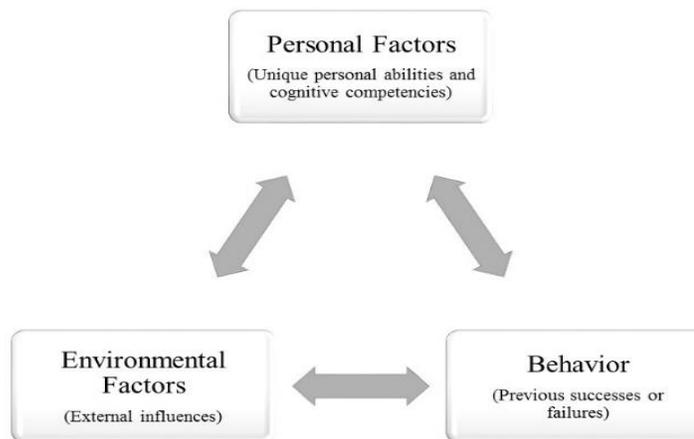
The concept of self-efficacy has been compared to the simple and timeless children's book *The Little Engine that Could* (Piper & Bragg, 1961), which tells the story of an undersized train engine struggling to carry an oversized load up a steep mountainside. The engine, when faced with this challenging and daunting task, *believed* that it could make the journey. "I think I can, I think I can," was the mindset and mantra of this engine as it went up and over the mountainside. Even when others would not accept the challenge, the little engine believed in itself and its abilities to accomplish a task and, ultimately, succeeded. Metaphorically, the little engine is each human faced with a daunting task, and more specifically, a

principal as the leader of a school. The importance of the story is not only the accomplishment, but also the fact that much greater engines had refused to try because they did not believe that they could succeed. The little engine, however, accepted the challenge because it believed in its ability to succeed. Similarly, at its core, self-efficacy is the concept that a person can succeed at whatever they set their mind to accomplish and whatever they believe they can accomplish. Self-efficacy theory, and the work of Bandura and others, explains why this elementary truth has influence in explaining human behavior (Bandura, 1999).

A more academic explanation of self-efficacy asserts that it is a person's belief in his own capabilities to create a desired outcome (Bandura, 1982). These beliefs regulate how people feel, think, and motivate themselves and, consequently, how they behave. Looking at how a person views their own capability and how that will influence their performance to accomplish a task or face a challenge leads to what is called having a strong or weak sense of self-efficacy. People with a strong sense of self-efficacy are highly self-motivated and have a profound involvement with accomplishing what they set their minds to because of a high level of confidence in their capabilities (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). They approach each task, difficult or not, as something to be mastered rather than as a hazard that needs to be avoided or ignored (Bandura, 1994). Conversely, those who are lacking in self-efficacy quickly lose faith in their ability to perform tasks and may become frustrated and defeated. Those with a weaker sense of self-efficacy may blame others or circumstances for their failure to succeed (Luthans, 2002).

Figure 1 illustrates factors that influence self-efficacy and how they influence each other and, ultimately, self-efficacy. Three factors influence self-

efficacy: Personal factors, environmental factors, and behavior factors (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2003). Personal factors include unique personal characteristics; environmental factors are outside influences that shape decisions and beliefs; and behavior factors are based on previous experiences (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2003). These factors are considered reciprocal in their influence in that the factors interact with each other to influence self-efficacy which, in turn, influences the behavior, environment, and personal beliefs (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2003)



*Figure 1.* Reciprocal causation influence.

The figure illustrates the reciprocal influences that personal factors, environmental factors, and behavior has on self-efficacy. Adapted from Stajkovic and Luthans (2003).

Another method used to clarify the meaning of self-efficacy is to distinguish it from other similar or related concepts. Self-efficacy is not a given personality trait or a perceived skill set. Personality traits, like determination and persistence, are a manifestation of a set of behaviors that a person exhibits regularly. Studies of personality traits including optimism (Carver & Scheier, 2001), hope (Snyder, Feldman, Taylor, Schroeder, & Adams, 2000), learned resourcefulness (Rosenbaum, 1990), or the more recent subject of possessing a

level of determination called “grit” (Bowman, Hill, Denson, & Bronkema, 2015) all describe attributes and characteristics. Self-efficacy, however, is the ability to coordinate one’s skills and abilities to attain the goals desired in a given circumstance. A person may possess skills and personality traits found in many successful people, but without a strong sense of self-efficacy, those skills and traits become merely a collective set of characteristics. A strong sense of self-efficacy is necessary for using the skills and traits found in successful people to attain a desired outcome (Bandura, 1997).

Another similar concept frequently confused with self-efficacy is self-esteem. Brockner (1988) discussed the distinctions between self-efficacy and self-esteem, concluding that self-esteem is usually explained as a trait reflecting the evaluation of the self. Self-esteem is how a person views himself. In contrast, self-efficacy is an evaluation of task capability and how that relates to the ability to succeed (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

### **Sources of Self-Efficacy**

As noted, self-efficacy is not a trait or behavior that someone is born with. To understand how self-efficacy beliefs develop requires the analysis of human cognition, motivation, and emotion, which, in turn, allows for the opportunity to look at the causation of certain self-efficacy behaviors (Barone, Maddux, & Snyder, 1997). These areas of psychology are the building blocks to relating the four main sources of self-efficacy and how they influence individuals (Bandura, 1977). Bandura’s theory points to the initial development of one’s self-efficacy to four main sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and psychological states (Bandura, 1994). Gist (1987) called these sources, informational cues, that provide important data that in due course determine a strong or weak sense of self-efficacy. A person’s judgement of their performance

ability is the result of the incorporation and adaptations of these four sources (Gist, 1987).

**Mastery experiences.** The most influential source of self-efficacy is defined as repeated performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1982; Bandura & Adams, 1977). It is a person's collective experiences of positive outcomes that lead to the gradual building of coping skills and gives the exposure to overcoming challenges needed for task performance. Through experiences with positive outcomes, people can register what skills and traits they needed and used in order to create a successful outcome. That attribute—understanding that successful outcomes are a result of effort and ability rather than luck or chance—are hallmarks of a strong sense of self-efficacy. As a result, even setbacks can serve as helpful experiences when they have the purpose of teaching individuals that success usually requires sustained effort. After people, with guidance and persuasion, understand that they can reflect and find ways to overcome, they emerge stronger from the adversity. However, failure can also lead to a decrease in self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). While positive mastery experiences of overcoming and powering through situations can strengthen self-efficacy, failure to overcome can often result in a decrease in self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

**Vicarious experiences.** The second way of generating beliefs of self-efficacy is through vicarious experiences or the modeling of a behavior. Watching others similar to themselves succeed through sustained efforts of learning, coping, and dealing with challenges creates the belief that they too can perform in such a manner (Bandura, Adams, Hardy, & Howells, 1980; Kazdin, 1976). It is when the modeled behavior can show clear results, either positive or negative, that a person is able to see either what to mimic or what to avoid if they are faced with a similar

challenge. Having a role model, coach, or mentor serves to give relevant and realistic evaluations of what it will take to be successful in performing a task. Several studies show the positive effect of modeling in conjunction with work related behaviors, (Burnaska, 1976; Meyer & Raich, 1983; Moses & Ritchie, 1976), pointing to improved task performance in areas from supervisory duties to goal attainment.

**Social persuasions.** Social persuasions, sometimes called verbal persuasion, is the third area of strengthening people's beliefs that they can perform a given task. By verbally persuading or convincing others that they possess the capabilities to succeed, one can change a mindset and, as a result, change behavior (Bandura, 1977). This includes persuasive discussions and specific task feedback regarding an individual's abilities (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). If people receive positive reactions and purposeful encouragement aimed at their improvement in specific areas, they are more likely to apply more effort in accomplishing a task. It is important that this feedback comes from credible, trustworthy, and experienced individuals when evaluating the usefulness of social persuasions as a tool for greater self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Though at times, social persuasions can influence efficacy perceptions for individuals, it is still regarded as less effective than mastery or vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1982).

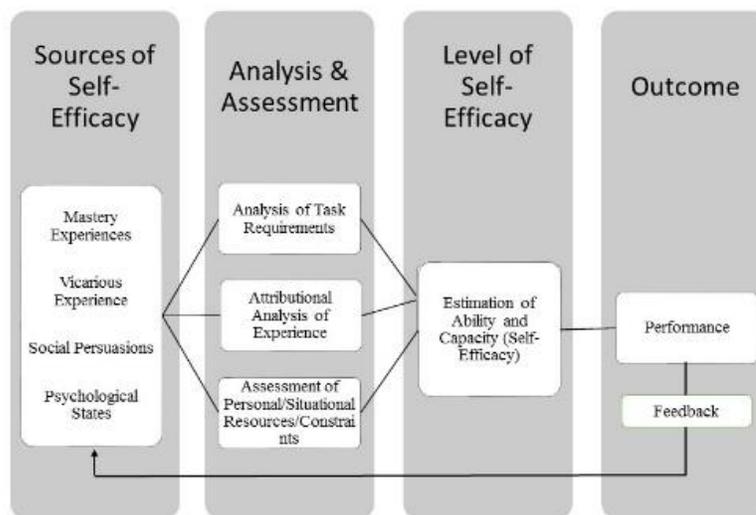
**Psychological states.** Finally, the last source of assessing personal capabilities is the idea of a person relying on their own perceptions of their psychological states (Bandura, 1977). Given a situation, the presence of anxiety and stress changes a person's capacity to interpret their ability to accomplish a task (Gist, 1987; Stumpf et al., 1987; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Weakened self-efficacy beliefs may be the result of fear or anxiety of a certain task. For example, if a person has a fear of public speaking, their self-efficacy beliefs to present to a

group of people, as part of their job to sell a product, would diminish (Bandura, 1997). Stumpf et al. (1987) gave support to the idea that a heightened level of anxiety contributed to weakened self-efficacy by individuals, and Wood and Bandura (1989) added that in order to strengthen self-efficacy, a person should work to enhance their emotional and physical well-being and reduce stress levels.

Figure 2 illustrates how the four sources of self-efficacy influence the analysis and assessment of the task and one's abilities to complete the task, the resulting self-efficacy level, and the resulting performance. The outcome provides feedback that cycles back to inform the four sources of self-efficacy. The figure shows how the four sources of self-efficacy influence cognitive, motivational, and personal processes (Bandura, 1994). These processes determine the level of self-efficacy experienced by a person and produce an outcome, whether success or failure, which provides feedback to continue to inform the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). A person with a high sense of self-efficacy will attribute the outcome to effort and use the outcome to influence continued effort toward success (Bandura, 1994).

### **Principal Self-Efficacy**

In an era of increased accountability and numerous school reforms, the role of the principal has become the key to school performance. In fact, the role of a good principal has been dubbed the cornerstone of good schools and that, without their leadership skills, it is difficult or impossible for schools to succeed (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Schools without any leadership had lower student achievement levels than schools with even limited leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003).



*Figure 2.* Self-efficacy and performance relationship model

Adapted from “Self-Efficacy: A Theoretical Analysis of Its Determinants and Malleability by M.E. Gist and T.R. Mitchell, 1992, p. 189. This figure illustrates how the sources of self-efficacy influence self-efficacy and the relationship between self-efficacy and performance.

Principals are responsible for a variety of leadership roles—from transformational leader to instructional leader to facilitative leader—and are responsible for several key practices that include developing a strong vision and goals, transforming school culture and climate, improving instruction, building capacity in others to lead, and managing school systems. Every day, principals make decisions that are key in influencing instruction, culture, climate, school processes and practices, leadership, and student achievement. How they feel about their ability to lead ties directly to how they think and react given a multitude of daily issues (Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2004; Sergiovanni, 1991). Principals are charged with the duty of facilitating group goal fulfilment through maintaining an environment advantageous to group performance. Successful school leadership involves processes to organize, direct, and motivate the actions of staff and

students (Harvey & Holland, 2013). It requires the tenacity of task accomplishment, effective task tactics, and the use of interpersonal skills. Their ability to cope successfully (self-efficacy) in any number of various skills is crucial to school success (Bandura, 1982).

Principals who have a strong sense of self-efficacy are persistent with goal attainment, view change as process that does not happen overnight, and also recognize unsuccessful strategies (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996). High efficacy school principals show resiliency when faced with issues they cannot immediately solve by remaining confident and calm (Lyons & Murphy, 1994). They depend on internal, expert power while performing their duties (Lyons & Murphy, 1994). All too often, schools that are not lead by principals with a strong sense of efficacy flounder with the inactions of someone controlled by the environment and who, either cannot adjust for situations or issues or blames others for failures. As such, principals who have a low sense of self-efficacy, are less likely to be self-directed and successful leaders. They will attribute successes and failures to luck, their surroundings, or the students and staff they work with rather than the amount of effort they put into the task (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). The inability to relate with students, staff, and the community, as well as negative attitudes due to overload and stress have all contributed to principal burnout (Friedman, 1997).

Research on principal self-efficacy is limited, looked at through various lenses, and has been measured from different angles. Some studies have shown that a principal's level of self-efficacy is tied to persistence in goal achievement and adaptable to change (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996), the quality of teacher supervision (Licklider & Niska, 1993), and school restructuring (Dimmock & Hattie, 1996). Norwegian researchers Roger Federici and Einar, Skaalvik (2011) examined the effects of principal self-efficacy on work engagement and

motivation of principals. Through their research, they found that “adaptive functioning” is an important component of principals who have a strong sense of self-efficacy (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 576). For the purposes of their study, they defined principal self-efficacy as the “principal’s judgments of their capabilities to plan, organize and execute tasks and deal with their relationship to people and institutions in their environment” (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 578). Each of the key leadership practices require a principal to be able to build relationships with others in order to build a shared vision, to develop a collaborative culture, to build capacity in others, and to transform the culture and climate while organizing and managing the many tasks of being a principal. A principal with a strong sense of self-efficacy will believe in their capabilities to accomplish the leadership roles necessary to implement the key practices. The Norwegian study asked principals to rate their certainty in their ability to accomplish various leadership roles and tasks and used another test to measure work engagement levels (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011). Through their study, they found that to measure principal self-efficacy effectively, the measurement tool must test for multiple factors reflecting the multidimensional construct of principal self-efficacy, and it must be developed to address the variety of responsibilities specific to school principals (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011).

### **Summary**

The role of the principal is demanding. The principal must act as both leader and manager, and each of those roles encompass a myriad of expectations and actions. Successful leadership requires a leader who is, both, a transformational leader and an instructional leader, as the integration of the two produces the strongest effect on student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003). Woven into these leadership roles are key practices of good leaders. Effective

principals establish vision and goals and high expectations for student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005; Spiro, 2013), transform school climate and culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990), improve instruction (Harvey & Holland, 2013; Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2004; Spiro, 2013), manage systems, people, and processes (Catano & Stronge, 2006), and build capacity in others to lead (Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2004).

With all that is required of a principal to be an effective leader, it is important that principal have a strong belief in the ability to be successful. The belief that one can accomplish what one sets his mind to is referred to as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). The work of Albert Bandura explored the theory of self-efficacy and its impact on human behavior. When this theory is applied to the principal, as the leader of the school, it examines how the principal's sense of self-efficacy influences the actions, decisions, and effectiveness of the principal.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology proposal for completion of this study. Features of this chapter include the purpose of the study, the research questions, the design of the study, how the sample was created and participants selected, the procedures for collecting data, the instrumentation used (including the pilot study), and ultimately, how the data were analyzed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study compared the perceived levels of self-efficacy in principals' schools that are performing either well above or well below expectations as determined by a regression analysis based on SBAC scores and the poverty level of the school.

Emerging studies have sought to analyze self-efficacy in students, teachers, and even principals (Bong, 2004; Curry, 2014; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Studies about principal self-efficacy have been reviewed in terms of a comparison to work engagement (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011), various key leadership areas, and the use of power (Lyons & Murphy, 1994). What has not been looked at is a comparison of principals from schools that are performing above or below expectations academically and how they rank themselves in terms of their perceived believe to produce a desired result in the key areas of (a) creating a vision, (b) establishing a positive climate and culture, (c) being an instructional leader, (d) managing a school, and (e) building capacity in school staff.

### **Research Questions**

A principal with a high level of self-efficacy in key leadership practices would effectively lead schools that perform at a high level. The specific research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do the levels of perceived principal self-efficacy compare between over- and under performing schools?
  - a. What are the corresponding levels of perceived principal self-efficacy in the five key leadership practices?
2. Which source of self-efficacy do principals find to be more important in determining their level of self-efficacy?
3. Are there any other factors that affect principals perceived level of self-efficacy?

### **Research Design**

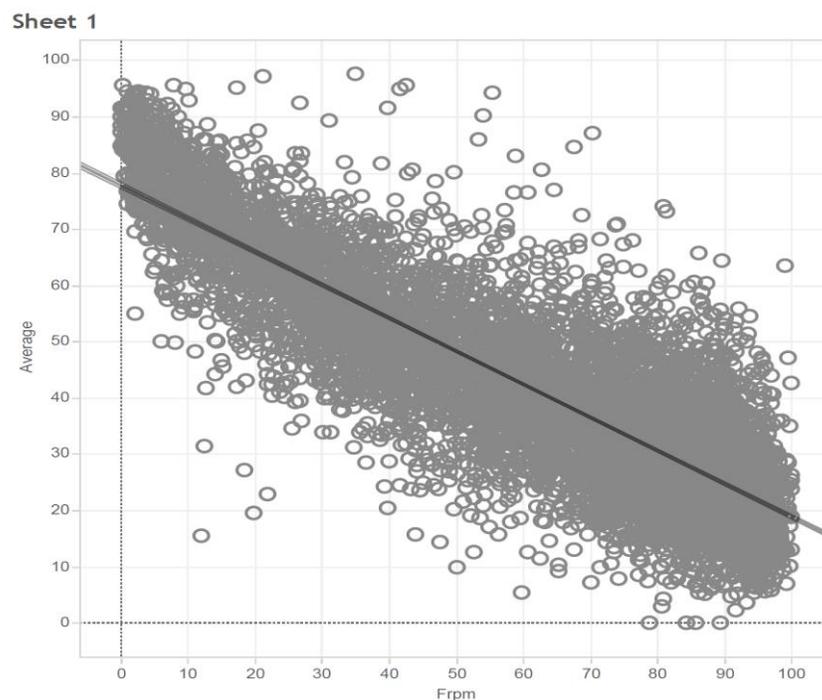
The study was conducted utilizing a mixed methods process of quantitative and qualitative methods. Correlational coefficients were used to determine the extent of the relationship between two variables—performance on the 2015-16 SBAC test and a principal’s level of perceived self-efficacy in five key areas, as well as qualitative responses on their capability to produce a desired result.

### **Participants/Sample**

The participants in the study were selected from all public K-12 principals from schools in the state of California who had qualifying math and ELA scores from the 2015-16 school year. Only traditional K-12 public schools were considered in the sample. All charter, court, ROP, continuation, alternative, ROP and Special Education schools were removed from the sample to obtain a more cohesive group of principals with similar experiences. Research files from the California Department of Education were used to create a list of public elementary, middle, and high schools. A file was created that included school and administrator information, an average of each school’s math and ELA percent of students who performed at the level ‘met or above’ the standard from the Smarter

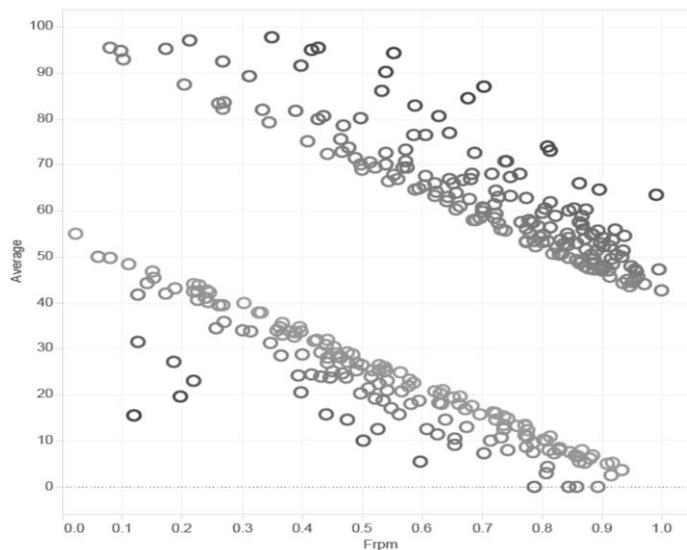
Balanced Assessment in 2015-16, the percent of students who received free and reduced priced meals at each school (FRPM).

To obtain the sample, a multiple regression analysis was used to model the data with the dependent variable being the average score on the 2015-16 SBAC exam and the independent variables of the percentage of FRPM and EL students. A review of the resulting beta weights for the independent variables showed that the EL variable, while significant, was minimally predictive of the dependent variable ( $\beta=.04$ ,  $t_{(9150)}=5.506$ ,  $p<.000$ ). The significance was most likely associated with the high sample size. To simplify the sample selection, the EL variable was dropped and only the FRPM was used in a linear regression. FRPM significantly predicted the average ELA & Math SBAC scores ( $\beta=-.771$ ,  $t_{(9150)}=-115.839$ ,  $p<.000$ ), showing a strong inverse relationship (Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* Multiple regression analysis of K-12 public schools. The dependent variable is a composite score of Math and ELA SBAC scores for 2015-16 and the independent variable is the number of students who receive free and reduced priced meals (FRPM).

For this study, the detection of outlier schools was important. Standardized residuals were calculated to identify how far each school fell above or below the general regression line. A total of 162 schools had standardized residuals of +2 and were included as part of the sample and identified as high performing. For schools below the general regression, 184 schools had standardized residuals of -1.5 and were included as part of the sample and identified as low performing. A standardized residual of -3.92 was used for the underperforming and 3.96 for the over performing to balance the number of schools above and below the regression line (Figure 4). The resulting data plots allowed the identification of low and high performing schools in relationship to the effects of poverty (FRPM). The names and contact information for principals of each of the selected schools were included in the data set to help with survey participation. Principals who were in their first year at both their school and career were eliminated from the data set.



*Figure 4.* Multiple regression analysis of K-12 public schools.

The dependent variable is a composite score of Math and ELA SBAC scores for 2015-16 and the independent variable is the number of students who receive free and reduced priced meals (FRPM) where a standardized residual of -3.92 and 3.96 was used to determine high and low achieving schools.

### **Data Collection & Purpose**

Prior to conducting the research and data collection, the Human Subjects approval process was completed in conjunction with the California State University, Fresno institutional review board. Once completed, the survey (Appendix A) was sent out via email using Survey Monkey. Individual emails were sent to the sample group of principals asking for their participation by the researcher. The link to the survey was included in the email instead of the survey being sent automatically via Survey Monkey so that emails were not automatically sent to junk-mail. Follow-up emails were sent periodically during this time to increase the level of participation. One week after the first email, the researcher sent a second individualized email to those who had not responded to the survey. Again, one week after the second, a third email was sent. Survey data responses were collected using the software within Survey Monkey.

### **Instrumentation & Pilot Study**

The literature on self-efficacy gave the researcher examples of surveys used in relation to studies that were conducted on students and teachers. The basis for the survey design was adapted from a study of Norwegian principals' level of self-efficacy compared to work engagement (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011). This survey was of particular interest since it also gauged perceived self-efficacy in various key areas of principal performance. Once the initial survey was designed, the questions were shared with experts in the field of educational leadership to further refine. Efforts were made to focus the questions to the five key areas of principal leadership in an attempt to strengthen the relationship with principal self-efficacy.

The survey was piloted (Appendix B) with a group of principals and deputy principals in the Clovis Unified School District and 10 principals from Fresno County, both located in California's Central Valley. None of the schools or

principals in the pilot study were identified as a member of the sample, and therefore, did not receive the survey twice. These individuals, as principals in the state of California, from schools with various levels of FRPM students, were a good representative group to pilot the survey. Feedback as to the wording and understanding of each question was used to make adjustments before the final survey was sent to the sample group of principals across the state.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the quantitative data collected, the researcher used a series of statistical tests. Data were downloaded from Survey Monkey into Microsoft Excel where it was cleaned of any inconsistencies. It was, then, converted to a SPSS file where it was analyzed and where t-tests and correlation coefficients were calculated.

### **Limitations**

This study has some limitations to be considered. The sample is limited to the state of California and, therefore, may not be generalizable beyond the state. Of the schools identified, there are some principals who have been in their schools for less than 1 year, and as such, were not able to participate in the process. Not all participants responded, which created an under representative sample in some areas.

The study is limited to the self-reported perceptions of the principal's self-efficacy since the researcher asked individual principals to rate themselves,

### **Summary**

This study was developed to explore whether there is any connection between principals' perceived levels of self-efficacy and school achievement. Principals from schools in the state of California were selected to participate in the

study. This mixed methods study was also limited to schools with a high number of FRPM students that are either over-performing or underperforming according to their SBAC data.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS/OUTCOMES

The purpose of this study was to compare a principal's perceived sense of self-efficacy between over- and underperforming schools in California. This study examined a principal's perceived sense of self-efficacy in five key leadership areas: Establishing a vision and purpose; transforming a school's culture and climate; improving instruction; managing student achievement data, school systems, and processes; and building capacity in others. A mixed methods study was conducted using an electronic survey emailed to school principals across the state of California from selected over- and underperforming schools, as determined by a regression analysis of 2016 SBAC data as explained in chapter 3.

This chapter presents the research findings from the surveys submitted by the selected California principals. The research findings address the following research questions:

1. How do the levels of perceived principal self-efficacy compare between over- and underperforming schools?
  - a. What are the corresponding levels of perceived principal self-efficacy in the five key leadership practices?
2. Which source of self-efficacy do principals find to be more important in determining their level of self-efficacy?
3. Are there any other factors that affect principals perceived level of self-efficacy?

### **Results of Research Questions**

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

**Demographic data.** The sample for the online survey consisted of responses from 65 (*N*) K-12 public school principals across the state of California.

Of the 184 total surveys sent out, 35% were returned. Within the sample, 31 surveys were returned from principals from over-performing schools and 34 were returned from principals from underperforming schools. Table 1 represents the response rate percentages for principals at both over- and underperforming schools. The relative equal number of responses between the two gives balance to sample and strengthens the comparison.

Table 1

*Percent of Over- and Underperforming Schools' Principal Respondents*

| Achievement Level | N  | %    |
|-------------------|----|------|
| Over-Performing   | 31 | 47.6 |
| Underperforming   | 34 | 52.4 |

**Research question 1.** How do the levels of perceived principal self-efficacy compare between over- and underperforming schools?

Table 2 represents the comparison of the mean and standard deviation for the perceived level of self-efficacy from principals' responses from over- and underperforming schools. Principals from over-performing schools had a slightly higher mean, representing levels of perceived self-efficacy, than principals from underperforming schools.

Table 2

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Over- and Underperforming Schools' Principal Responses for the Overall Survey*

| Achievement Level | N  | Mean    | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------|----|---------|----------------|
| Over-Performing   | 31 | 1691.50 | 202.35         |
| Underperforming   | 34 | 1595.68 | 207.24         |

Table 3 represents the independent *t*-test outcomes between principals from over- and underperforming schools. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference between principals from over-performing schools ( $M=1691.5$ ,  $SD=202.35$ ) and principals from underperforming schools ( $M=1595.68$ ,  $SD=207.24$ );  $t(62)=1.86$ ,  $p =.067$ .

Table 3

*t*-test Results Comparing Over- and Underperforming Schools' Principal Self-Efficacy

|                        | t-test for Equality of Means |    |                 |            |                  | t-test for Equality of Means 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |        |
|------------------------|------------------------------|----|-----------------|------------|------------------|--|--------|
|                        | t                            | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Diff. | Std. Error Diff. | Lower  | Upper  |
| Overall Survey Results | 1.86                         | 62 | .067            | 95.82      | 51.34            | -6.809   | 198.46 |

**Research question 1a.** What are the corresponding levels of perceived principal self-efficacy in the five key leadership practices?

Table 4 represents the independent *t*-test outcomes between principals at over- and underperforming schools in their perceived ability to establish a vision and purpose at their school sites. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference principals at over-performing schools ( $M = 255.97$ ,  $SD = 39.75$ ) and principals at underperforming schools ( $M = 246.24$ ,  $SD = 34.10$ );  $t(62) = 1.05$ ,  $p = .296$ .

Table 5 represents the independent *t*-test outcomes between principals at over- and underperforming schools in their perceived self-efficacy in their ability to create a positive culture and climate at their school sites. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference between principals at over-performing schools

( $M = 329.0$ ,  $SD = 46.9$ ) and principals at underperforming schools ( $M = 317.44$ ,  $SD = 47.69$ );  $t(62) = .975$ ,  $p = .333$ .

Table 4

*t-test Results Comparing Over- and Underperforming Schools' Principal Self-Efficacy in Establishing a Vision and Purpose*

|                                   | T    | t-test for Equality of Means |                 |            |                  | t-test for Equality of Means 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |       |
|-----------------------------------|------|------------------------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|--|-------|
|                                   |      | df                           | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Diff. | Std. Error Diff. | Lower  | Upper |
| Establishing a vision and purpose | 1.05 | 62                           | .296            | 9.73       | 9.23             | -8.72  | 28.18 |

Table 5

*t-test Results Comparing Over- and Underperforming Schools' Principal Self-Efficacy in Creating a Positive Culture and Climate*

|                     | t    | t-test for Equality of Means |                 |            |                  | t-test for Equality of Means 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |       |
|---------------------|------|------------------------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|--|-------|
|                     |      | df                           | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Diff. | Std. Error Diff. | Lower  | Upper |
| climate and culture | .975 | 62                           | .333            | 11.56      | 11.85            | -12.14   | 35.26 |

Table 6 represents the independent t-test outcomes between principals at over- and underperforming schools in their perceived self-efficacy in their ability to be instructional leaders at their school sites. Statistical analysis showed a significant difference between principals from over-performing schools ( $M = 431.17$ ,  $SD = 50.39$ ) and principals from underperforming schools ( $M = 396.62$ ,  $SD = 56.48$ );  $t(62) = .152$ ,  $p = .013$ .

Table 6

*t-test Results Comparing Over- and Underperforming Schools' Principal Self-Efficacy in their Ability to be an Instructional Leader*

|   | t-test for Equality of Means |    |                 |            |                  | t-test for Equality of Means 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |       |
|---|------------------------------|----|-----------------|------------|------------------|--|-------|
|   | t                            | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Diff. | Std. Error Diff. | Lower  | Upper |
| Creating a positive climate and culture | 2.568                        | 62 | .013            | 34.55      | 13.46            | 7.65   | 61.45 |

Table 7 represents the independent t-test outcomes between principals from over- and underperforming schools in their perceived self-efficacy in their ability to manage data, systems, and people at their school sites. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference between principals from over-performing schools ( $M = 336.67$ ,  $SD = 41.84$ ) and principals from underperforming schools ( $M = 315.59$ ,  $SD = 207.24$ );  $t(62)=1.74$ ,  $p=.088$ .

Table 7

*t-test Results Comparing Over- and Underperforming Schools' Principal Self-Efficacy in their Ability to Manage Data, Systems, and People*

|                                    | t-test for Equality of Means |    |                 |            |                  | t-test for Equality of Means 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |       |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|----|-----------------|------------|------------------|--|-------|
|                                    | t                            | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Diff. | Std. Error Diff. | Lower  | Upper |
| Managing data, systems, and people | 1.74                         | 62 | .088            | 21.08      | 12.15            | -3.21  | 45.37 |

Table 8 represents the independent t-test outcomes between principals from over- and underperforming schools in their perceived self-efficacy in their ability

to build capacity in others at their school sites. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference for principals from over-performing schools ( $M = 338.70$ ,  $SD = 44.97$ ) and principals from underperforming schools ( $M = 319.8$ ,  $SD = 49.72$ );  $t(62)=1.59$ ,  $p=.118$ .

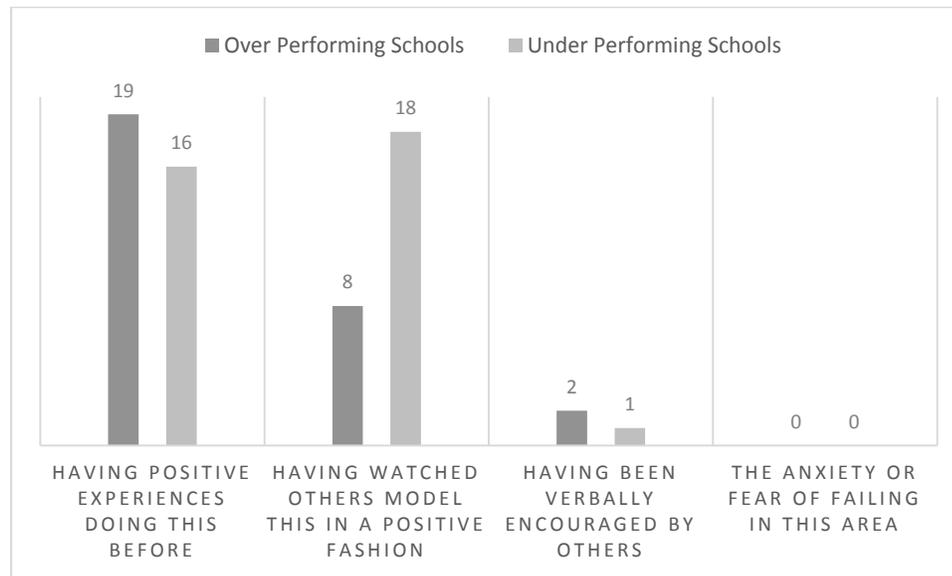
Table 8

*t-test Results Comparing Over- and Underperforming Schools' Principal Self-Efficacy in their Ability to Build Capacity in Others*

|   | t-test for Equality of Means |    |                 |            |                  | t-test for Equality of Means 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |       |
|---|------------------------------|----|-----------------|------------|------------------|--|-------|
|   | t                            | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Diff. | Std. Error Diff. | Lower  | Upper |
| Creating a positive climate and culture | 1.59                         | 62 | .118            | 18.90      | 11.91            | -4.90  | 42.71 |

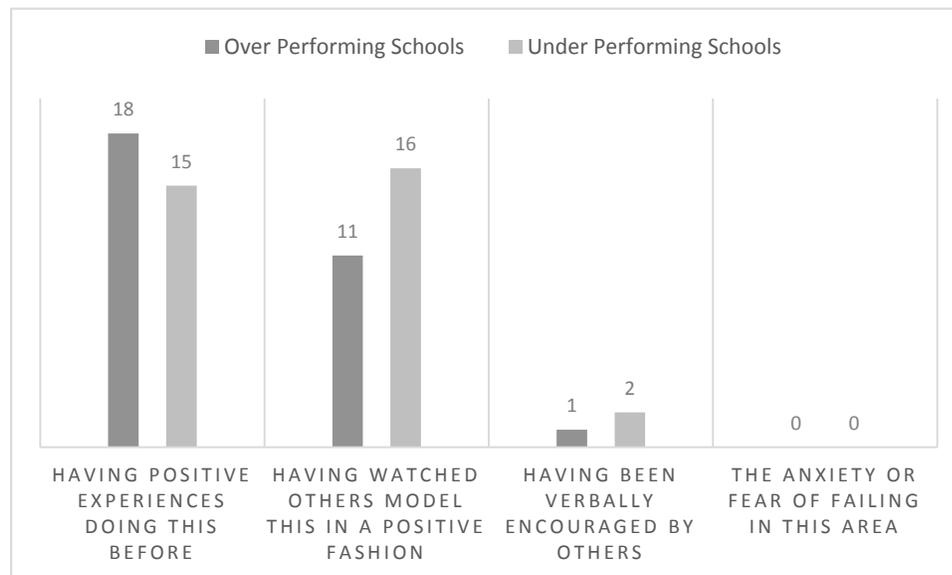
**Research question 2.** Which source of self-efficacy do principals find to be more important in determining their level of self-efficacy?

Figures 5 through 9 represent the percentage of responses in correlation to each of the four main sources of self-efficacy. Each figure represents the percentage of principals who attribute one of the four main sources of self-efficacy—mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, or psychological states—to determining their overall level of self-efficacy for each of the 5 key leadership areas addressed in this study.



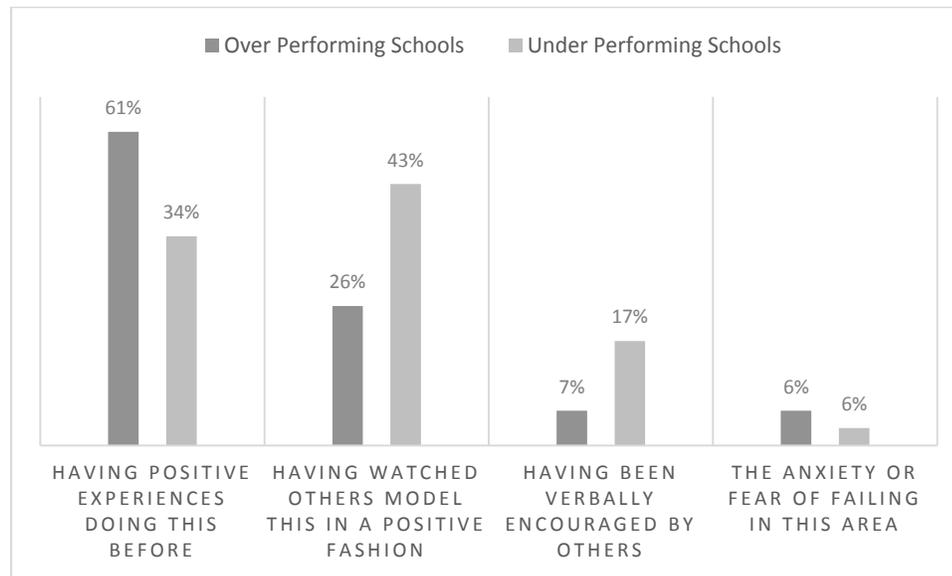
*Figure 5. Creating vision and purpose.*

Percent Comparison of Principals from Over- and Underperforming Schools Attributing Their Overall Level of Self-Efficacy for Creating a Vision and Purpose to One of the Four Main Sources of Self-Efficacy.



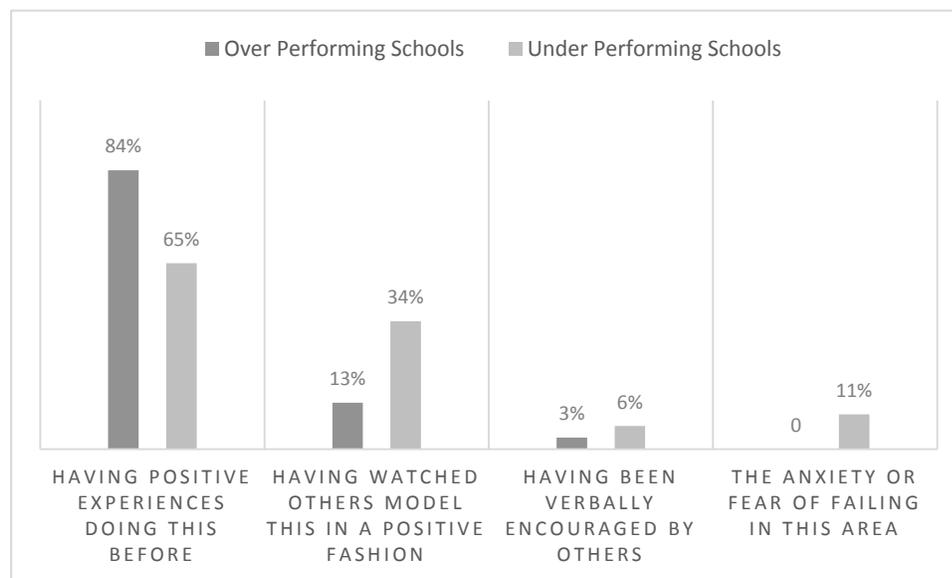
*Figure 6. Affect culture and climate.*

Percent Comparison of Principals from Over- and Underperforming Schools Attributing Their Overall Level of Self-Efficacy for Affecting Culture and Climate to One of the Four Main Sources of Self-Efficacy.



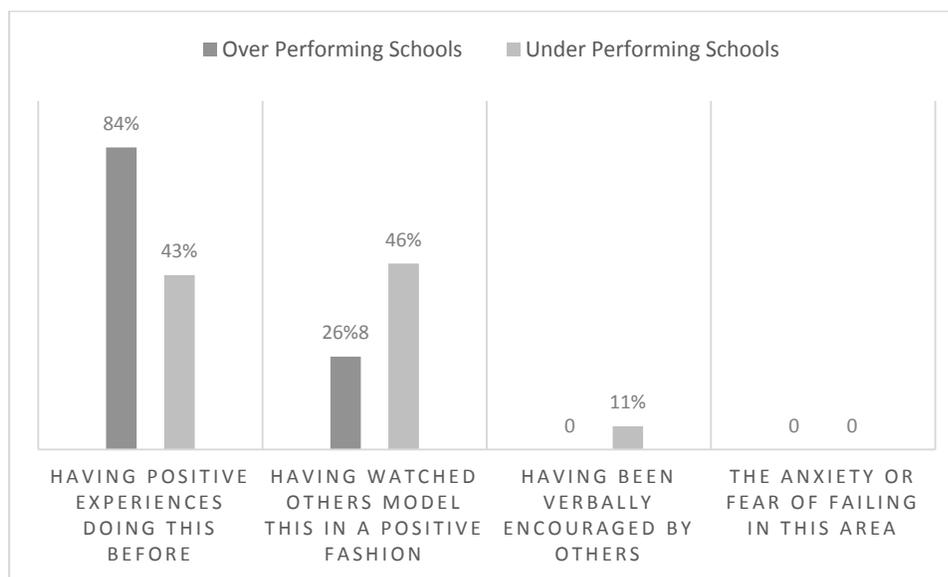
*Figure 7. Instructional leadership.*

Percent Comparison of Principals from Over- and Underperforming Schools Attributing Their Overall Level of Self-Efficacy for Improving Instruction to One of the Four Main Sources of Self-Efficacy.



*Figure 8. School management.*

Percent Comparison of Principals from Over- and Underperforming Schools Attributing Their Overall Level of Self-Efficacy for School Management to One of the Four Main Sources of Self-Efficacy.



*Figure 9. Building capacity in others.*  
 Percent Comparison of Principals from Over- and Underperforming Schools Attributing Their Overall Level of Self-Efficacy for Building Capacity in Others to One of the Four Main Sources of Self-Efficacy.

**Research question 3.** Are there any other factors that affect principals perceived level of self-efficacy?

Table 9 represents the synthesis and comparison of common themes found in individual written responses from principals from over- and underperforming schools. A total of 25 usable comments were coded of which 14 were received from principals of over-performing schools and 11 were from principals of underperforming schools. There were 17 comments that were considered positive in nature and eight that were considered as negative.

The most common responses were related to either leadership traits and challenges or the principals' relationship with the District Office. Individual responses included:

- “Specific training and ongoing support via collaboration with and coaching from fellow site and district administrators.”

- “Building infrastructures that promote collaborations cross grade levels and school wide is key to successful schools. Taking ownership of every aspect of our work is important in developing capacity with your staff.”
- “Being in a small district is challenging because I stand alone in almost all areas of support. The most challenging factors is wearing so many hats and not having someone to help with balancing all the priorities.”
- “The instructional, operational, overseeing programs of students with IEP’s and "at risk", WASC visits, Middle College/Early College programs and opportunities for leadership are other factors.”

Comments on their relationship with their district office—whether supportive or challenging—also had a higher number of comments from principals at both over- and underperforming schools and included statements such as:

- “There are competing interests for time/energy in implementing multiple district initiatives simultaneously.”
- “Bargaining unit contracts empower teachers and staff in ways that can be detrimental to efforts to bring about positive, systemic change.”
- “District support in providing PD, programs and staff.”
- “Cycles of inquiry on all levels of the school system, from the district, principal teams, site leadership teams, grade level teams, staff meetings.”

Table 9

*Summary of Responses of Over- and Underperforming School Principals on Other Factors that Affect Self-Efficacy by Frequency of Themes*

| School Performance | Positive Comments          |                               |                              | Negative Comments    |                             |                 |              |
|--------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
|                    | Supportive District Office | Relationships & Support Staff | Leadership Traits & Attitude | Community Challenges | Challenging District Office | Contract Issues | Lack of time |
| Over-performing    | 2                          | 2                             | 5                            | 2                    | 1                           | 2               |              |
| Under-performing   | 3                          | 2                             | 3                            |                      | 1                           |                 | 2            |
| Total              | 5                          | 4                             | 8                            | 2                    | 2                           | 2               | 2            |

## Summary

Utilizing a mixed methods design in an electronic survey, (n = 65) fully completed surveys were analyzed. Frequency and demographic information was analyzed to determine the variation of the sample. This was done to examine the sample in relation to the number of over- (n = 31) and under- (n = 34) performing school principals' return rates in answering each research question.

Independent t-tests were used to calculate the significance in differences between the mean values of the over- and underperforming school principals as a whole and within each of the five key leadership areas. This process answered research question(s) 1 and 1a, respectively. Results showed that there were no significant differences in how these two groups of principals answered the overall survey and in four of five areas of key principal leadership areas. The only area that showed to have a significant difference was that of *instructional leadership*, where underperforming school principals scored themselves significantly lower in their level of self-efficacy. Charts were then created to show the frequency of answers in how over- and underperforming school principals attributed their level of self-efficacy in the five key leadership areas. This allowed for a comparison analysis and answered research question 2 by showing that over-performing school principals generally ranked *having positive experiences* in this area as their most common reason for their level of self-efficacy. While underperforming school principals generally ranked having *watched someone else* positively complete a task as their most frequent experience in gaining levels of self-efficacy. Research question number 3 was obtained by identifying themes through analyzing the qualitative responses principals gave in last question of the survey. Principals from both over- and underperforming schools included comments that addressed leadership skills and attitudes most frequently as factors that influenced

their perceptions about their self-efficacy and, then, also included comments about district office support or challenges as influencing their perceived sense of self-efficacy.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION/SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

This chapter will serve to summarize the findings in relation to the research questions. Then, the implications for practice and future research ideas will be presented.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The over-arching purpose of this study was to analyze the perceived level of self-efficacy of K-12 public school principals in relation to five key principal leadership areas: establishing a vision and purpose; transforming a school's culture and climate; improving instruction; managing student achievement data, school systems, and processes; and building capacity in others (Mendels, 2012; Wahlstrom et al, 2010). Additionally, the principals were grouped into two categories by the achievement level of their school based on a composite score of Math and English Language Arts 2016 SBAC testing, taking into account the poverty level of the students the schools serve. This allowed for statistical analysis comparing the responses between over- and underperforming school principals overall and in each of the 5 key leadership areas.

Principals were also asked to gauge their level of self-efficacy to one of Bandura's four main sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and psychological states (Bandura, 1994). Lastly, respondents were given a chance to include any other factors that they felt affected their ability to obtain school goals and outcomes in an open-response question of the survey. The above areas provide answers to the corresponding research questions.

## Summary and Discussion of Findings

### Research Question 1

*How do the levels of perceived principal self-efficacy compare between over- and underperforming schools* was answered by using an independent *t*-test of the overall survey results between over- and underperforming school principals. Principals answered questions rating their level of self-efficacy on a scale of 0 – 100. The over-performing school principal responses had a mean of their combined answer totals of 1691.50 and a standard deviation of 202.35. While the underperforming principals responded with a mean of 1595.68 and a standard deviation of 207.24. The *t*-test in Table 3 revealed that the difference between the two groups of principals was nearing significance ( $p = .067$ ) yet did not qualify as a significant difference at ( $p < .05$ ). Thus, regardless of the academic achievement of their respective school sites, principals from over- and underperforming schools perceived that they had similar levels of self-efficacy when it comes to the major tasks of running their schools.

People, including school principals, with a high sense of self-efficacy and who are highly self-motivated have a high level of confidence and are drawn to lead (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). The idea that principals have a strong belief in their own abilities is probably one of the qualities that helped them be promoted to the job in the first place. As the data show, regardless of whether their school is successful academically or not, principals from low or high performing schools have similar perceived levels of self-efficacy.

One cause for this could be found in the reciprocal causation explanation which points to the links between the influences of a person's cognitive abilities, external influences, and behavior patterns of success and failures in the past, as all contributing to a person's level of self-efficacy (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). In

answering the survey questions about their own abilities to lead their school sites could it be possible that principals confused the idea that self-efficacy is directly tied to the attainment of goals (Wood & Bandura, 1989) with some other factor? That is to say, could it be possible, given the academic achievement variation of the sample, that principals answered the survey through the lens of gauging their own personality traits and not self-efficacy? It has been determined that optimism (Carver & Scheier, 2001), resourcefulness (Rosenbaum, 1990), and “grit” (Bowman et al., 2015) for example, are perceived skill sets that make up part of who we are and how we lead. These examples of personality traits and others are not, however, self-efficacy, but may be confused with self-efficacy. A strong sense of self-efficacy is what is necessary to take such traits, in part, and attain a desired outcome (Bandura, 1994). As such, this goes against previous research that attests that principals who have a strong sense of self-efficacy can recognize unsuccessful strategies (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996), can show resiliency by remaining calm and confident (Lyons & Murphy, 1994), and they don’t attribute success or failure to luck, their surroundings, or their students and staff (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005).

### **Research Question 1a**

*What are the corresponding levels of perceived principal self-efficacy in the five key leadership practices* was answered by using an independent *t*-test for each of the question groupings pertaining to the corresponding five key areas of principal leadership. As noted in research question 1, overall comparisons between principal groups were not significant. Question 1a looks at the comparisons between over- and underperforming school principals in each individual key leadership areas of; establishing a vision and purpose; transforming a schools culture and climate; improving instruction; managing student

achievement data, school systems, and processes; and building capacity in others (Mendels, 2012; Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

Principals in this study felt that they have a strong belief that they can create a vision and create a purpose that brings student learning needs and expected outcomes to fruition (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Marzano et al., 2005). The over-performing school principal responses had a mean of their answers in this area of  $M = 255.97$  and a standard deviation of 39.75. While the under-performing principals responded with a mean of 246.24 and a standard deviation of 34.1. The  $t$ -test in Table 4 revealed that no significant difference ( $p = .296$ ) existed between over- and underperforming school principals. Regardless of the academic achievement levels of their schools, the fact that principals had similar perceived levels of self-efficacy brings to light some interesting questions. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe's (2010) meta-analysis examined the link between school leadership and student achievement. Their study found an effect size of .42 standard deviations, an effect size that points to the importance of vision in organizations (Harris & Lambert, 2003) and the goals that can be derived from that vision (Locke & Latham, 2006). Yet, when asked, principals at schools that were low performing perceived themselves as doing just that, setting goals established from a shared vision and purpose.

The area of how school culture and climate affect student behavior and student achievement has been well documented (Goldring et al., 2009; Mendels, 2012; Spiro, 2013). The direct link to the literature when looking at principals whose schools have either over- or underperformed is the tie between culture and climate to student learning (Cosner & Peterson, 2003). The over-performing principal responses had a mean of their answers in this area of 329.0 and a standard deviation of 46.9. While the under achieving principals responded with a

mean of 317.44 and a standard deviation of 47.7. The *t*-test in Table 5 revealed that no significant difference ( $p = .333$ ) existed between over- and underperforming school principals. Regardless of the academic achievement levels of their schools or whether a culture of learning existed, principals had similar perceived levels of self-efficacy.

The requirements, in terms of job duties, of principals have increased and have become more complex (Bossi, 2007). The management side of running a school and keeping up with operational standards (Catano & Stronge, 2006) compete for a principal's time and energy. The over-performing school principal responses had a mean of their answers for managing a school of 336.67 and a standard deviation of 41.84. While the under-performing school principals responded with a mean of 315.59 and a standard deviation of 53.69. The *t*-test in Table 7 shows that no significant difference ( $p = .088$ ) existed between over- and underperforming school principals. Despite the sense of conflict that principals feel when trying to balance between the role of school visionary and instructional catalyst with the managerial responsibilities that so often lead to confusion and frustration (Cascadden, 1998) and the fact that principals are asked to support systems that require attention to student data that support teachers in the process of continual growth and improvement (Guthrie & Schuermann, 2010), this study found that regardless of the academic achievement levels of their schools, principals had similar perceived levels of self-efficacy in this area.

Successful school principals have realized that the job of running a school is better served when not done in isolation. Perhaps the more important a principal is to a school, or the more inflated their importance, is due in large part from a principal's inability to allow others to take on leadership responsibilities (Fullan, 1993). Effective principals develop the contributions from many others in

the school and develop them to make meaningful contributions (Leithwood, Seashore, et al., 2004). The over-performing school principal responses in this study had a mean of 338.7 and a standard deviation of 44.97. While the under-performing school principals responded with a mean of 319.79 and a standard deviation of 49.717. The *t*-test in Table 8 revealed that no significant difference ( $p = .118$ ) existed between over- and underperforming school principals. The correlation between shared leadership and improved student learning may indeed exist (Hallinger, 2011), and the idea that developing people's capacity helps run a school (Copland, 2003), are important factors. However, despite the academic achievement levels of their schools, principals from both had similar perceived levels of self-efficacy.

The only area in which there was a significant difference between principal groups was in how they responded to questions rating their level of self-efficacy in improving instruction. The over-performing school principal responses had a mean in this area of 431.17 and a standard deviation of 50.39. While the under-performing school principals had a mean of 396.62 and a standard deviation of 56.48. The *t*-test in Table 6 revealed that there is a significant difference ( $p = .013$ ) between these two groups. Principals of over-performing schools scored themselves significantly higher than those principals at under performing schools. What is unique is that this is the only significant statistical difference found in the study. The fact that the single most important role of a school principal has been determined to be student achievement (Spiro, 2013; Yaffe, 2014), and given the fact that two sets of principals from polar opposites in terms of their schools' student achievement scores from the 2016 SBAC, would have such a significant difference in their ability to attain a desired outcome in this one area leads to several questions. There are important elements to principal leadership in

improving instruction, all of which combine to raise student achievement. Teachers feeling valued and cared for (Wahlstrom et al., 2010), creating leaders and spreading responsibilities (Wahlstrom et al., 2010) with the use of peer coaches and mentor teachers (Grossman & Davis, 2012), and creating professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) are all part of the equation. In this one area we find a more significant difference between the level of perceived self-efficacy and a school's student achievement level.

### **Research Question 2**

*Which source of self-efficacy do principals find to be more important in determining their level of self-efficacy* was answered by comparing the total number of responses given for each of the 5 key areas of principal leadership.

Establishing a central vision with achievable goals is key to setting a purpose for a school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2004; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2006). In the study previously mentioned that examined the relationship between student achievement and leadership it was found that setting a vision and purpose had an effect size of .42 standard deviations (Robinson et al., 2008). This study found that principals at over-performing schools generally ranked that having positive experiences establishing a vision and setting a purpose was the most important factor influencing their levels of self-efficacy in this area, while principals at under-performing schools generally ranked watching others model the behavior in a positive fashion as their most important factor. These findings connect with Bandura's conclusions that mastery experiences are the most influential source of self-efficacy where principals of over-performing schools had experience doing this, while principals of underperforming schools generally did not have experience and had to rely on watching others (Bandura, 1982; Bandura & Adams, 1977).

Similarly, in the key leadership area of creating a positive culture and climate, principals at over-performing schools ranked having positive experiences in this area as their number one factor in determining their level of self-efficacy. While principals at under-performing schools ranked watching others model success in creating a positive culture and climate as their highest reason. Once again, these findings connect with Bandura's conclusions that mastery experiences have the greatest influence on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Bandura & Adams, 1977). While Bandura's research found that vicarious experiences, or watching others successfully complete similar tasks, can influence self-efficacy, he also found that a person's collective personal experience had a greater impact on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Bandura et al., 1980; Kazdin, 1976). Shaping a school culture and climate requires principals to understand the underlying beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and written and unwritten rules and to use their awareness of this background to shape a school culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; MacNeil et al., 2009). The findings for this research question suggest that guiding principals to work through the complexity of discovering the underlying factors that contribute to the culture and climate of their school and helping them use this to transform their culture and climate successfully will have greater impact on student achievement than mere observation of another successful principal.

The greatest disparity between principals of over- and underperforming schools was found in the key leadership area of improving instruction. Instructional leadership is key to improving student achievement (Hattie, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Strong instructional leaders are able to empower teachers to take ownership over the school's instructional program, delegate leadership to teacher leaders, and encourage and support strong collaborative

teams (Elgarten, 1991; Spiro, 2013; Yaffe, 2014). In this study, principals of over-performing schools ranked having previous positive experiences improving instruction as their number one factor with 61% of the responses versus principals at under-performing schools ranked watching others model this behavior in a positive fashion as their number one factor with 43% of the responses. This difference corresponds with the *t*-test significance found in this area of leadership and continues to show the importance of providing principals with positive experiences that support a strong sense of self-efficacy in instructional leadership.

Principals must also manage the variety of tasks, systems, and data in their role (Spiro, 2013). In this more task-oriented area of leadership, principals of both over- and underperforming schools ranked having positive experiences doing this before as the number one factor in determining their level of self-efficacy with 84% and 65% of the responses respectively. These findings are unique from the other key leadership areas. While the tasks at a school are complex to manage (Bossi, 2007), completion of the tasks bring a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment while other key leadership areas may be more difficult to judge success or failure and may take more time to reach success. As a result, principals with a low sense of self-efficacy in other key areas of leadership may focus on task fulfillment over instructional and transformational leadership in order to feel successful.

Finally, effective leaders build capacity in others to lead (Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2004). In this key leadership area, the findings of this study showed that principals at over-performing schools gave the highest number of responses to having positive experiences in this area than in any other leadership area with 26 out of 34 responses. While principals at under-performing schools nearly split their responses between having positive experiences and having watched others

successfully model this area, with 15 and 16 responses respectively. Hallinger's (2011) study showed an indirect correlation between shared leadership and student achievement, and developing shared leadership is one component of instructional leadership (Elgarten, 1991; Harvey & Holland, 2013; Yaffe, 2014). As this area of leadership is a component of instructional leadership, and instructional leadership has a significant impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2009), providing for mastery experiences for principals in this area of leadership to improve self-efficacy could also impact their level of self-efficacy as an instructional leader.

### **Research Question 3**

*Are there any other factors that affect principals perceived level of self-efficacy* was answered as an open-ended question soliciting written responses from principals? Principals from both over- and underperforming schools provided similar responses to the open-ended questions. Overall, principals from both over- and underperforming schools had a higher number of positive comments than negative comments. For the positive comments, principals from both over- and underperforming schools had the highest number of comments focusing on leadership traits and attitudes. These responses focused on their belief that their own leadership traits and attitudes impacted their perceived levels of self-efficacy, or capability to lead. Additionally, an equal number of principals from both over- and underperforming schools had comments about relationships with staff being a positive contributing factor to their perceived levels of self-efficacy.

Another common theme from principals from both over- and underperforming schools was district office support—both positive and negative comments. Both provided comments about a supportive or challenging district office as a source that influenced their perceived levels of self-efficacy. Other

common themes in the responses included: community issues, time issues, and contract issues.

While principals from over-performing schools responded to survey questions that mastery experiences were the most influential source of their level of perceived self-efficacy, their open-ended responses attributed their level of self-efficacy to their own traits and skills, relationships, and outside influences and issues. Similarly, principals from underperforming schools provided open-ended responses that attributed their perceived level of self-efficacy to leadership traits and abilities, relationships, and outside influences and issues. When principals from both over- and underperforming schools looked to outside influences and issues as reasons for their high or low levels of self-efficacy, they pointed toward district office issues, community issues, time issues, and contract issues.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

Based on the findings from this study, the implications for future practice will focus on three areas unique to this area of research—the commonalities of responses to the survey, the interaction of perceived self-efficacy with instructional leadership, and the role of mastery experience as a significant contributing factor to perceived self-efficacy. Each of these areas of findings has implications for future practice for both district and university leadership programs when working with and supporting future, new, and struggling principals.

The findings of this study showed overall commonalities of the responses to the survey. Chapter 3 explained that the terms over- and underperforming schools were established by ranking schools by their 2016 SBAC scores (a composite score of Math and English Language Arts for each testing grade level combined at a school) and by taking into account the number of FRPM students at each respective school site. Data from the regression analysis showed the schools

that greatly over-performed and those that greatly underperformed using standard residuals that gave the final sample. The single most important external factor was accounted for, yet principals whose schools were at polar opposites of each other in terms of student achievement levels had very similar responses to their perceived levels of self-efficacy in all but one area—instructional leadership.

This study found significant differences in the responses for perceived self-efficacy between principals from over- and underperforming schools in the area of instructional leadership. As instructional leadership has the greatest impact on student outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Hattie, 2009), the implications from this research for future practice include focusing on and providing support for principals by finding ways to improve their perceived sense of self-efficacy as an instructional leader. As Hattie mentions, there are two types of school leadership, transformational and instructional (Hattie, 2009). Principals who are instructional leaders display behaviors that promote a climate free of disruption where learning can take place, create a system where learning objectives are explicitly understood, and has high expectations for teachers and staff (Dimmock & Hattie, 1996; Hattie, 2009). Enable to assist in the growth of a principal's self-efficacy in this area those who mentor and coach principals need to find ways to have principals practice these skills. That is to say, they need mastery experiences in these areas. Too often educators count professional development as a means of training a principal, yet the research has shown that the most powerful source of self-efficacy growth is to have positive experiences actually doing the expected behavior (Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman et al., 1992).

Additionally, the findings of this study found significant differences in the responses from principals from over- and underperforming schools in how they attributed their perceived self-efficacy to one of Bandura's four main sources for

self-efficacy. Bandura's (1994) research points to four sources for developing self-efficacy—mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and psychological states. The findings from this study showed that principals from over-performing schools pointed to mastery experiences more consistently and at a higher rate than principals from underperforming schools. The implications from this data align with Bandura's (Bandura, 1982; Bandura & Adams, 1977) research that states that mastery experiences are the most influential source of self-efficacy. As a result, recommendations for future practice include using coaching models to support future, new, and struggling principals in order to provide them with mastery experiences to improve their perceived level of self-efficacy in key leadership areas, as vicarious experiences, or modeling, alone may not have as high of an impact on principals' perceived levels of self-efficacy. In addition, given both the research and significance of the findings in the area of instructional leadership, direct coaching—providing mastery experiences for principals—should focus on instructional leadership.

### **Recommendations for Research**

Based on the findings of the study, future research should explore the links between perceived self-efficacy and instructional leadership. Hattie (2009) found that principal leadership results in a .36 effect on student achievement, and further, found that instructional leadership has a higher effect on student achievement than transformational leadership. Hattie further concluded that those areas that have the greatest effect on student achievement are supported most by the qualities found in effective instructional leaders (Hattie, 2009). Future research can explore more deeply the connection between self-efficacy and instructional leadership and explore areas within instructional leadership that may have the greatest impact on a principal's self-efficacy in this area. Using Hattie's and others' research, the

review of the literature would be expanded to include specific attributes of effective instructional leadership. The review of the literature found in this study is currently limited to the importance of shared leadership (Elgarten, 1991; Spiro, 2013), peer mentoring (Grossman & Davis, 2012), collaborative culture (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), and meaningful observation practices (Syed, 2014) as a sampling of areas of effective instructional leadership. Further research on areas of instructional leadership with the greatest effect on student achievement can guide further study about the effects of principal self-efficacy on instructional leadership.

In addition, based on the limitations of this study, future research should include a larger sampling of principals from schools outside of California. As this study found significance in principals' self-efficacy in the area of instructional leadership, and other research has determined that instructional leadership has the greatest impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2009; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008), further research could provide more generalizable results that could be used to inform principal licensing and mentoring programs.

### **Conclusion**

“Strong leadership ranks second only to classroom instruction among all school-related influences on student learning” (Syed, 2014, p. 47). With this in mind, school principals face a daunting task of juggling a variety of leadership roles and management tasks every day (Spiro, 2013). However, central to the principal's many roles and tasks is the goal of improving student achievement, and a principal's leadership is central to improving student achievement. With high expectations and a multitude of competing interests pulling principals in many directions, having a high sense of self-efficacy, or the belief in one's capability to accomplish a given task, can also play a role in a principal's leadership. Finding

ways to provide principals with mastery experiences to grow their sense of self-efficacy in various leadership roles can support them as leaders and, thus, promote increased student achievement.

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24. What most impacted your capability to act in transforming school culture and climate?

- Having positive experiences doing this before
- Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- Having been verbally encouraged by others
- The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

25. What most impacted your capability to act in improving instruction?

- Having positive experiences doing this before
- Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- Having been verbally encouraged by others
- The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

26. What most impacted your capability to act in managing school business?

- Having positive experiences doing this before
- Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- Having been verbally encouraged by others
- The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

27. What most impacted your capability to act in building capacity in others?

- Having positive experiences doing this before
- Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- Having been verbally encouraged by others
- The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

28. Please describe any other factors that affect your capability to lead your school;

*Thank you for your time and for adding to this body of research!*

## APPENDIX B: PILOT SURVEY

*Pilot Survey****Instructions: Please choose one:***How many years have you been principal at this school?:

- A) 1<sup>st</sup> year
- B) 2-4 years
- C) 4 or more

***Instructions: Please circle the number that best describes your “capability to produce a desired result” in the following areas:***Establishing a Vision and Purpose:*How certain are you that you can:*

Work with stakeholders to set a vision with measurable goals

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Create high expectations for student achievement with staff

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Monitor progress towards meeting attainable goals

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Transforming School Culture and Climate:*How certain are you that you can:*

Develop a school in which all staff experience a supportive community

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Inspire employees to reach all students

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Engage students to take responsibility for making their school a better place to learn

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Develop a school that is safe and welcoming to all students

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

### Improving Instruction:

*How certain are you that you can:*

Develop the school's instructional focus

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Initiate, plan, and carry out instructional professional development

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Promote collaboration and shared ownership of student achievement

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Make the changes needed in the instructional program based on data

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

### Managing School Business:

*How certain are you that you can:*

Monitor and manage various school budgets

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Develop systems to evaluate all school programs and individual performance

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Hold staff accountable and deal with employee performance issues

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Deal with all aspects of student discipline issues

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Mentor and/or Train others:*How certain are you that you can:*

Develop skills and expertise in staff members to resolve challenges

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Support and motivate teachers

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Use “shared leadership” to make important decisions

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

Delegate duties and support others to build organizational capacity

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

To what degree do you feel student achievement is a direct reflection of your ability in these key areas?

Uncertain 1 2 3 4 5 Very Certain

***Instructions: Please circle one area for each section below***What area most impacted your capability to act in these key areas?

Establishing a Vision and Purpose:

- A) Having positive experiences doing this before
- B) Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- C) Having been verbally encouraged by others
- D) The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

Transforming School Culture and Climate:

- A) Having positive experiences doing this before
- B) Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- C) Having been verbally encouraged by others
- D) The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

Improving Instruction:

- D) Having positive experiences doing this before

- E) Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- F) Having been verbally encouraged by others
- G) The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

**Managing School Business:**

- A) Having positive experiences doing this before
- B) Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- C) Having been verbally encouraged by others
- D) The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

**Building Capacity in Others:**

- A) Having positive experiences doing this before
- B) Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- C) Having been verbally encouraged by others
- D) The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

***Instructions: Please rank/order the following 4 areas as to how important you feel they have been in impacting your capacity as principal:***

- \_\_\_\_\_ Having positive experiences doing this before
- \_\_\_\_\_ Having watched others model this in a positive fashion
- \_\_\_\_\_ Having been verbally encouraged by others
- \_\_\_\_\_ The anxiety or fear of failing in this area

***Instructions: Please add any other comments which will help the researcher better understand the relationship of these 5 key leadership areas and your view of your capability to lead***