

Sustaining Distributed Leadership:  
Lessons Learned from a Case Study of Delaware Middle Schools

by  
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I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standards required by Wilmington University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education in Innovation and Leadership.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Stephanie, and my children, Dylan and Kiera, whose unconditional love and support have been instrumental in completing this journey. We did this. I love you all, forever and always.

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*So thanks to all at once, and to each one...  
Macbeth, V.viii.75*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide a thick, rich description of distributed leadership practices at a suburban Delaware school district, to explore, per Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2004), the *hows* and *whys* of building-level distributed leadership practices, and to examine staff attitudes and perceptions relative to the influence of distributed leadership practices on school climate. The district received a grant to initiate distributed leadership in 2005; however, no follow-up studies had been conducted since 2009. The researcher administered the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale [DLRS] to 135 staff members in two middle schools and interviewed fourteen employees from the two schools and district office.

DLRS results indicate that both buildings practice distributed leadership regularly, and interviews provide detailed explanations of how and why these practices are in place. The main overarching theoretical concept to emerge from interviews is that Wellbrook's practice of distributed leadership engenders community and organizational unity of purpose via a common mission and vision while allowing for localized best practices in achieving them. School climate in both buildings was largely characterized as positive. This study includes suggestions both for further research and for the district to consider examining.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### Background

Much of the rhetoric currently surrounding the national education reform discussion in the United States revolves around issues pertaining directly to teachers: teacher quality, teacher training, tenure, and the impact of these variables on students' standardized test performance. The problems in education, so the narrative goes, would go away if schools could simply weed out bad teachers. One of the many flaws in this approach to improving the American public education system is that it approaches teaching and learning as if they take place in a vacuum, unaffected by a multitude of variables both within and without the classroom, building, and district. One such variable is the effect that leadership, at both the building and district levels, has on teachers and students.

While in a traditional hierarchical school leadership structure the building and district administration may have little face time with students, the methods by which they provide support, guidance, and direction to their staff affects students both directly and indirectly. Policy development, curriculum planning, budget, and staff professional development are among the many domains traditionally left to the school leader - principal, director, head teacher, or superintendent. Beyond the administrative domain, style and quality of school leadership influences students

indirectly via their impact on teacher morale and academic optimism (Chang, 2011; Mascall, Leithwood, Straus, & Sacks, 2008; Sheppard, Hurley, & Dibbon, 2010).

Given the traditional hierarchical organizational structure prevalent in many American schools, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the impact of leadership styles and decisions is felt most directly by faculty and staff. Leaders who engage in top-down, coercive management styles without allowing for discussion or negotiation risk engendering negative atmospheres and resentment (Law, Galton, & Wan, 2010; Rice, 2006; Storey, 2004). Even when apparent good faith attempts at communication and collaboration between staff and administration are evident, failure to do so effectively can still have a negative impact on all parties (Rice, 2006). The questions then become, what feasible alternative approaches to leadership exist?

The theory of distributed leadership is one that has generated much interest and a burgeoning body of research since the mid-1990s (Timperley, 2005). It has been described as “not a blueprint for leadership but rather a framework for thinking about leadership” (Spillane & Orlina, 2005, p. 158). Indeed, distributed leadership has been endorsed by such policy development organizations as the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Education Commission of the States as a recommended leadership practice (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010; Mayrowetz, 2008; Sanders & Kearny, 2008). Characteristics of distributed leadership in schools include treating leadership as a behavioral characteristic independent of specific job titles (Park & Datnow, 2009), using a shared decision making model that stresses the

collaborative, social nature of effective decision-making, and placing an emphasis on instructional leadership over organizational leadership (Timperley, 2005).

Distributed leadership (also sometimes referred to synonymously as *shared* or *collective* leadership) can take many forms, as there exists no single agreed-upon definition (Leithwood & Mascal, 2008). Regardless of the specific form it takes, distributed leadership makes student growth and learning the driving forces behind all decisions, which are made collaboratively by stakeholders, rather than by a few key administrators.

Multiple definitions of distributed leadership exist in the literature (Harris, 2004; Helterbran, 2010; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane & Orlina, 2005), and their varied usage warrants discussion and delineation in order to narrow the focus of the present study. The conceptual basis for distributed leadership is distributed cognition and activity theory, which considers all the environmental variables that influence action, including “what the actor knows, believes, and does in and through particular social, cultural, and material contexts” (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 10). Within this framework, leadership activity does not take place in a vacuum, and must change depending on the situation, including the social norms of the current environment. To this end, distributed leadership theory focuses on “interactions among leaders and their situation” (Spillane & Orlina, 2005, p.161) more than on specific tasks independent of context.

Leadership tasks are stretched over multiple players acting in concert, together or separately, to achieve a common goal. Spillane et al. (2004) provide the hypothetical example of a curriculum committee consisting of an assistant principal, a math coordinator, and a fourth grade teacher. In this example, each player brings a separate skill set or expertise – the assistant principal may have greater knowledge of state curriculum standards and accountability measures, the math coordinator has the highest degree of content area knowledge, and the fourth grade lead teacher would likely have the greatest knowledge of current pedagogy and the most intimate knowledge of the current student population. All three players come together to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

In addition to the cognitive and theoretical constructs of Spillane et al. (2004), Mayrowetz (2008) identifies slightly more specific definitions of distributed leadership. One is the conceptualization as a “prescriptive message for leadership to be shared throughout the school in a more democratic fashion” (p. 428), involving multiple stakeholders, including teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, custodial and food services staff, and even students. He further characterizes distributed leadership as an efficiency measure, delegating leadership tasks to capable individuals who do not necessarily hold formal leadership positions. Harris (2004) and Helderbran (2010), however, caution against such an oversimplification of distributed leadership. Beyond mere task delegation, they argue, distributed leadership must evaluate how labor is stretched over multiple parties, ask what

interdependencies exist between players enacting a leadership task, and identify how the players' actions, individually and collaboratively, serve to advance toward a common goal (Harris, 2004; Helterbran, 2010). Mayrowetz's (2008) final perspective on distributed leadership is one of capacity building – by including staff members not formally designated as leaders in leadership activities, formal leaders develop leadership capacity in their entire staff with an overall goal of school improvement.

Spillane et al. (2004) acknowledge the inherent difficulties in defining effective leadership “beyond some generic heuristics for suggested practices” (p. 4). They suggest that in educational leadership research, focus must be shifted from *what* effective school leaders do to *how* they do it, which they define as “the ways in which school leaders develop and sustain those conditions and processes believed necessary for innovation” (p. 4). Relationships between task-enactors across the traditional school hierarchy, not discrete actions, lay the foundation for effective leadership in schools (Chang, 2011; Mayrowetz, 2008; Sentocnik & Rugar, 2009; Sheppard et al., 2010; Spillane et al., 2004; Spillane & Hunt, 2010; Spillane & Orlina, 2005). Due to the inherent complexity in personalities and relationships, leadership must be viewed through a lens that honors that complexity and uniqueness that varies not only from school district to school district, but also from building to building and from relationship to relationship. Distributed leadership is one such conceptual framework through which leadership tactics may be studied broadly. The research base on

context-specific distributed leadership practices in K-12 education, however, is still emerging (Spillane et al., 2004).

Research into distributed leadership practices is an important component of moving toward the ostensible goal of all educational leadership research: the improvement of schools and the process of education and learning. To that end, the works of Helderbran (2010), Hulpia, Devos, & Van Keer (2011), Leech & Fulton (2008), Mascall et al. (2008), Sheppard et al. (2010), and Zorn and Boler (2007) suggest that distributed leadership practices have the potential for being beneficial to teachers and building organizational and leadership capacity as well as to student learning. Sheppard et al. (2010) conclude “a transformational and inclusive formal leadership approach practiced by the school administrators has a positive, rather than negative impact upon both teacher morale and enthusiasm” (p. 8). Along similar lines, Hulpia et al. (2011) and Helderbran (2010) explored one component of distributed leadership in greater depth and with greater specificity: teacher leadership. Encompassing themes of empowerment and inclusivity, Helderbran (2010) says of teacher leadership, “in its truest sense, [it] involves those informal aspects of leadership, where a teacher sees a need or identifies a problem and takes the reins to address it within his or her means” (p. 365). She continues, “[w]hen educators focus on who is the leader and who are the followers, only one person can contribute significantly to the overall well-being of the school. Teachers in this scenario are relegated to a sub-professional category” (p. 366). When teachers feel valued and

participatory in their schools, they feel a greater sense of ownership of and investment in the school, which ultimately benefits students (Chang, 2011; Helderbran, 2010; Hulpia et al., 2011; Spillane & Hunt, 2010).

The Delaware Department of Education [DEDOE] was one state entity that recognized the potential positive influence of distributed leadership on school improvement and student learning. In 2004, the department charged the Delaware Academy for School Leadership [DASL] with the task of developing and coordinating distributed leadership programs in schools throughout the state. In October 2004, DASL invited teams from each of Delaware's 19 public school districts to attend a retreat, at which teams learned about the research base behind distributed leadership as well as met with current practitioners. Following the retreat, districts were invited to apply for mini-grants of \$25,000, to be paid out over three years, to develop and implement local distributed leadership efforts. Four districts were awarded grant money in January 2005 (J. Wilson, personal communication, February 6, 2014).

Each district awarded a mini-grant established a distributed leadership team to work with representatives from the DEDOE as well as nationally renowned experts on distributed leadership such as James Spillane and Joseph Murphy. These teams met monthly over the course of three years and also attended mandatory three-day summer retreats each summer. The three-year term of funds distribution was deliberate; according to Dr. Jacqueline Wilson, Project Director for the DEDOE State

Action for Education Leadership Project at the time, this was done in order to provide districts sufficient time to build a culture in which distributed leadership would become sustainable. Support from DEDOE was discontinued after three years in order to allow the burgeoning educational leaders in the district (both administrators and non-administrators) to continue the work of their own accord (J. Wilson, personal communication, February 6, 2014).

### **Research Problem Statement**

A 2009 study by Buttram and Pizzini (2009), funded by the Delaware Education Research and Development Center [DERDC], sought to identify if and how the local distributed leadership initiatives had changed the schools, as well as how each individual school had focused its distributed leadership efforts. This study identified three implications for how DL in Delaware needed to proceed. First is the necessity of anchoring DL with other school improvement efforts, as the goal of implementing DL is not simply to have DL for its own sake; rather, DL is the method by which school improvement takes place. Second, regardless of intensity of DL implementation, cultural changes take time. There were no differences in survey responses between schools who rated their participation in implementing DL as low, medium, or high. Third, teachers having autonomy to work without administrators is likely more important to schools seeing benefits of DL than collaboration between teachers and administrators. Opportunities for professional learning and growth that occur from teacher collaboration are critical and cannot be minimized.

Wellbrook School District (a pseudonym) is located in northern Delaware, and was one of the original four DASL grant recipients in 2005, as well as one of the DL sites surveyed in Buttram and Pizzini (2009). The former assistant superintendent of Wellbrook School District at the time of the DASL grant supports the findings of Buttram and Pizzini (2009). She indicated that implementing DL in Wellbrook allowed the building principals to become more visible instructional leaders and spend more time in classrooms by empowering and distributing responsibilities to teachers who truly took on leadership roles, not just task delegation. Professional development was ongoing, and teacher leaders were trained by the district in distributed leadership practices alongside administrators, helping to build relationships and trust. Teachers reported feeling respected by administrators who drew upon their individual strengths in distributing leadership responsibilities. Building administrators met twice monthly with district office staff to eat lunch and have conversations about how they might continue to distribute leadership. The initiative was ongoing, pervasive, and supported at all levels. Distributed leadership principles were even embedded into the interview process for prospective employees (M. Proffitt, personal communication, February 11, 2014). In the ensuing years since the establishment of distributed leadership in Wellbrook School District, both the assistant superintendent and the superintendent responsible for this initiative have since retired.

Five years on from the Buttram and Pizzini (2009) study, no further studies have been published examining continuing distributed leadership practices in any of the DL schools in Delaware. It is unknown if the promising distributed leadership practices identified in the study still exist in WSD, and if so, which ones, and why?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to provide a thick, rich description of distributed leadership practices at a suburban Delaware school district, to explore, per Spillane et al. (2004), the *hows* and *whys* of building-level distributed leadership practices, and to examine staff attitudes and perceptions relative to the influence of distributed leadership practices on school climate.

This study is expected to yield a portrait of distributed leadership in action and also insight into how distributed leadership practices in the district are viewed by administrators and non-administrators. Distributed leadership practices were examined at the middle school level for context specificity. Attitudinal feedback is expected to inform suggestions for improvement of existing leadership practices.

### **Need for the Study**

As originally indicated by Spillane et al. (2004), distributed leadership provides an excellent framework for filling at least some of the existing gaps in educational leadership research by examining “the *how* of school leadership... While there is an expansive literature about *what* school structures, programmes, roles, and processes are necessary for instructional change, we know less about *how* these

changes are undertaken or enacted by school leaders” (p. 4). Harris and Muijs (2005) describe a “fissure between theory and practice [that] is both interesting and disturbing” (p. 32) in academic treatments of distributed leadership, noting “the empirical work looks for ways of describing leadership practice in action; the theoretical says very little about the nature of practice but is more concerned with capturing and interrogating the process of interaction” (p. 33). Harris and Muijs (2005) align with Spillane et al. (2004) and Dean (2007) in noting the emphasis on the theory behind distributed leadership at the expense of concrete examples of distributed leadership in action; Dean’s (2007) case study indicates a research review that “yields only a small body of scholarship concerning what [distributed leadership] is and how to do it, and even fewer practical examples of how to actually develop it” (p. 3). The present study will address this knowledge gap by providing practical examples of the *hows* and *whys* of distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2004) in Wellbrook School District.

### **Research Questions**

Three central questions drive this study:

- How is distributed leadership practiced in the Wellbrook School District?
- Why does Wellbrook School District engage in distributed leadership practices?

- What are staff and administrator perceptions regarding the impact of distributed leadership practices on school climate in Wellbrook School District, and do they vary by sub-group?

### **Definition of Terms**

Mayrowetz explains multiple uses of the term *distributed leadership*, and ultimately warns against trying to define the term too narrowly due to the breadth of the leadership problems and issues it addresses (2008). While this argument is well taken, it is necessary to more clearly define some specific terms for the purposes of the current research:

- **Distributed leadership** is defined, for the purposes of the present study, as “the sharing, spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across individuals and roles across the school organization” (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Louis, 2007, p. 470) which promotes innovation, empowerment, and improvement (Harris, 2004). The author acknowledges the multitude of applications of this term in the literature (Leithwood & Mascal, 2008; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane et al., 2004)
- **Formal leaders** are school personnel who are employed in official positions of leadership in a district (e.g., superintendent, director, supervisor, coordinator, principal, assistant or vice-principal).
- **Informal leaders** are school personnel who are not employed in official positions of leadership, but contribute skill and expertise to leadership

functions “in an open and equitable relationship” with formal leaders (Helterbran, 2010, p.364). The term *teacher leader* also may be used synonymously as a generic term to include all informal leaders in a district regardless of specific job title (e.g., teacher, guidance counselor, paraprofessional, etc.).

- **Instructional leadership** is defined as leadership functions and tasks that are “strongly concerned with teaching and learning, including the professional learning of teachers as well as student growth” (Southworth, 2002, p. 79).
- **Leadership** is defined as “a set of organizational functions that leaders might be expected to perform”, including, but not limited to, instructional leadership, site management, resource acquisition, and community relations (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003, p. 349).
- **Middle school** is defined as grades six through eight for the purposes of this study.
- **Stretched**, in the context of distributed leadership tasks, refers to the interplay between task enactor, situational context, social context, and tools (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Spillane et al., 2004).
- **Teacher leadership** is defined as the capacity for leadership “from within the teaching ranks” that “exercise[s] expertise, energy, and influence in the school community” (Helterbran, 2010, p. 364-365).

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

The studies included in the present literature review examined distributed leadership in a variety of educational settings. While many studies focused on school districts in the United States, some described attempts at implementing distributed leadership in countries such as Belgium (Hulpia et al., 2011), Canada (Mascall et al., 2008; Sheppard et al., 2010), China (Law et al., 2010), England (Harris, Day, & Hadfield, 2003; Storey, 2004), New Zealand (Timperley, 2005), Slovenia (Sentocnik & Rupar, 2009), and Taiwan (Chang, 2011). Some studies examined attempts at distributed leadership at the primary/elementary level (Chang, 2011; Law et al., 2010; Timperley, 2005), secondary level (Hulpia et al., 2011; Leech & Fulton, 2008; Rice, 2006), and K-12 (or foreign equivalent) inclusive (Goldstein, 2007; Harris et al., 2003; Mascall et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009; Sentocnik & Rupar, 2009; Storey, 2004).

#### Search Strategy and Inclusion Criteria

Initial forays into the literature were wide-sweeping in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the different definitions and applications of distributed leadership, and were centered around Google searches for variations on the phrase *distributed leadership* (in K-12, in higher education, district, building, principal, superintendent, teacher). While informative, none of these sources met the criteria for inclusion in the present review in that they were not empirical studies.

Rather, these magazine and website articles and blog posts provided some initial direction for seeking peer-reviewed empirical journal articles via their cited references. Beyond that, the Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and PsycINFO databases accessed through EBSCOhost yielded the most fruitful results for full-text articles on distributed leadership; Google Scholar was also used, but led primarily to paid-access journals, which were not feasible due to both financial and time constraints. Articles cited in this dissertation came from a variety of peer-reviewed journals, but the following publications yielded particularly fruitful results on the topic of distributed leadership: *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *Journal of School Leadership*, *Education*, *School Leadership and Management*, and *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. When full-text articles were not immediately available for download via EBSCOhost, the Wilmington University Interlibrary Loan service was utilized. Search terms used in EBSCOhost were similar to those noted above, with the addition of specific authors' names, identified through both the initial review of non-peer-reviewed literature and through reading cited sources in articles returned in the initial EBSCOhost search. Given the scope of the present dissertation topic, no studies were included that discussed distributed leadership in higher education.

The present literature review is organized thematically by common themes that emerged from the included studies. The introduction provides a brief overview of distributed leadership and what role it may play in the current national discussion

of education reform. Inclusion criteria were discussed to establish the scholarly value of the works discussed herein, as well as to provide instruction for readers to access similar journal articles. Research findings are presented and analyzed, followed by the conclusion, in which the examined research is summarized, and future action with regard to the research process is outlined.

The present literature review will explore a cross-section of the available research on distributed leadership in the K-12 setting, both in the United States and in equivalent settings in Canada, China, England, Taiwan, Belgium, Slovenia, and New Zealand. It will discuss reported strengths and shortcomings of distributed leadership, common themes in the research addressed, and identify gaps in the research. While much of the existing research on distributed leadership in K-12 school systems promotes it as a preferred leadership style, gaps exist in the literature in the areas of exploring the degree to which distributed leadership affects teacher effectiveness and student learning. Further research exploring the appropriateness of varying degrees of leadership distribution, as well as rich case studies of successful distributed leadership practices, would also add much to the existing literature (Dean, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Spillane et al., 2007).

From detailed examination of these studies, three primary common themes emerged regarding distributed leadership in K-12 settings: the necessity of strong relationships, the impact of teachers' perceptions on the implementation of distributed leadership, and specific procedural concerns and gaps in the extant research.

## **The Value of Relationships in Distributed Leadership**

Open, communicative relationships based on trust between all stakeholders in a school building or district are essential components of successful distributed leadership (Angelle, 2010; Harris, 2003; Helterbran, 2010; Hulpia et al., 2011; Mascall et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009; Rice, 2006). A primary function of distributed leadership is to provide a greater spread of decision making authority (Park & Datnow, 2009); in order to accomplish this effectively, all contributors to the leadership cohort must share a clearly defined sense of the mission and vision of the school, as well as what behaviors and artifacts of teaching and learning constitute progress toward these shared goals (Goldstein, 2007, Park & Datnow, 2009; Rice, 2006).

The Rosemont (CA) Unified School District (RUSD) used a distributed leadership framework in its effort to improve the teacher evaluation process, traditionally a primary leadership responsibility. Goldstein (2007) described how Rosemont attempted to formalize these collaborative relationships and conversations via the establishment of a Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) policy. The PAR policy codified the conversations that must take place around staffing retention and improvement practices by identifying three groups crucial to the process: 1) Participating Teachers (PTs), who were either teachers new to the profession or veteran teachers who had been identified as struggling or unsatisfactory in some professional capacity, 2) Consulting Teachers (CTs), stable veteran teachers who

mentored, observed, evaluated, and debriefed PTs, as well as made employment recommendations, and 3) the PAR Panel, an oversight panel comprised of teachers and various administrators from around the district and co-chaired by the president of the teachers' union and the district head of Human Resources. Within this framework, multiple levels of accountability were created. As recipients of intensive mentoring and regular opportunities for constructive critical feedback and collaboration, PTs are held accountable for their teaching practices by CTs. CTs, in turn, were accountable to the PAR Panel for providing these supports and making honest recommendations as to whether or not the district should retain each PT. Building principals were also accountable to the PAR Panel; while principals did not answer directly to the panel, they could be approached if the PAR panel created logistical situations in which PTs may continue to struggle (e.g., unreasonable scheduling or teaching demands). There was even accountability within the PAR Panel; the teacher's union and district administration held each other accountable for maintaining and improving the quality of the teaching staff. Goldstein (2007) reported the union president's belief that "the district's administrators could not expect the teachers union to be responsible for cleaning up unsatisfactory veteran teachers if the union had no role in determining which teachers became tenured in the district in the first place" (p. 521).

In order for stakeholders from diverse professional perspectives (teachers, district administrators, principals, union officials) to work effectively as a team, trust

that each member would do what was best for students, as opposed to looking out for their own group's best interests, had to be established. By Goldstein's (2007) account, this happened in the RUSD. She indicated that "principals were surprised to find the teachers union president not only sitting at the table at panel hearings but arguing for teachers' dismissals" (p. 523). Progress toward a common, standards-based goal was thoroughly documented and discussed at regularly scheduled face-to-face meetings so employees of the RUSD were able to put aside partisan politics for the higher purpose of improving one aspect of their district.

Trust was also found to be an integral component of distributed leadership in another school district. Mascall et al. (2008) surveyed 8,800 full-time and part-time teachers in an Ontario, Canada school district serving nearly 200 elementary and high schools in primarily urban and suburban areas of the region. Their survey defined four patterns of leadership distribution: 1) Planful Alignment, in which a great deal of thought and planning goes into the distribution of leadership responsibilities and results are usually positive, 2) Spontaneous Alignment, in which distribution occurs at random, by change, or is otherwise unplanned, but still usually yields positive outcomes, 3) Spontaneous Misalignment, characterized by a lack of planning which usually results in negative outcomes, and 4) Anarchic Misalignment, in which individual units or departments within the school distribute among themselves, but act independently of one another, and sometimes in conflict with one another.

Mascall et al. (2008) sought to identify relationships between these four patterns of distributed leadership and three elements of what they described as “academic optimism” (p. 216): organizational citizenship behaviors (behaviors observed to engender feelings of belonging to a group), trust (between both teachers and administrators), and collective teacher efficacy (the confidence teachers have in their shared ability to carry out a professional task). Correlations were established not only between all four distributed leadership patterns and all three elements of academic optimism, but also between each leadership pattern and overall academic optimism. Two elements (trust and teacher efficacy) were each further split into two variables: “Trust in leaders” and “Trust in teachers”, and “Teacher self efficacy” and “Collective teacher efficacy” (Mascall et al., 2008, p. 223).

Results of Mascall et al.’s (2008) survey indicated that Planful Alignment is moderately correlated to aggregate academic optimism ( $r=0.339$ ). While this may be a modest correlation, Planful Alignment is unique among the four styles of distributed leadership in that it demonstrates consistently positive, significant relationships with all elements of academic optimism. It also demonstrates the strongest correlation (albeit moderate) to any of the elements of academic optimism (Trust in leaders,  $r=0.403$ ).

Table 1  
*Correlations Between Leadership Styles and Academic Optimism*

|                                    | <b>Planful alignment</b> | <b>Anarchic misalignment</b> | <b>Spontaneous misalignment</b> | <b>Spontaneous alignment</b> |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Collective teacher efficacy</b> | 0.114**                  | -0.127**                     | -0.170**                        | -0.028                       |
| <b>Teacher self efficacy</b>       | 0.085**                  | -0.079*                      | -0.156**                        | -0.049                       |
| <b>Trust in teachers</b>           | 0.258**                  | -0.140**                     | -0.286**                        | 0.038                        |
| <b>Trust in leaders</b>            | 0.403**                  | -0.185**                     | -0.356**                        | 0.002                        |
| <b>Org. citizenship behavior</b>   | 0.123**                  | -0.040                       | -0.027                          | -0.084**                     |
| <b>Academic optimism</b>           | 0.339**                  | -0.171**                     | -0.301**                        | -0.063*                      |

**Notes:** \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed); \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

*Note.* Correlations between leadership styles and academic optimism. Reprinted from “The Relationship Between Distributed Leadership and Teachers’ Academic Optimism,” by Mascall, Leithwood, Straus, and Sacks, 2008, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(2), p. 223. Copyright 2008 by Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Reprinted with permission.

While the results of this survey should be interpreted with caution due to the low response rate of only 1,640 out of 8,800 (19%), Mascall et al. (2008) have laid groundwork for future research on the role of trust not only in distributed leadership scenarios, but also in teacher support, teacher efficacy, and if and how those ultimately translate into student learning.

A more recent study by Chang (2011) examined the relationships between distributed leadership, academic optimism, and student achievement in elementary schools in Taiwan. Survey data were collected from 1,003 elementary school teachers and administrative staff in 100 schools from around the country. Each respondent completed three surveys: the Elementary School Distributed Leadership

Scale, the Elementary School Teacher Academic Optimism Scale, and the Elementary School Student Achievement Scale. The three surveys provided respondents a combined total of 63 Likert-type items in which they rated their level of agreement with statements about distributed leadership at their schools. Item categories across survey instruments included open leadership, members of the dynamic and participation, situational atmosphere, academic stress, student/parent trust, teacher efficacy, and student performance in each of the following subject areas: language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science & technology.

Survey data analysis not only confirmed the findings of Mascall et al. (2008) that distributed leadership directly and positively influences teachers' academic optimism (explained variance was 42.45%), but also provided more conclusive evidence that distributed leadership does positively affect student achievement, albeit indirectly. Teacher academic optimism accounted for 56.25% of the variance of student achievement. As Chang (2011) explains:

As a result of its direct effects on teacher academic optimism, distributed leadership was the primary factor influencing teacher academic optimism. Direct effects of teacher academic optimism on students' learning performance were observed, demonstrating that teacher academic optimism is reflected in students' learning performance. Teacher academic optimism also significantly explained students' learning performance as evaluated by their assessment scores. Distributed leadership facilitated teacher academic optimism and, through this interaction, has a positive influence on students' learning achievement. (p. 507)

Chang's (2011) findings on the impact of distributed leadership on teacher academic optimism, and the direct and indirect influence of both on student achievement, are significant to the research base on distributed leadership. This study provides some concrete connections in an area in the research that has been historically lacking, and can serve as a model for further research into the connection between distributed leadership and student achievement.

Teacher support, open conversation, and trust were among factors identified by teachers in four mid-sized urban school systems as essential to the success of distributed leadership initiatives (Park & Datnow, 2009). While the educators discussed by Goldstein (2007) used teacher support as their common goal, the district-level leaders of the Park and Datnow study kept a broader focus, building a common vocabulary around data-driven decision making (DDDM) which was then facilitated at the building level in a distributed manner, using both official administrators and teacher leaders.

According to these teachers, the common culture of student achievement data use was critical to the success of leadership distribution. Explicit norms and expectations were developed, which allowed staff to make mistakes and learn from them in a non-evaluative setting. Within this framework, conversations were then able to take place revolving around data and the processes and practices that achieved them. The tone of these conversations tended to be collaborative, with administrators asking teachers what they could provide in the way of tools or support. Keeping

conversational focus on data removed the potential for an evaluative tone (in which teachers were to blame for undesired results) and kept it on the process (i.e., how did we get these data, and what can we do differently to get different results?). Student achievement data served as a means of sparking conversation about best teaching practices and continuous improvement (Park & Datnow, 2009).

As these districts pursued DDMM and continued conversations, new roles and relationships began to form organically. Certain teachers began to emerge as informal “data experts” (Park & Datnow, 2009, p. 486) who would then use their new knowledge to support their colleagues. Conversations continued throughout the school year between district administration, building administration, and teachers:

Part of the rationale for this approach was to build a sense of mutual support and trust between the district and the school. Central office administrators... believed that teacher and principal buy-in... was critically important, and their support needed to be carefully nurtured. At multiple levels, practitioners expressed the belief that data need to be dealt with in an environment filled with trust in order to build an ethos of continuous improvement. (Park & Datnow, 2009, p. 484)

As staff familiarity with data grew, decision-making authority spread over multiple levels and groups in order to empower staff to act on data. Individual leadership teams began to assume responsibility for choosing and implementing instructional strategies that would best benefit their students based on collected data. In a logical progression of assumption of authority, teams then began to make their own programming decisions, design or request individualized professional development

experiences, and develop their own policies in order to best suit the needs of their students (Park & Datnow, 2009).

Trust among team members was also found to be a crucial element of leadership distribution at an American middle school. In a case study of Autumn Lake Middle School, Angelle (2010) conducted interviews with the principal, vice-principal, and nine teacher volunteers, all of whom collectively represented 25% of the school staff. Data collected from these interviews illuminated the school's decision-making process as well as three major distributed leadership constructs that guide instructional leadership.

Like many middle schools, Autumn Lake takes a team approach to education, in which teachers from different content areas comprise interdisciplinary grade-level teams; these teachers all teach the same students, and confer regularly regarding student progress, curriculum matters, and other issues. Autumn Lake also has a leadership team comprised of formal leaders and teachers, elected by their grade-level colleagues, to consider information and make decisions on both instructional and managerial matters. While the formal leaders also serve on this team, the principal and vice-principal do not carry any more decision-making authority than the teachers. The teachers, as explained by the principal, are "in closest proximity to the students" and therefore have "the most accurate understanding of their...needs and the best practices through which to meet [them]" (p. 8). The typical teacher's perception of the principal is that he "held expectations that quality teaching and learning would

occur, that he would provide what was needed for this to occur, but had confidence in the teaching staff to deliver instruction” (p. 8). Reciprocally, the teachers acknowledged and appreciated the principal’s ability to remove ego from the process and flatten the hierarchy of the school; they “believe that this mode of operation reflects the practices of the leadership, without whom the structure would fail” (p. 8).

Three primary constructs of Autumn Lakes’ model of distributed leadership emerged from the interview data: organizational structure, organizational culture, and organizational affiliation. Trust influenced organizational structure in that teacher teams were given autonomy to conduct team meetings at their discretion. The principal required they meet for one hour per day, but when, where, and the agendas were left to the discretion of each individual team. As cited above, the principal trusted teachers to deliver high quality instruction and govern their teams accordingly, and the teachers in turn feel empowered to make curricular, disciplinary, and other decisions within their teams that allow them to best meet the needs of their particular group of students in a given year (Angelle, 2010).

Organizational culture in a distributed context was established from the outset with “shared goals and agreement of their greater purpose throughout the school community” (p.8). The principal’s leadership style also contributed to the culture of collaboration; he was described by one interviewee as “a strong leader without being a power monger. He does it through relationships. [H]is philosophy is that if he takes care of the teachers and the teachers have a good relationship, then we’ll take

care of the kids” (p. 9). All teachers interviewed reported feeling supported by their principal in their daily operations.

Organizational affiliation was the third construct to emerge from interview data. Teachers reported enjoying being a part of Autumn Lakes Middle School, which increased their feelings of ownership and investment in the school and its students. One teacher noted, “I think our success is that we haven’t done it by threats. We don’t threaten people. We do it by relationships. ... [I]f I come in and build that relationship and show I care... they’re going to want to succeed because of that relationship” (p. 10). The principal concurred, acknowledging the importance of positive relationships in not only helping teachers to perform at a high level, but also in helping students to succeed.

Much of the emphasis on trust and collaboration at Autumn Lakes Middle School is also supported by the research of Hulpia et al. (2011) and Helterbran (2010). Hulpia et al. (2011) surveyed over 1,500 teachers from 46 large secondary schools in Belgium in order to assess their perceptions of their organizational commitment. The results identified three primary leadership variables that have a direct significant correlation to teachers’ organizational commitment. These variables, all significant at the .001 level, include quality of support ( $r=.552$ ), participative decision making ( $r=.561$ ), and cooperation within the leadership team ( $r=.607$ ) (p. 745). Quality of supervision of teachers was not found to be significantly related to organizational commitment. Taken in concert, these data seem to support

the case study data presented by Angelle (2010), in which teachers were well-supported, had a voice in the decision making process, and worked collaboratively and cooperatively on leadership teams.

In her review of literature on teacher leadership, Helterbran (2010) confirmed the necessity of supportive leadership, stating, “The principal, to be fully effective, must understand the importance and benefit of sharing leadership for without this understanding to support and foster teacher leadership, little good will come” (p. 364). She identified three major considerations for leadership distribution:

- Seek out leadership characteristics in candidates during the interview process. Individuals who demonstrate the capacity for leadership will be likely to embrace leadership opportunities throughout their careers, their presence contributing to the strengthening of teacher leadership in their buildings.
- Shift the mindset of veteran teachers who may only see themselves in follower roles. Doing so fosters their sense of empowerment and ownership, which is critical in engendering a school-wide culture of teacher leadership.
- Embrace learning for the social activity that it is and encourage teachers to take control of their own professional learning experiences with each other.

Helterbran identifies the social model of professional development as “an excellent and non-threatening activity to build relationships with others...

Learning inspires confidence and the willingness to take risks in improving practice.” (p. 369)

Klar (2012) also examined the role of the building principal in fostering distributed leadership practices in three urban high schools in the Midwestern United States. This multi-site case study focused on how principals at three different high schools fostered leadership capacity in their department chairs, which were traditionally positions of a more administrative nature than of instructional leadership. Klar (2012) identified four primary actions taken by these principals that led to the successful distribution of leadership among department chairs.

The first action was to create multiple and pervasive opportunities for the department chairs to learn. Rather than providing prescriptive professional development, these principals asked their chairs to self-assess their professional needs and created a list of topics from the responses. The principals then worked to provide their chairs with multiple opportunities throughout the year to improve in the areas they identified, utilizing both internal and external resources. Furthermore, they made themselves readily available to the department chairs for guidance and assistance.

Principals in this study also modeled the distributed leadership practices they wished to see their department chairs implement. Team activities would be characterized by a collegial and professional tone, rather than one of mistrust or antagonism, which was previously the case in one school in the study. Everyone in team meetings would be encouraged to contribute ideas, and every opinion was considered and valued.

In addition to modeling distributed leadership practices, principals also modeled collaborative learning. They provided their chairs multiple opportunities throughout the year to learn with and from each other, as opposed to strictly receiving professional development opportunities from external resources. Beyond simply modeling preferred practice for working with students, this professional learning environment further engendered trust between colleagues and lead to a greater sense of openness and camaraderie between colleagues.

Finally, the principals were credited with deliberately setting their department chairs up for success. While the nature of the chairs' role shifted from more administrative to one of instructional leadership, the principals provided frequent opportunities to meet to address concerns or problems, as well as to help the department chairs prepare to run successful meetings with their own department faculty. This all contributed to the metacognitive process that "helped the chairs...better understand how the conditions, structures, and deliberative processes they were experiencing in leadership activities could be transferred to their individual departments" (p. 378).

This deliberate agenda-setting and facilitation of a supportive, collegial professional learning environment was what has led to the successful distribution of instructional leadership at the high schools in Klar's (2012) study; time spent providing critical feedback to peers across departments was deemed "one of the biggest successes of the initiative" (p. 379) by one of the principals.

Relationships built upon mutual trust and respect between team members are central to the successful distribution of leadership practices. Part of developing these practices, as Helterbran (2010) alluded to, is to establish buy-in from stakeholders, perhaps most importantly teachers.

### **Impact of Teachers' Perceptions on Distributed Leadership**

The belief of the central administrators from Park and Datnow's (2009) study that staff buy-in was crucial to the success of a distributed leadership implementation was addressed some years earlier by Timperley (2005). In Timperley's (2005) four-year longitudinal study, seven elementary schools in New Zealand were divided into two groups and observed as they began distributed leadership programs independent of one another. In the first two years, student reading achievement scores in Group 2 schools (two schools) were consistently higher than those of students in Group 1 schools (five schools). Observational data also revealed key differences in how the two groups implemented their distributed leadership programs.

Schools in Group 1 and Group 2 demonstrated three major differences in their respective approaches to DDDM and distributed leadership. In the first 18-24 months, Group 1 schools focused primarily on teacher program implementation fidelity. Student achievement (or program implementation connections to student achievement) was not an area of concern; *effective* distributed leadership and DDMM were interpreted incorrectly by this district to mean that teachers implemented the program exactly as they were taught. Group 2, conversely, focused less on

implementation fidelity and more on student learning: there was an explicitly stated belief that all students could reach academic benchmarks, and teaching strategies were fine-tuned or developed in response to local achievement data (Timperley, 2005).

Another area in which the groups differed was distribution of tasks. Program implementation in Group 1 was left solely in the hands of the teachers, who were trusted to deliver programs as instructed and given support to do so. Again, program implementation fidelity was the top priority. Group 2 schools saw student achievement outcomes as the primary goal, however, and so engaged teachers and administration in discussions about data analysis and instructional implications (Timperley, 2005). Instructional programs were viewed as means to the end, not as the ends themselves, and decisions regarding program or instructional changes were distributed across district personnel, not left solely to one group.

While both groups engaged in data analysis, Group 1 looked at student achievement data collated as a large group, not individual classes or individual students. Group 2 schools examined achievement data at the individual student level, thus “trigger[ing] a complex web of cognitions about children, their progress, how that progress fitted with the others in the group, and what actions [they] could take next” (Timperley, 2005, p. 415). It was only when Group 1 schools started looking this closely at student achievement data in Year 3 of the study that reading scores began to rise.

Similarly, two groups' approaches to distributed curriculum leadership were contrasted by Law et al. (2010). In their examination of how leadership styles influenced "interactional patterns and therefore the discourses" (p. 286) at a primary school in Hong Kong, two very different approaches, and their respective impacts, were documented in two academic departments: Math and Chinese.

The head of the Chinese department was seen as the more assertive and directive of the two. Communication was primarily unidirectional from the head to the teachers, and teachers reported no sense of community, collaboration, collegiality, or interaction among the team. They did, however, report feelings of resentment and disengagement from professional directives (Law et al., 2010). The head of the math department was viewed in a much more positive light. She was described by her teachers as less of a director and more of a facilitator, soliciting department members for ideas and feedback. Discourse among the group was open and constructive, and largely based in anecdotes. Teachers in the math department reported feeling both supported and empowered by their supervisor due to the facilitative leadership role she assumed (Law et al., 2010).

When stakeholders did not establish the common language or vision of the distributed leadership framework, or when the vision did not fit the generally accepted philosophical underpinnings of distributed leadership - as was the case with the Group 1 schools for two years (Timperley, 2005) or with the head of the Chinese department at the Hong Kong primary school (Law et al., 2010), outcomes did not

live up to expectations, and teacher buy-in flagged. Harris et al. (2003) interviewed teachers, head teachers, support staff, and parents of students at 12 case study schools in England that had “publicly acknowledged ‘effective’ leaders” (p. 69) in order to identify best practices in distributed leadership. Three common characteristics emerged from interview data from these schools.

Teachers easily identified distinctions between *leadership* and *management*. Across interviewees, management was believed to be a subset of leadership; a necessary part of leadership, but not its sole function. Other components included providing direction for the school, setting professional standards, and making difficult decisions (Harris et al., 2003). Teachers in these schools took a constructivist approach to leadership, acknowledging the need for the entire school community to be invested and participate in leadership activities, constructing their own roles, and sharing responsibility for the direction of the school.

Relationships between effective leaders and teachers in this study were found to be complex and complicated. Not only were there employee-supervisor relationships, but these leaders also blended personal and professional relationships to become role models, collaborators, and friends (Harris et al., 2003). The nature of these relationships also changed over the course of time; the relationship a head teacher might have with a new teacher would be different than that of a head teacher and veteran teacher. As with effective instruction and students, effective distributed leadership seems to be individualized, however slightly, to the unique relationship

between the head teacher and each staff member, as opposed to a uniform relationship between the head teacher and all staff. These relationships also helped to move the entire school community toward the common vision or goal. Common commitments (or *buy-in*) and strong feelings of community were seen as integral to the success of a school in achieving or progressing toward the academic goals set by the head teacher (Harris et al., 2003).

Harris et al. (2003) also discovered that professional development relevant to improving the school as a whole was seen as rewarding and motivating by surveyed staff. Feelings of collegiality and community were engendered by staff providing training to each other in their own areas of expertise, and this was all bound together by the common commitment to academic excellence and high expectations of the head teachers of both their students and staff.

While interview and observation are credible approaches to social science research, Leech and Fulton (2008) went in a more quantitative direction by surveying 1,841 teachers in a large urban public school system serving over 126,000 students, with an approximate racial demographic breakdown of 54% White and 46% minority (mostly African-American). Through teacher responses to Kouzes and Posner's (1997) Leadership Practices Inventory (which measures leadership behaviors) and Ferrara's (1994) Shared Educational Decisions Survey (measures level of shared decision making in schools), Leech and Fulton (2008) sought to determine whether there are relationships between leadership behaviors and shared decision making (a

key component of distributed leadership) in seven areas of school operations: planning, policy development, curriculum and instruction, student achievement, pupil personnel services, staff development, and budget management. Teacher responses remained anonymous, but were coded by school.

Perhaps in contrast to the qualitative results discussed thus far in the present literature review, Leech and Fulton (2008) found very weak relationships between leadership behaviors of principals in secondary schools surveyed and levels of shared decision making (SDM; see Table 2). According to the authors, these data indicate that since very little of the variance in levels of SDM can be attributed to leader behaviors, “a combination of other factors must impact shared decision making in schools” (Leech & Fulton, 2008, p. 640). The authors point to the collaborative nature of shared decision making and the roles that strong relationships and team building must play therein, and suggest intensive training in facilitating SDM for both principals and teachers in order to encourage involvement in the process (Leech & Fulton, 2008).

Table 2

*Summary of Significant Relationships (r) Between the Principal's Leadership Behaviors and the Level of Shared Decision Making*

| Variable               | Challenging The Process | Inspiring a Shared Vision | Enabling Others to Act | Modeling the Way | Encouraging the Heart |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Planning               | 0.157                   | 0.124                     | 0.126                  | 0.155            | 0.127                 |
| Policy Development     | 0.191                   | 0.161                     | 0.172                  | 0.187            | 0.166                 |
| Curriculum Instruction | 0.157                   | 0.118                     | 0.152                  | 0.172            | 0.167                 |
| Student Achievement    | 0.121                   | 0.100                     | 0.112                  | 0.119            | 0.130                 |
| Pupil Personnel        | 0.129                   | 0.100                     | 0.107                  | 0.128            | 0.115                 |
| Staff Development      | 0.107                   | 0.097                     | 0.125                  | 0.126            | 0.115                 |
| Budget Management      | 0.111                   | ---                       | 0.112                  | 0.119            | 0.096                 |

**Note.** P<.05

*Note.* Summary of significant relationships (*r*) between the principal's leadership behaviors and the level of shared decision making. Reprinted from "Faculty Perceptions of Shared Decision Making and the Principal's Leadership Behaviors in Secondary Schools in a Large Urban District," by Leech and & Fulton, 2008, *Education*, 128(4), p. 638. Copyright 2008 by Project Innovation, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

### **Procedural Concerns and Research Gaps**

When attempts at distributed leadership go wrong, perhaps the natural first response is to reflect and identify reasons why (Law et al., 2010; Timperley, 2005).

Even when it is implemented well, reasons why are sought and displayed as best practices (Goldstein, 2007; Harris et al., 2003; Law et al., 2010; Mascall et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009; Timperley, 2005). The problem with this approach, however,

is that it assumes the conclusion that distributed leadership is a desired approach and should be implemented in schools. Rice (2006) identifies problems in both procedure and perception of distributed leadership. In her study of implementing a full inclusion program in an urban American high school, multiple examples of teachers and administrators “talking past one another” (p. 95) were found to be at the heart of much of the negative feelings on many sides. The special education teacher and counselor who were charged with rolling the new inclusion program out to the faculty, for example, viewed questions from staff in very different ways. The teacher understood questions to be an expected part of the learning process. The counselor and principal, however, saw questions about process and logistics as challenges, either to the new policy or to the philosophy of inclusion in general (Rice, 2006). In another example, the principal attempted to act more as a facilitator than a director, in accordance with distributed leadership philosophy. Rather than give concrete, direct answers to questions, she would solicit other teachers for feedback, or ask follow-up questions. While the principal felt this was “an opportunity [for the teachers] to provide input into the process” (p. 94), teachers tended to interpret these responses in one of three ways: “as (a) a lack of professionalism, (b) a lack of competence, or (c) a lack of respect” (p. 94). Teachers viewed the principal’s attempt to involve them in the implementation process as “platitudes, not real answers...it’s unprofessional. Worse than that, it’s unethical to announce a policy but have no clue how to implement it. If this were law, we’d be talking malpractice” (p. 94). A teacher who

did not even attend the special meetings called to discuss the new program said, “These kinds of things are just a waste of time. They don’t listen. I leave with more questions than answers” (p. 94). Another teacher shared, “...it doesn’t seem to be well organized or thought through. Or if it is, it hasn’t been presented to us in a very professional manner” (p. 94).

In her reflection on the shortcomings of the attempt at distributing responsibility for the rollout of the inclusion program, Rice (2006) came to the same conclusion as Park and Datnow (2009), Mascall et al. (2008), Hulpia et al. (2011), Helterbran (2010), and Angelle (2010): trust is an integral component of a distributed leadership scenario. This raises the question, however, of whether or not it is appropriate to attempt distributed leadership in an environment where there is clearly very little or no trust among parties, such as at this high school. If administrators prefer to provide explicit direction and teachers prefer and expect to be given such direction, why would distributed leadership be a preferable option? Law et al. (2010) suggest that blurring of boundaries and flexibility of professional roles between teachers and leaders has mostly positive effects for distributed leadership, but that very lack of clarity of specific role expectations created resentment among the staff at this school (Rice, 2006).

Similar problems rose from a lack of role definition at a school in England, where the head of faculty assumed a sweeping degree of jurisdiction in the newly restructured distributed leadership framework; other staff members disagreed with

him, leading to more problems than solutions and ultimately distracting from the ultimate goal of academic excellence (Storey, 2004). Further interview and questionnaire data from this study indicate a pervasive mistrust of the head teacher by teaching staff and a lack of willingness on the part of the head teacher to fully distribute leadership tasks, despite the desire of teaching staff to do so (Storey, 2004). In cases such as these, it is worth asking whether these obstacles can be surmounted in order to implement distributed leadership in accordance with even the most basic commonly agreed upon philosophies. Even if so, is there a limit as to how widely it is practical to distribute leadership practices and responsibilities?

In addition to the data provided by Rice (2006) and Storey (2004), previous studies in the present literature review at times raise concerns not only about distributed leadership, but also about the methods by which they arrived at the conclusion that it is a universally desirable framework. Very few of the studies are longitudinal in nature, which means that they provide only snapshots of distributed leadership in action, with no meaningful data on its long-term impact. Timperley (2005) is a notable exception, having conducted her study over a four year period. Leech and Fulton (2008) surveyed teachers on their perception of shared decision making in a variety of administrative areas, but given the lack of administrative training most teachers have, it is entirely possible that the teachers surveyed lacked operational definitions of the given leadership behaviors, and were involved without realizing it, thereby contaminating the results. While Goldstein (2007) collected a

vast amount of interview, observation, and survey data from all stakeholder groups (PTs, CTs, administrators, PAR Panel members), it may have been instructive to have read interview or survey data from PTs who were ultimately dismissed via the PAR process to see how their perspectives compared to those still working within the system. Finally, some of the included studies (Angelle, 2010; Leech & Fulton, 2008; Mascall et al., 2008; Storey, 2004) rely largely or entirely on self-report interview data, which are prone to bias in the forms of under-reporting or over-reporting, so their accuracy may be called into question and must be interpreted with caution; studies that used multiple means of data collection in order to triangulate information accuracy (Harris et al., 2003; Park & Datnow, 2009; Rice, 2006; Timperley, 2005) may be more reliable.

## **Conclusion**

Despite concerns over procedural implementation and universal propriety, distributed leadership in education is a topic that has garnered much attention – mostly positive – since the mid-1990s. Proponents of this philosophy hold it up as an example of the evolution of school leadership, citing its collaborative and inclusive nature and the establishment of student achievement as a common goal to unify staff and drive action as primary reasons why it should be adopted by schools. Studies included in the present literature review have provided rich case studies of how leadership tasks in the areas of staffing, curriculum, instruction, and program development can be effectively and equitably distributed across staff, as well as

identified elements of best practice in distributed leadership in the K-12 school setting, including:

- A culture of professional collaboration (Angelle, 2010; Klar, 2012; Law et al., 2010; Park & Datnow, 2009)
- A supportive, constructively critical, collegial professional environment with multiple, pervasive opportunities for professional growth (Angelle, 2010; Helterbran, 2010; Klar, 2012; Law et al., 2010; Mascall et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009)
- A wide spread of decision-making authority (Angelle, 2010; Leech & Fulton, 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009)
- Clearly defined mission and vision, including common vocabulary and agreement on what constitutes progress theretoward (Goldstein, 2007; Park & Datnow, 2009; Rice, 2006)
- High degrees of trust and open lines of communication between teachers and formal leaders (Angelle, 2010; Harris et al., 2003; Helterbran, 2010; Hulpia et al., 2011; Mascall et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009; Rice, 2006)
- High degrees of investment in implementing distributed leadership, from both teachers and formal leaders (Angelle, 2010; Harris et al., 2003; Helterbran, 2010; Park & Datnow, 2009; Timperley, 2005)

## Chapter III

### Methodology

The purpose of this study is to provide a thick, rich description of distributed leadership practices at a suburban Delaware school district, to explore, per Spillane et al. (2004), the *hows* and *whys* of building-level distributed leadership practices, and to examine staff attitudes and perceptions relative to the influence of distributed leadership practices on school climate. This study is expected to yield not only a portrait of distributed leadership in action, but also insight into what impact, if any, distributed leadership practices have on school climate. Distributed leadership practices will be examined in two buildings at the middle school level for context specificity. Attitudinal feedback is expected to inform suggestions for improvement of existing leadership practices.

#### Research Methods

**Quantitative Method.** Newman and Benz (1998) classify quantitative research methods as empirical or statistical in nature. Quantitative researchers identify a specific research focus and collect quantifiable data on which they conduct statistical analysis (Creswell, 2007) in order to answer questions about numbers or numerical change, determine the influence of variables on a situation, or test a hypothesis (Muijs, 2011). More traditional, structured methods of social and behavioral science research, including questionnaires and rating scales, allow for greater ease of statistical calculation and analysis than qualitative methods and are

used primarily when the research aims to describe, explain, or evaluate (Cargan, 2007; Newman & Benz, 1998), as does the present study. Quantitative research designs, particularly those involving Internet-based data collection methods such as web-based surveys or email (Muijs, 2011), allow researchers to collect large amounts of data from multiple sites and sources for convenient comparison via statistical analysis.

**Qualitative Method.** Qualitative research methods, alternately, “locate [...] the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3) through which observers relate “the characteristics, concepts, definitions, descriptions, metaphors, and symbols of things and events” (Cargan, 2007, p. 9). Qualitative research eschews numerical data for interactional, observational, and interview data, among others, collected from participants in order to gain insight into a given topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In contrast to the more narrowly-defined avenues of quantitative research, qualitative research allows the researcher and participant to explore different avenues as they arise during the research process, select which areas warrant deeper examination than others, effectively utilize a small sample size, and explore the *emic*, or insider’s, perspective to the issue under investigation (Balarabe Kura, 2012; Cargan, 2007).

**Mixed Methods Design.** While the respective proponents of qualitative and quantitative research are often critical of the other approach (Balarabe Kura, 2012), Newman and Benz (1998) propose that the dichotomy of qualitative vs. quantitative

research is a false one. Rather, they posit that behavioral and social science research exists on a qualitative-quantitative continuum, on which different methods complement each other in the ultimate pursuit of knowledge. Kvale (1996) also notes that while quantitative and qualitative research methods may seem at odds, “what they have in common is the working out of consistent and recurrent patterns through intensive case studies” (p. 103). The current study proposes to contribute to the existing research base on distributed leadership practices by following Newman and Benz’s (1998) prescription of integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods on an “interactive continuum” (p. 12) in a mixed methods case study.

In order to address the primary research objectives of assessing and providing thick, rich descriptions of distributed leadership practices, both quantitative and qualitative measures must be used; neither approach, on its own, will sufficiently satisfy these objectives. Mixed methods research was designed specifically in response to “the observed limitations of both qualitative and quantitative designs” (Caruth, 2013, p. 113). This mixed methods research design will be a descriptive, single-case case study in distributed leadership practices in a mid-sized public school district in Delaware. The Wellbrook School District is the primary unit of analysis, with quantitative attitudinal feedback compared in two embedded units of analysis: administrators and non-administrators.

Case study designs, particularly those consisting largely of interview data, are often considered to be inherently lacking in both internal and external validity (de

Vaus, 2001; Kvale, 1996; Small, 2009); however, while “[i]t is correct to say that case study designs cannot provide a basis for making statistically valid generalizations beyond that particular case...case studies do not strive for this type of external validity” (de Vaus, 2001, p. 237). Indeed, attempts at generalizing results of a case study to a larger population damage the researcher’s understanding of the case itself (Stake, 2005).

In the qualitative phase, idiographic explanations of cases will seek to “develop... complete explanation[s] of each case” (de Vaus, 2001, p. 233); the primary unit of analysis in the present study is the school district. This, complemented by quantitative survey data, will provide “a more complete, *holistic*, and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study...the use of multiple measures may also uncover some unique variance which otherwise may have been neglected by single methods” (Jick, 1979, p. 603). Social phenomena such as organizational leadership are complex, and therefore are “beyond the methodologies and instrumental forces of any one single approach – quantitative or qualitative alike – to study and understand them in total” (Balarabe Kura, 2012, p. 15).

### **Quantitative Method**

**Participants.** In the quantitative phase of this study, the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale [DLRS] was sent to the 135 current employees of two middle school buildings within the pseudonymous Wellbrook School District [WSD]. This included not only teachers and administrators, but also certificated and non-

certificated staff such as guidance counselors, social workers, school psychologists, speech/language specialists, school nurses, secretaries, and library media specialists. While teachers make up a majority of any school's staff, distribution of leadership tasks and the impact thereof extends to all employees, not just teaching staff (Angelle, 2010; Camburn et al., 2003; Law, et al., 2010; Rice, 2006; Spillane & Hunt, 2010).

Of 135 possible respondents, 68 completed the DLRS, indicating an overall response rate of 50.37%. Thirty of 65 possible respondents completed the survey at Banniman Middle School (response rate of 46.15%), while 38 of 70 possible respondents completed the survey at Aponte Middle School (response rate of 54.29%). Of the 68 total responses received, 44.1% came from Banniman Middle School, while 55.9% came from Aponte Middle School. Respondent demographics will be explored in further detail in Chapter Four.

In order to obtain as many responses as possible within the district, no specific screening criteria were put into place to qualify or eliminate participants from responding to the DLRS other than their status as employees working in one of the two middle schools in the study. Participants were selected based on their employment status with WSD as well as their willingness to complete the survey. As per Muijs' (2011) suggestions, the distribution of the DLRS was designed to maximize participant response rates: brevity (under 30 minutes to complete), minimal effort and no cost to respondents, and the promise of feedback on the project to those who request it.

The present study follows the example of previous case studies of distributed leadership within a single district (Angelle, 2010; Camburn et al., 2003; Goldstein, 2007; Law et al., 2010; Rice, 2006; Spillane & Hunt, 2010). *Purposive* samples are derived from populations specifically chosen by the researcher in order to gain insight into or better understanding of phenomena (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007); Wellbrook School District was selected for this study primarily because of the district's ability to advance the study's aim of contributing to the emerging body of context-specific distributed leadership practices in K-12 school settings, given the district's past participation in a statewide distributed leadership initiative and presumed ongoing implementation of distributed leadership practices.

**Data Sources.** The Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale [DLRS] was used to collect quantitative data in the first phase of this study. The DLRS was developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education [CSDE] in order to assess school districts' preparedness to implement distributed leadership practices. Items on the DLRS each align to one of five central dimensions of distributed leadership:

- Mission, Vision, and Goal (7 items)
- School Culture (11 items)
- Shared Decision-Making (6 items)
- Evaluation and Professional Development (8 items)
- Leadership Practices (8 items) (Gordon, 2005)

Each of the 40 items on the DLRS is phrased as a declarative statement about some aspect of distributed leadership practice (e.g., "School goals are aligned with its mission statement", "My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional

development plan”). Respondents rate how frequently each statement applies to their school building on a five-point Likert-type scale. Response options for each item include “Continually”, “Frequently”, “Sometimes”, “Rarely/Never”, and “Insufficient Information”. In order to simplify the statistical analysis process, respondents were asked to respond to items on a scale of 1 (“Rarely/Never”) through 5 (“Continually”). The 40-item DLRS was distributed electronically via Google Forms with each item marked as “Required”; respondents could not submit their responses without answering each item on the survey, so there were no missing data. The open-ended questions included in the DLRS are irrelevant to the present study and were excluded from the quantitative research phase in favor of more context-specific open-ended interview questions in the qualitative phase.

The DLRS was validated by the CSDE over the course of two sample administrations in 2003. In these pilot studies, the DLRS received responses from over 1,500 respondents; 1,257 responses remained usable after the data cleaning process, in which incomplete data were discarded (Gordon, 2005). While the DLRS is designed to assess a school’s preparedness to implement distributed leadership practices, it can and also has been used to assess and report on current enactment of distributed leadership practices (Gunter, Shopfner, Croom, Endel, & Roberts, 2008). Gordon (2005) also analyzed the 40 items on the DLRS via the principal component analysis (PCA) function in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS):

The analysis began with five conceptually derived dimensions and resulted in four empirically distinguishable factors that were retained for further

investigation. The items in three of the dimensions: mission, vision, and goal; school culture; and leadership [practices] were almost identical to the empirically derived items. Most of the items from the other two dimensions were combined into a single factor named Shared Responsibility. All the items loaded above .35, indicating reasonably strong construct validity. Further investigation of the internal-consistency reliability measure of the items was conducted. The four dimensions were found to be internally consistent (Cronbach's alpha .84 to .92), reliable and well defined by the items. Inter-item correlation for each item within each dimension ranged from .35 to .77. Overall analysis of the data yielded substantial support for the DLRS as a valid and reliable instrument. (p. 61)

For the purposes of the present study, items were aligned to the same four dimensions described by Gordon (2005):

- Mission/Vision/Goals (8 items)
- School Culture (13 items)
- Leadership Practices (9 items)
- Shared Responsibility (10 items)

Furthermore, respondents also were asked to respond to five additional statements regarding the climate of their individual buildings, on the same 1-5 Likert scale as the DLRS items:

- Teachers take pride in being part of the school community.
- Students take pride in being part of the school community.
- Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community.
- Students at this school care about learning.
- Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students.

**Data Collection.** The initial phase of data collection involved quantitative data collected via the rating scale. Participants were provided with a link to an online

informed consent letter that had to be read prior to starting the DLRS proper. As per de Vaus (2001), this letter informed respondents of the purpose of the present study, basic procedures required to participate, a general statement of potential risk involved in their participation, an offer to answer questions and provide feedback on the project, and a reminder that their participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. Respondents also were assured of confidentiality; while no names were collected, other potentially identifying demographic data were (e.g., position, years of experience, primary building assignment). At the end of the letter, participants were asked to click a link to the initial demographic data collection page of the DLRS. In order to facilitate data collection, disaggregation, and analysis, the DLRS demographic and survey items were transcribed into Google Forms, an online survey tool.

The DLRS requires respondents to provide basic demographic information: gender, race or ethnicity, highest degree earned, total years in education, and total years in present building. Participants in this study also were required to indicate which building within WSD was their primary school, or the school building in which they spent more than 50 percent of their work week, as well as their status as either an administrator or a non-administrator. This was done in order to allow survey data to be disaggregated by building for intra-district comparison, as well as to prevent double reporting by staff members who work in multiple buildings (e.g., speech therapists, Child Study Team members). The quantitative rating scale data was

convenient for both respondents and researcher and thereby increased the likelihood of a high response rate while significantly reducing the potential for researcher bias (Evans & Mathur, 2005).

**Data Analysis.** The items on the DLRS, as well as the additional items on school climate, are presented as declarative statements to be rated on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale. Kuzon, Urbanek, and McCabe (1996) illustrate the sensitivity with which researchers must approach interpreting results of such ordinal-level instruments:

Just as it is invalid to rank the results of a given surgical procedure as poor, fair, good, or excellent and state that the average result is “fair and a half,” it is invalid to rate those same outcomes as 1, 2, 3, or 4 and state that the average result is 2.5. (p. 266)

Frequency distributions of DLRS and additional item responses were presented in the analysis in order to identify how regularly respondents felt each statement applied to their schools. Furthermore, in order to identify the statements and practices that respondents felt applied most or least frequently, items that earned the highest percentage of positive (4 and 5) or negative (1 and 2) responses were noted in each domain (Jamieson, 2004; Kuzon, Urbanek, and McCabe, 1996). These data were further disaggregated by the sub-groups of administrators, non-administrators, Aponte Middle School staff, and Banniman Middle School staff.

## Qualitative Method

**Participants and Delimiting Factors.** The second phase of this study involved interviews with WSD faculty members. Interviewees were limited to the superintendent and assistant superintendent of WSD and the principals and assistant principals of the two middle schools, as well as non-administrator faculty members from each middle school referred by the superintendent and building principals. The practice of asking interviewees to recommend other interviewees is known as *snowball sampling*, and increases the likelihood of finding willing participants (Small, 2009). The potential also exists for referred interviewees to provide “greater openness [and] deeper interviews” (p. 14) than those selected at random, thereby increasing the quality of reported interview data. A limitation of this sampling practice, however, is that it is impossible to prove that the sample is truly representative of the designated population (in this case, Banniman and Aponte Middle School staff) (Black, 1999). To combat that limitation as best as possible, all interviewees who were asked to provide references were asked to do so with respect to diversity in gender, ethnicity, grade and subject level taught, and job assignment.

The sample for the qualitative phase of the study is best described as *nonprobabilistic*, a common practice in field-oriented research that does not aim for statistical generalizability. A nonprobabilistic sample is one in which participants are not randomly selected, nor are their responses intended to be generalized to a larger population (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Objectively speaking, “there is no correct number of cases to include in a case study design” (de Vaus, 2001, p. 240). Guest et al. (2006) identify the dearth of empirically-based “practical guidelines for estimating sample sizes for purposively sampled interviews” (p. 60). While sample sizes must be large enough to achieve *theoretical saturation*, or the point at which “all of the main variations of the phenomenon have been identified and incorporated into the emerging theory” (p. 65), such a precise number is rarely found in the literature. Kvale’s (1996) answer to the question of how many interview subjects are needed for a qualitative study is simply, “Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know” (p. 101), although he later suggests a range of approximately fifteen interviewees, depending on time and resources available to the researcher. Guest et al. (2006) argue that the definition of theoretical saturation has become “diffuse and vague” (p. 65) due to frequent use across different contexts and bodies of literature, and simplify the concept to mean, “the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook” (p. 65). In their methodological review of their own research study of women in West African countries, Guest et al. (2006) found that saturation occurred after the first twelve interviews. The present study resembles that described by Guest et al. (2006) in that it includes “a relatively homogeneous population and [has] fairly narrow objectives” (p. 75). As the aim of the present study “is to understand common perceptions and experiences among a group of relatively homogeneous individuals” (p. 79), focus groups and interviews

were conducted with fourteen WSD employees – the superintendent, assistant superintendent, two buildings principals, two assistant principals, and eight members of the certificated staff collectively referred to as “non-administrators” due to the variety in job types among them.

Of the fourteen interviewees, two (superintendent and assistant superintendent, both administrators) work in the district office. Five respondents (two administrators, three non-administrators) are based in Banniman Middle School and seven (two administrators, five non-administrators) are based in Aponte Middle School.

**Data Sources and Credibility.** Interview (both individual and small group) was the primary qualitative data collection method; after interview recordings were transcribed, a *member check* was conducted. Interview transcripts were provided to the interviewees, who were asked to review them for accuracy and make any desired comments or clarifications within a one-week time period. The active participation of the interviewee in the review process helped to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Interviewees were informed not only of their right to review and respond to the transcripts, but also of their duty to the same (Clausen, 2012).

Fieldnotes were recorded, focusing on “certain phenomena [deemed by the researcher to be] interesting and worthy of annotation” (Wolfinger, 2002, p. 87). As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) state, “there is no one ‘natural’ or ‘correct’ way to write about what one observes” (p. 45), and therefore, rather than act as simple

descriptive accounts of an event or observation, fieldnotes function as lenses for interpretation. Emerson et al. (2011) further elucidate:

Fieldnotes are distinctively a method for capturing and preserving... insights and understandings... Thus, fieldnotes inscribe the sometimes inchoate understandings and insights the fieldworker acquires by intimately immersing herself in another world... [I]t is exactly this deep immersion – and the sense of place that such immersion assumes and strengthens – that enables the ethnographer to inscribe the detailed, context-sensitive, and locally informed fieldnotes that Geertz (1973) terms “thick description.” (p. 59)

The triangulation of multiple data sources helps maximize credibility of the study and minimize problems related to respondents' inability to recall information accurately (de Vaus, 2001). A limitation of this study is that interviews and field notes were the only two data sources used in the qualitative phase. A third data source was not used; as such, credibility of the study may be weakened.

**Data Collection.** While five interviews were conducted face-to-face, nine interviews were conducted via a synchronous videoconferencing method. Skype was the primary videoconferencing method; however, in instances where interviewees did not have a Skype account and did not know how to set one up, a web-based videoconferencing service that did not require account creation was used (e.g., [Appear.in](#) and [VideoLink2.me](#)). Interviews were conducted after employee contract hours and at the convenience of the interviewee in order to maximize response rates. Individual interviews were all audio- and video-recorded; the focus group was only

audio-recorded due to technical difficulties with the video recording device.

Recordings of the focus group and interviews were made for ease of transcription.

While there may be an “assumption [in qualitative research] that the most appropriate method for producing narrative data is through face-to-face encounters” (Holt, 2010, p. 114), there are also compelling research data to support both the propriety and utility of online videoconference tools in qualitative research. Practical advantages include time efficiency, the ability to conduct research over long geographical distances, and rearrangement flexibility, for both researcher and informant (Hay-Gibson, 2009). Each of these advantages is germane to the present study in that the researcher lives approximately two hours north of the research sites and is employed full-time. Practical considerations also dictated that interviews often needed to be conducted after informant and researcher contract hours, usually in the evening (both are employed by public schools and are not permitted to conduct study business during contracted work hours).

From the informant’s perspective, Hay-Gibson (2009) and Pretto & Pocknee (2008) suggest that videoconference technology such as Skype is widely and freely available; Hay-Gibson (2009) in particular noted that participants in her study felt empowered in using online technology for interviews in that they felt more in control with regard to scheduling than they might in scheduling face-to-face.

Videoconference technology enables researcher and participant to see each other, combining the practical ease of the long-distance telephone interview with the

necessary visual element that previously could only exist in the face-to-face environment, “allowing for at least a mimicked face-to-face interaction” (Sullivan, 2012, p. 59).

Videoconference technology for research purposes is not without limitations. Hay-Gibson (2009) and Sullivan (2012) both note that the medium risks alienating certain groups of potential participants, such as elderly people, those with visual or hearing impairments, or those who are otherwise technologically averse. Successful use of the technology is also partially dependent on available bandwidth at the chosen interview time; technical problems such as patchy audio or lagging video could interfere with the interview and cause frustration (Hay-Gibson, 2009; Pretto & Pocknee, 2008). The potential benefits of the medium, as outlined above, however, outweigh its potential drawbacks (Sullivan, 2012).

**Data Management.** In order to maintain a data archive that is “intact, complete, organized, and accessible” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 206), the primary data management and archiving system in the present study was Evernote, a note-keeping computer application. Marshall and Rossman (2011) endorse the use of a data management system that “must enable the researcher to organize and make data easily retrievable and manipulatable” (p. 206); Evernote meets these criteria in several ways.

Evernote provides a notebook-like framework for recording and storing both plain text notes and files. For the purposes of this study, the individual data storage

unit within Evernote was defined as a *note*, and notes were grouped into *notebooks*. Each individual note was descriptively titled to identify interviewee and date; additionally, each note automatically generates metadata upon both creation and revision, including date and time created, date and time updated, and a history of revisions made to each individual note. Since Evernote can store both text and files within the same note, related files and text notes (e.g., plain text notes on an interview and the audio recording of the interview) can be stored together for ease of access and organization. Notes are keyword-searchable, not only in plain text notes, but also in documents containing text such as word processing documents, spreadsheets, or Portable Document Format (PDF) files through a feature known as Optical Character Recognition (OCR). Tessier (2012) has argued for the benefits of a similar program for qualitative data management, Microsoft OneNote, that has many of the same archival and organizational functionalities as Evernote.

Research data entered into Evernote had multiple security measures to maintain confidentiality. A key feature of Evernote is the service's ability to synchronize data across multiple devices; this is accomplished, in part, by Evernote storing user data on its central servers. Information that is entered in Evernote on a laptop, once synchronized, can then be accessed from another computer with Evernote installed, the Evernote web application, or a mobile device with Evernote installed, such as a smartphone or tablet. Use of the Evernote service requires a

unique username and password as the first security measure. The company also takes proactive measures to ensure data security:

- Your Evernote password is protected by encryption, and only you have access to it.
- Your personal information and data stored in our systems is protected by various physical, electronic and procedural safeguards. It is housed in secure facilities, and Evernote restricts physical and network access to select trained staff. We regularly evaluate our technologies, facilities, procedures, and potential risks to maintain the security and privacy of our users' data.
- Certain Evernote services support the use of standard SSL encryption to protect data transmissions. However, this is not a guarantee that such data transmissions cannot be accessed, altered or deleted due to firewall or other security software failures. (“Data storage and transfer”, 2013, para. 6)

As an added safeguard against such failures, plain text within notes can also be encrypted (password-protected) prior to synchronization at the end user level. Evernote does not voluntarily share, sell, or rent user data; it only does so with explicit consent of the user, during an investigation of possible fraudulent or illegal activity, or when compelled to do so by law enforcement agencies (“Information access and disclosure”, 2013).

○ **Data Analysis.** Interview data collected in the second, qualitative phase of the study were analyzed according to the constant comparative method [CCM], “the dominant principle of the analysis process in...qualitative research” (Boeije, 2002, p. 391). Multiple methods of CCM are necessary to increase internal validity;

comparisons can be made within a single interview, between interviews within the same group (e.g., multiple interviews of non-administrators), and interviews between groups (administrator interviews v. non-administrator interviews) (Boeije, 2002). This between-method methodological triangulation of multiple data sources – in which both qualitative and quantitative methods are combined in studying a single phenomenon – will serve to “reap... the benefits and neutraliz[e] the flaws of the methods to be triangulated towards increasing the credibility of the research results” (Hussein, 2009, p. 10).

In *open coding*, the first stage of data analysis, large quantities of raw data are analyzed for emerging categories that describe the overall phenomenon under study (Barker, Jones, Britton, & Messer, 2002; Hahn, 2008). In this phase, all identified variables may be organized in an outline form and each overall category is described (Barker et al., 2002); these are “the basic building blocks in grounded theory construction” (Pandit, 1996). This stage is followed by *axial coding*. Axial coding furthers the data analysis process by identifying relationships between concepts or categories identified in the open coding stage (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Categories are then further developed “by specifying the conditions that gave rise to it, the context in which it is embedded, and the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled, managed, and carried out” (Goulding, 2002, p. 78). In the third stage, *selective coding*, all identified categories are integrated in order to determine a theoretical framework. A *story*, or descriptive narrative, is then generated to describe

the central phenomenon under study that relates all discovered categories to a core category (Pandit, 1996). Interview and fieldnote data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis program.

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## Chapter IV

### Results and Findings

The purpose of this study was to provide a thick, rich description of distributed leadership practices in the Wellbrook School District, to explore the hows and whys of building-level distributed leadership practices in the district, and to examine staff attitudes and perceptions relative to the influence of distributed leadership practices on school climate. Study participants were the staff of Banniman and Aponte Middle Schools, two of the three middle schools in Wellbrook School District. Participants were asked to complete the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale [DLRS] as well as five additional items addressing school climate; select district employees were also targeted for qualitative interviews.

Survey data were analyzed by dimension (Mission/Vision/Goals, School Culture, Leadership Practices, and Shared Responsibility), by building (Aponte and Banniman), and by job classification (administrator and non-administrator). Interview data from administrative and non-administrative staff in both Aponte and Banniman, as well as district-level administrators, were also analyzed to identify emerging themes.

#### Research Questions

Three central questions drive this study:

- How is distributed leadership practiced in the Wellbrook School District?
- Why does Wellbrook School District engage in distributed leadership practices?
- What are staff and administrator perceptions regarding the impact of distributed leadership practices on school climate in Wellbrook School District, and do they vary by sub-group?

### **Quantitative Method**

**Participants.** Survey respondents were staff members from both Aponte and Banniman Middle Schools in Wellbrook School District. The DLRS was distributed to 135 staff members holding a variety of job titles in both middle schools. Of 135 possible respondents, 68 completed the DLRS, indicating an overall response rate of 50.37%. Thirty of 65 possible respondents completed the survey at Banniman Middle School (response rate of 46.15%), while 38 of 70 possible respondents completed the survey at Aponte Middle School (response rate of 54.29%). Of the 68 total responses received, 44.1% came from Banniman Middle School, while 55.9% came from Aponte Middle School.

The majority of survey respondents were female ( $n=55$ ; 80.88%); males made up just 19.12% of respondents ( $n=13$ ). Respondents were also overwhelmingly of White/Caucasian ancestry ( $n=60$ ; 88.24%), while the remainder of identified races/ethnicities (8.82%) were comprised of Black/Non-Hispanic ( $n=4$ ) and Hispanic ( $n=2$ ). Two respondents (2.94%) preferred not to provide this information.

Survey respondents largely held either Bachelor's ( $n=24$ ; 35.29%) or Masters' ( $n=39$ ; 57.35%) degrees. One respondent reported earning a high school diploma or GED (1.47%), one reported earning an Associate's degree (1.47%), two earned an Educational Specialist degree (2.94%), and one, a doctorate (1.47%).

Of the 68 respondents, four (5.88%) held administrative positions in the buildings (principal or assistant principal) while sixty-four (94.12%) held non-administrative positions. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents were classroom teachers ( $n=51$ ), while the remainder were comprised of paraprofessionals ( $n=5$ ; 7.35%) and non-instructional certificated staff (e.g. library media specialist, school psychologist, etc.) ( $n=8$ ; 11.76%). The table below illustrates the longevity of survey respondents with regard to number of years in the education profession, in Wellbrook School District, and in their current building:

Table 3  
*Survey Respondents Professional History*

|              | <b>Total Years<br/>in Education</b> |             | <b>Total Years in<br/>District</b> |             | <b>Total Years in<br/>Building</b> |             |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Less than 1  | 2                                   | 2.94%       | 7                                  | 10.29%      | 11                                 | 16.18%      |
| 1-5          | 15                                  | 22.06%      | 21                                 | 30.88%      | 29                                 | 42.65%      |
| 6-10         | 15                                  | 22.06%      | 17                                 | 25.00%      | 19                                 | 27.94%      |
| More than 10 | 36                                  | 52.94%      | 23                                 | 33.82%      | 9                                  | 13.24%      |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>68</b>                           | <b>100%</b> | <b>68</b>                          | <b>100%</b> | <b>68</b>                          | <b>100%</b> |

**Findings.** DLRS items are each aligned to one of four dimensions of distributed leadership, as per Gordon (2005). Findings from the present study are reported by dimension. In addition to the 40 items on the DLRS, respondents also

were asked to rate five statements regarding the climate. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (“Rarely/Never”) to 5 (“Continually”) the frequency with which each declarative statement applies to their school building. In addition to overall rating scale results, responses were disaggregated by respondent school building (Banniman or Aponte) and by respondent professional role (administrator or non-administrator).

***Dimension 1: Mission, vision, and goals.*** Rating scale items in this dimension focus on stakeholders’ understandings of the school’s mission and vision statements, goal-setting and school improvement, and alignment between goals, mission, and state standards. On average, 72.24% responded to these statements with a 4 or 5, while 11.21% responded with a 1 or 2. 16.54% of respondents rated items a 3.

Table 4  
 Dimension 1 Score Distribution - All Respondents

|   | 1            | 2            | 3             | 4             | 5             |
|---|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. The school has clearly written vision and mission statements.*   | 0.00%        | 0.00%        | 2.94%         | 20.59%        | 76.47%        |
| 2. Teachers and administrators understand and support a common mission for the school and can describe it clearly.* | 0.00%        | 1.47%        | 8.82%         | 55.88%        | 33.82%        |
| 3. If parents are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe the mission clearly.**      | 8.82%        | 20.59%       | 44.12%        | 20.59%        | 5.88%         |
| 4. If students are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe it clearly.**              | 10.29%       | 23.53%       | 33.82%        | 27.94%        | 4.41%         |
| 5. School goals are aligned with its mission statement.   | 1.47%        | 0.00%        | 10.29%        | 29.41%        | 58.82%        |
| 6. The school uses a school improvement plan as a basis for progress.**   | 8.82%        | 2.94%        | 16.18%        | 35.29%        | 36.76%        |
| 7. Teachers and administrators collectively establish school goals and revise goals annually.                       | 1.47%        | 8.82%        | 14.71%        | 30.88%        | 44.12%        |
| 8. The school's curriculum is aligned with the state's academic standards.*   | 0.00%        | 1.47%        | 1.47%         | 29.41%        | 67.65%        |
| <b>Average Percentage:</b>  | <b>3.86%</b> | <b>7.35%</b> | <b>16.54%</b> | <b>31.25%</b> | <b>40.99%</b> |

Note: \* Items with greatest percentage of 4 & 5 responses; \*\* Items with greatest percentage of 1 & 2 responses.

*Dimension 1 Disaggregation: Administrators vs. Non-Administrators.*

Administrators and non-administrators who responded to the DLRS rated the

following items most highly (4 or 5 response). Due to the small number of administrators in the survey sample (4), many items in this domain earned 100% response rate of 4 or 5. The items listed below for administrators are the items with both the greatest number of 4 or 5 responses *and* the greatest number of 5 ratings:

Table 5  
*Dimension 1- Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Administrators (n=4)</b>   |  | <b>Non-Administrators (n=64)</b>   |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 1. The school has clearly written vision and mission statements.*                             | 100%                                     | 1. The school has clearly written vision and mission statements.*  | 96.88%                                   |
| 5. School goals are aligned with its mission statement.                                       | 100%                                     | 8. The school's curriculum is aligned with the state's academic standards.*  | 96.88%                                   |
| 7. Teachers and administrators collectively establish school goals and revise goals annually. | 100%                                     | 2. Teachers and administrators understand and support a common mission for the school and can describe it clearly. | 89.06%                                   |
| 8. The school's curriculum is aligned with the state's academic standards.*                   | 100%                                     |  |  |

Note: \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both administrators and non-administrators rated items regarding the school's mission and vision statements and curriculum alignment with state standards very

highly. Administrators also rated item 2 (“Teachers and administrators understand and support a common mission for the school”) very highly, although not with enough 5 responses to earn placement in the table above. Teachers did not rate item 5 (“School goals are aligned with its mission”) as highly as their administrator colleagues.

Administrators only rated two items in Dimension 1 a 1 or 2. It is important to note that neither item in the Administrator column earned a rating of 1:

Table 6  
*Dimension 1- Items with Greatest Percentage of 1 or 2 Ratings*

| <b>Administrators (n=4)</b>   |  | <b>Non-Administrators (n=64)</b>  |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 3. If parents are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe the mission clearly.* | 25%                                      | 4. If students are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe it clearly.*         | 34.38%                                   |
| 4. If students are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe it clearly.*         | 25%                                      | 3. If parents are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe the mission clearly.* | 29.69%                                   |
|   |  | 6. The school uses a school improvement plan as a basis for progress.   | 12.50%                                   |

Note. \*Top rated item in both groups.

Both administrators and non-administrators gave low ratings to the items gauging parents' and students' understanding of the school mission. Non-administrators also rated the item regarding the use of a school improvement plan low, albeit not as frequently as the other two items.

*Dimension 1 Disaggregation: Aponte vs. Banniman.* Respondents from Aponte Middle School (administrators and non-administrators,  $n=38$ ) and Banniman Middle School (administrators and non-administrators,  $n=30$ ) rated the following items 4 or 5 most frequently:

Table 7

*Dimension 1- Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (<math>n=38</math>)</b>  |  | <b>Banniman (<math>n=30</math>)</b>   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 1. The school has clearly written vision and mission statements.*  | 97.37%                                   | 1. The school has clearly written vision and mission statements.*           | 96.67%                                   |
| 8. The school's curriculum is aligned with the state's academic standards.*  | 97.37%                                   | 8. The school's curriculum is aligned with the state's academic standards.* | 96.67%                                   |
| 2. Teachers and administrators understand and support a common mission for the school and can describe it clearly. | 86.84%                                   | 5. School goals are aligned with its mission statement.                     | 93.33%                                   |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both groups rated items 1 (“The school has clearly written vision and mission statements”) and 8 (“The school’s curriculum is aligned with the state’s academic standards”) very highly. These ratings reflect those of the overall response sample in Table 4, particularly the sample from Aponte. The sample from Banniman also rated item 5 (“School goals are aligned with its mission”) very highly.

Respondents rated the following items a 1 or 2 most frequently:

Table 8

*Dimension 1- Items with Greatest Percentage of 1 or 2 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (n=38)</b>  |  | <b>Banniman (n=30)</b>  |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> |
| 4. If students are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe it clearly.*         | 37.47%                                   | 3. If parents are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe the mission clearly.* | 26.67%                                   |
| 3. If parents are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe the mission clearly.* | 31.58%                                   | 4. If students are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe it clearly.*         | 26.67%                                   |
| 6. The school uses a school improvement plan as a basis for progress.   | 13.16%                                   | 7. Teachers and administrators collectively establish school goals and revise goals annually.                 | 13.33%                                   |

Note: \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both groups gave low ratings to items 3 (“If parents are asked to describe the school’s mission, most will be able to describe the mission clearly” and 4 (“If students are asked to describe the school’s mission, most will be able to describe it clearly”) at significantly higher rates than their respective third lowest scoring items in this dimension.

***Dimension 2: School culture.*** Rating scale items in this dimension focused on professional development, shared decision making, shared responsibility, and trust and respect among and between school personnel. Respondents also were asked to provide input on the building principal’s knowledge of instructional issues and ability to be consistent in words and actions. On average, 77.6% of respondents rated items in this dimension a 4 or 5, while 6.9% rated items a 1 or 2. 15.5% of respondents rated items a 3.

***Dimension 2 Disaggregation: Administrators vs. Non-Administrators.*** Administrators and non-administrators who responded to the DLRS rated the following items most highly (4 or 5 response). Due to the small number of administrators in the survey sample (4), many items in this domain earned 100% response rate of 4 or 5.

Table 9  
 Dimension 2 Score Distribution - All Respondents

|  | 1     | 2     | 3      | 4      | 5      |
|--|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| 13. There is a high level of mutual respect and trust among the teachers and other professional staff.**   | 2.94% | 5.88% | 13.24% | 48.53% | 29.41% |
| 14. There is mutual respect and trust between school administration and the professional staff.  | 0.00% | 7.35% | 30.88% | 33.82% | 27.94% |
| 15. The school administrator(s) welcome professional staff members' input on issues related to curriculum, instruction, and improving student performance. | 1.47% | 5.88% | 17.65% | 32.35% | 42.65% |
| 16. The school supports using new instructional ideas and innovations.*  | 0.00% | 0.00% | 11.76% | 33.82% | 54.41% |
| 23. The principal actively encourages teachers and other staff members to participate in instructional decision making.                                    | 1.47% | 7.35% | 17.65% | 29.41% | 44.12% |
| 24. Professional staff members in the school have the responsibility to make decisions that affect meeting school goals.                                   | 1.47% | 5.88% | 19.12% | 42.65% | 30.88% |
| 26. Administrators participate alongside teachers in the school's professional development activities.   | 1.47% | 5.88% | 11.76% | 44.12% | 36.76% |

Table 9 - Continued

|   | 1            | 2             | 3             | 4             | 5             |
|---|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 27. The principal actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school.* | 0.00%        | 0.00%         | 4.41%         | 36.76%        | 58.82%        |
| 28. My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan.**  | 10.29%       | 11.76%        | 14.71%        | 32.35%        | 30.88%        |
| 29. My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual professional needs and school needs.**     | 7.35%        | 5.88%         | 20.59%        | 29.41%        | 36.76%        |
| 30. Teachers actively participate in instructional decision making.   | 1.47%        | 5.88%         | 17.65%        | 44.12%        | 30.88%        |
| 32. The principal is knowledgeable about current instructional issues.  | 0.00%        | 0.00%         | 13.24%        | 23.53%        | 63.24%        |
| 33. My principal's practices are consistent with his/her words.*  | 0.00%        | 0.00%         | 8.82%         | 20.59%        | 70.59%        |
| <b>Average Percentage:</b>  | <b>9.14%</b> | <b>18.70%</b> | <b>35.82%</b> | <b>60.82%</b> | <b>75.52%</b> |

Note: \* Items with greatest percentage of 4 & 5 responses; \*\* Items with greatest percentage of 1 & 2 responses.

The items listed below for administrators are the items with both the greatest number of 4 or 5 responses *and* the greatest number of 5 ratings:

Table 10

*Dimension 2 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (n=38)</b>  |  | <b>Banniman (n=30)</b>  |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 27. The principal actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school.* | 94.74%                                   | 16. The school supports using new instructional ideas and innovations.  | 96.67%                                   |
| 33. My principal's practices are consistent with his/her words.   | 89.47%                                   | 27. The principal actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school.* | 96.67%                                   |
| 32. The principal is knowledgeable about current instructional issues.  | 81.58%                                   | 13. There is a high level of mutual respect and trust among the teachers and other professional staff.                              | 96.67%                                   |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both administrators and non-administrators across buildings gave consistently high ratings to items regarding the principal's commitment to his own professional development and consistency between the principal's words and his professional practice. Non-administrators also strongly endorsed the school as open to new instructional ideas and innovations, while administrators gave their highest ratings to

items describing the collaborative nature of professional development planning and instructional decision making, as well as the principal's knowledge of instructional issues.

Administrators did not give a 1 or 2 rating to any item in Dimension 2. Items 28 ("My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan", 23.44%), 29 ("My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual professional needs and school needs", 14.06%) and 13 ("There is a high level of mutual respect and trust among the teachers and other professional staff", 9.38%) received the highest percentage of 1 and 2 responses from non-administrators.

*Dimension 2 Disaggregation: Aponte vs. Banniman.* Respondents from Aponte Middle School and Banniman Middle School rated the following items 4 or 5 most frequently:

Table 11

*Dimension 2 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (n=38)</b>  |  | <b>Banniman (n=30)</b>  |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 27. The principal actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school.* | 94.74%                                   | 16. The school supports using new instructional ideas and innovations.  | 96.67%                                   |
| 33. My principal's practices are consistent with his/her words.   | 89.47%                                   | 27. The principal actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school.* | 96.67%                                   |
| 32. The principal is knowledgeable about current instructional issues.  | 81.58%                                   | 13. There is a high level of mutual respect and trust among the teachers and other professional staff.                              | 96.67%                                   |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both groups rated item 27 (“The principal actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school”) very highly, as did the building administrators.

Aponte Middle School and Banniman Middle School respondents rated the following items 1 or 2 most frequently:

Table 12

*Dimension 2 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 1 or 2 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (n=38)</b>   |  | <b>Banniman (n=30)</b>   |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> |
| 28. My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan.*  | 28.95%                                   | 28. My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan.*  | 13.33%                                   |
| 29. My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual professional needs and school needs.* | 18.42%                                   | 29. My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual professional needs and school needs.* | 6.67%                                    |
| 13. There is a high level of mutual respect and trust among the teachers and other professional staff.                         | 15.79%                                   | 26. Administrators participate alongside teachers in the school's professional development activities.                         | 6.67%                                    |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both groups gave low ratings to items 28 (“My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan”) and 29 (“My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual professional needs and school needs”). Item 13 (“There is a high level of mutual respect and trust among the teachers and other professional staff”) was the third lowest-rated item from the Aponte sample, while item 26 (“Administrators participate alongside teachers in the school’s professional development activities”) was the third lowest-rated item

from the Banniman sample. It should be noted that these items earned 1 and 2 responses at a much lower rate at Banniman than at Aponte (e.g., 1 and 2 ratings for item 28 from 28.95% of respondents at Aponte as opposed to from 13.33% of respondents at Banniman).

**Dimension 3: Leadership practices.** Rating scale items in this dimension focused on the development of leadership capacity in non-administrative professional staff. On average, 62.09% of respondents rated items in this dimension a 4 or 5, while 12.9% rated items a 1 or 2. 25% of respondents rated items a 3.

Table 13

*Dimension 3 Score Distribution - All Respondents*

|  | 1     | 2     | 3      | 4      | 5      |
|--|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| 25. The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school's mission and goals.*                                     | 1.47% | 2.94% | 19.12% | 36.76% | 39.71% |
| 31. Central office and school administrators work together to determine the professional development activities.                                 | 1.47% | 8.82% | 35.29% | 41.18% | 13.24% |
| 34. Informal school leaders play an important role in the school in improving the performance of professionals and the achievement of students.* | 4.41% | 8.82% | 14.71% | 38.24% | 33.82% |
| 35. The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles.*                      | 2.94% | 7.35% | 19.12% | 39.71% | 30.88% |

Table 13 - Continued

|   | 1             | 2             | 3             | 4             | 5             |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 36. Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient school time to permit them to make meaningful contributions to the school.** | 2.94%         | 17.65%        | 27.94%        | 33.82%        | 17.65%        |
| 37. Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient resources to be able to make meaningful contributions to the school.         | 1.47%         | 5.88%         | 26.47%        | 48.53%        | 17.65%        |
| 38. Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school.**  | 1.47%         | 20.59%        | 30.88%        | 32.35%        | 14.71%        |
| 39. New teachers are provided opportunities to fill some school leadership roles.**   | 4.41%         | 14.71%        | 25.00%        | 35.29%        | 20.59%        |
| 40. Teachers are interested in participating in school leadership roles.  | 2.94%         | 5.88%         | 26.47%        | 52.94%        | 11.76%        |
| <b>Average Percentage:</b>  | <b>12.35%</b> | <b>29.26%</b> | <b>52.50%</b> | <b>75.88%</b> | <b>70.00%</b> |

Note: \* Items with greatest percentage of 4 & 5 responses; \*\* Items with greatest percentage of 1 & 2 responses.

*Dimension 3 Disaggregation: Administrators vs. Non-Administrators.*

Administrators and non-administrators rated the following items 4 or 5 most frequently. Due to the small number of administrators in the survey sample, many items in this domain earned 100% rate of 4 or 5. The items listed below are the items

with both the greatest number of 4 or 5 responses *and* the greatest number of 5 ratings:

Table 14  
*Dimension 3 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Administrators (n=4)</b>  |  | <b>Non-Administrators (n=64)</b>   |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 25. The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school's mission and goals.*                                     | 100%                                     | 25. The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school's mission and goals.*                                     | 75.00%                                   |
| 34. Informal school leaders play an important role in the school in improving the performance of professionals and the achievement of students.* | 100%                                     | 34. Informal school leaders play an important role in the school in improving the performance of professionals and the achievement of students.* | 70.31%                                   |
| 35. The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles.*                      | 100%                                     | 35. The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles.*                      | 68.75%                                   |
| 37. Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient resources to be able to make meaningful contributions to the school.      | 100%                                     |  |  |

Note: \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both administrators and non-administrators rated items regarding the role of informal leaders, mission-aligned professional development in the district, and the positive impact of teacher leadership on the district very highly.

Administrators only rated two items in Dimension 3 a 1 or 2. It is important to note that neither item earned a rating of 1 from administrators:

Table 15

*Dimension 3 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 1 or 2 Ratings*

| <b>Administrators (n=4)</b>  |  | <b>Non-Administrators (n=64)</b>  |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> |
| 31. Central office and school administrators work together to determine the professional development activities. | 50%                                      | 36. Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient school time to permit them to make meaningful contributions to the school. | 21.88%                                   |
| 38. Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school.*  | 50%                                      | 39. New teachers are provided opportunities to fill some school leadership roles.   | 20.31%                                   |
|  |  | 38. Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school.*   | 20.31%                                   |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both administrators and non-administrators gave low ratings to item 38 (“Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school”). Administrators also rated collaboration between central office and school administrators in determining professional development activities relatively low, while non-administrators most frequently gave 1 and 2 ratings to teacher leaders having adequate time to contribute in a leadership capacity and new teachers having opportunities to assume leadership roles.

*Dimension 3 Disaggregation: Aponte vs. Banniman.* Respondents from Aponte Middle School and Banniman Middle School rated the following items 4 or 5 most frequently:

Table 16

*Dimension 3 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (n=38)</b>  |  | <b>Banniman (n=30)</b>  |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 25. The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school's mission and goals.*                                    | 73.68%                                   | 37. Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient resources to be able to make meaningful contributions to the school. | 83.33%                                   |
| 34. Informal school leaders play an important role in the school in improving the performance of professionals and the achievement of students. | 71.05%                                   | 25. The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school's mission and goals.*                                | 80.00%                                   |
| 35. The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles.*                     | 65.79%                                   | 35. The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles.*                 | 76.67%                                   |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both groups rated items 25 (“The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school’s mission and goals”) and 35 (“The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles”) highly. Aponte respondents also acknowledged the importance of

informal school leaders in their building, while the majority of 4 and 5 ratings from Banniman staff support the idea that teacher leaders in their building are given sufficient resources to make meaningful contributions in that capacity.

Respondents rated the following items a 1 or 2 most frequently:

Table 17

*Dimension 3 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 1 or 2 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (n=38)</b>   |  | <b>Banniman (n=30)</b>   |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> |
| 36. Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient school time to permit them to make meaningful contributions to the school.* | 26.32%                                   | 38. Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school.*  | 23.33%                                   |
| 39. New teachers are provided opportunities to fill some school leadership roles.*   | 23.68%                                   | 36. Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient school time to permit them to make meaningful contributions to the school.* | 13.33%                                   |
| 38. Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school.*  | 21.05%                                   | 39. New teachers are provided opportunities to fill some school leadership roles.*   | 13.33%                                   |

Note: \* Top rated item in both groups.

Although prioritized slightly differently, both buildings were consistent in identifying areas of distributed leadership they feel are happening less frequently than others: sufficient time for teacher leaders to make meaningful contributions, veteran teachers filling most leadership roles, and new teachers having opportunities to assume leadership roles.

**Dimension 4: Shared responsibility.** Rating scale items in this dimension focus on various aspects of stakeholder collaboration and the systemic commitment to continuous improvement. On average, 76.32% of respondents rated items in this dimension a 4 or 5, while 9.12% rated items a 1 or 2, 14.56% of respondents rated items a 3.

Table 18  
*Dimension 4 Score Distribution - All Respondents*

|  | 1     | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      |
|--|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 9. Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students' academic performance.*                                     | 0.00% | 0.00%  | 1.47%  | 25.00% | 73.53% |
| 10. Teachers and administrators share accountability for students' academic performance.                                       | 2.94% | 4.41%  | 11.76% | 27.94% | 52.94% |
| 11. School district resources are directed to those areas in which student learning needs to improve most.**                   | 7.35% | 11.76% | 29.41% | 39.71% | 11.76% |
| 12. The school is a learning community that continually improves its effectiveness, learning from both successes and failures. | 0.00% | 8.82%  | 13.24% | 38.24% | 39.71% |

Table 18 - *Continued*

|  | 1             | 2             | 3             | 4             | 5             |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 17. The school's daily and weekly schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues.*   | 0.00%         | 8.82%         | 4.41%         | 32.35%        | 54.41%        |
| 18. School professionals and parents agree on the most effective roles parents can play as partners in their child's education.**  | 2.94%         | 8.82%         | 25.00%        | 51.47%        | 11.76%        |
| 19. The school clearly communicates the "chain of contact" between home and school so parents know whom to contact when they have questions and concerns.  | 0.00%         | 4.41%         | 14.71%        | 48.53%        | 32.35%        |
| 20. The school makes available a variety of data (e.g., school performance) for teachers to use to improve student achievement.*   | 0.00%         | 0.00%         | 4.41%         | 33.82%        | 61.76%        |
| 21. Decisions to change curriculum and instructional programs are based on assessment data.  | 7.35%         | 2.94%         | 23.53%        | 35.29%        | 30.88%        |
| 22. There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making.** | 10.29%        | 10.29%        | 17.65%        | 38.24%        | 23.53%        |
| <b>Average Percentage:</b>   | <b>11.90%</b> | <b>23.66%</b> | <b>40.51%</b> | <b>70.05%</b> | <b>81.15%</b> |

Note: \* Items with greatest percentage of 4 & 5 responses; \*\* Items with

greatest percentage of 1 & 2 responses.

*Dimension 4 Disaggregation: Administrators vs. Non-Administrators.*

Administrators and non-administrators who responded to the DLRS rated the following items most highly (4 or 5 response). Due to the small number of administrators in the survey sample (4), many items in this domain earned 100% response rate of 4 or 5. The items listed below for administrators are the items with both the greatest number of 4 or 5 responses *and* the greatest number of 5 ratings. Both administrators and non-administrators rated items regarding staff expectations of students, time allotted for collaboration, and the availability of academic data very highly.

Table 19

*Dimension 4 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Administrators (n=4)</b>  |  | <b>Non-Administrators (n=64)</b>   |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 9. Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students' academic performance.*                                       | 100%                                     | 9. Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students' academic performance.*                                       | 98.44%                                   |
| 12. The school is a learning community that continually improves its effectiveness, learning from both successes and failures.   | 100%                                     | 20. The school makes available a variety of data (e.g., school performance) for teachers to use to improve student achievement.* | 95.31%                                   |
| 17. The school's daily and weekly schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues.*                   | 100%                                     | 17. The school's daily and weekly schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues.*                   | 85.94%                                   |
| 20. The school makes available a variety of data (e.g., school performance) for teachers to use to improve student achievement.* | 100%                                     |  |  |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Administrators only rated one item in Dimension 3 a 1 or 2:

Table 20

*Dimension 4 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 1 or 2 Ratings*

| <b>Administrators (n=4)</b>   |  | <b>Non-Administrators (n=64)</b>  |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> |
| 22. There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making.* | 25%                                      | 22. There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making.* | 20.31%                                   |
|   |  | 11. School district resources are directed to those areas in which student learning needs to improve most.  | 20.31%                                   |
|   |  | 18. School professionals and parents agree on the most effective roles parents can play as partners in their child's education.   | 12.50%                                   |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both administrators and non-administrators gave low ratings to the item regarding the formal structure for engaging professional staff in the instructional decision making process. Non-administrators also gave low ratings to the items

regarding allocation of district resources and agreement between professional staff and parents on parental roles in their child's education.

*Dimension 4 Disaggregation: Aponte vs. Banniman.* Respondents from Aponte Middle School and Banniman Middle School rated the following items 4 or 5 most frequently:

Table 21

*Dimension 4 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (n=38)</b>   |  | <b>Banniman (n=30)</b>   |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 9. Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students' academic performance.*                                       | 100.00%                                  | 17. The school's daily and weekly schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues.                    | 96.67%                                   |
| 20. The school makes available a variety of data (e.g., school performance) for teachers to use to improve student achievement.* | 94.74%                                   | 9. Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students' academic performance.*                                       | 96.67%                                   |
| 10. Teachers and administrators share accountability for students' academic performance.   | 78.95%                                   | 20. The school makes available a variety of data (e.g., school performance) for teachers to use to improve student achievement.* | 96.67%                                   |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both groups rated items 9 (“Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students’ academic performance”) and 20 (“The school makes available a variety of data (e.g., school performance” for teachers to use to improve student achievement”) very highly. These ratings reflect those of the overall response sample in Table 17, as does the Banniman sample’s rating of item 17 (“The school’s daily and weekly schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues”). Aponte respondents also rated item 10 (“Teachers and administrators share accountability for students’ academic performance”) highly, albeit not at as high a rate as items 9 and 20.

Both groups gave low ratings to items 11 (“School district resources are directed to those areas in which student learning needs to improve most”) and 22 (“There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making”).

Table 22

Dimension 4 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 1 or 2 Ratings

| Aponte (n=38)   |                               | Banniman (n=30)   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Item  | Percentage of 1 & 2 Responses | Item  | Percentage of 1 & 2 Responses |
| 11. School district resources are directed to those areas in which student learning needs to improve most.*   | 26.32%                        | 22. There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making.* | 20.00%                        |
| 22. There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making.* | 21.05%                        | 11. School district resources are directed to those areas in which student learning needs to improve most.*   | 10.00%                        |
| 18. School professionals and parents agree on the most effective roles parents can play as partners in their child's education.   | 18.42%                        | 12. The school is a learning community that continually improves its effectiveness, learning from both successes and failures.  | 10.00%                        |

Note: \* Top rated item in both groups.

**Additional items: School climate.** Items in this section are not part of the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale, but were distributed to respondents in order to gauge their perception of aspects of school climate, including school pride and inclusivity. On average, 78.53% of respondents rated items in this dimension a 4 or 5, while 4.11% rated items a 1 or 2. 17.35% of respondents rated items a 3. Fewer respondents rated items in this section 1 or 2 than in any of the four dimensions on the DLRS.

Table 23  
*School Climate Items Score Distribution - All Respondents*

|   | 1            | 2            | 3             | 4             | 5             |
|---|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 41. Teachers take pride in being part of the school community.*   | 0.00%        | 2.94%        | 11.76%        | 55.88%        | 29.41%        |
| 42. Students take pride in being part of the school community.  | 0.00%        | 4.41%        | 25.00%        | 47.06%        | 23.53%        |
| 43. Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community.** | 0.00%        | 8.82%        | 14.71%        | 39.71%        | 36.76%        |
| 44. Students at this school care about learning.**  | 1.47%        | 2.94%        | 25.00%        | 50.00%        | 20.59%        |
| 45. Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students.*                              | 0.00%        | 0.00%        | 10.29%        | 47.06%        | 42.65%        |
| <b>Average Percentage:</b>  | <b>0.29%</b> | <b>3.82%</b> | <b>17.35%</b> | <b>47.94%</b> | <b>30.59%</b> |

*Note:* \* Items with greatest percentage of 4 & 5 responses; \*\* Items with greatest percentage of 1 & 2 responses.

*School climate disaggregation: Administrators vs. non-administrators.*

Administrators and non-administrators rated the following items 4 or 5 most frequently:

Table 24

*School Climate Items - Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Administrators (n=4)</b>  |  | <b>Non-Administrators (n=64)</b>   |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 43. Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community.* | 100%                                     | 45. Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students.*                             | 89.06%                                   |
| 44. Students at this school care about learning.   | 100%                                     | 41. Teachers take pride in being part of the school community.   | 85.94%                                   |
| 45. Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students.*                             | 100%                                     | 43. Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community.* | 76.56%                                   |

Note: \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both administrators and non-administrators rated items regarding the inclusivity of their schools and the relationships between teachers and students highly. Non-administrators also rated item 41 (“Teachers take pride in being part of the school community”) very highly, while administrators were unanimous in their support of item 44 (“Students at this school care about learning”).

Administrators did not rate any items in this section 1 or 2. Non-administrators gave very few 1 or 2 ratings as well. Item 43 (“Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community”) received the greatest number of 1 or 2 ratings (9.38%), items 44 (“Students at this school care about learning”) and 42 (“Students take pride in being part of the school community”) each received 3 ratings of 1 or 2 (4.69% each), and item 41 (“Teachers take pride in being part of the school community”) received 2 ratings of 1 or 2 (3.13%). No non-administrator rated item 45 (“Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students”) 1 or 2.

*School climate disaggregation: Aponte vs. Banniman.* Respondents from Aponte Middle School and Banniman Middle School rated the following items 4 or 5 most frequently:

Table 25

*Dimension 4 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 4 or 5 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (n=38)</b>   |  | <b>Banniman (n=30)</b>  |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>   | <b>Percentage of 4 &amp; 5 Responses</b> |
| 45. Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students.* | 89.47%                                   | 45. Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students.*                            | 90.00%                                   |
| 41. Teachers take pride in being part of the school community.*                    | 84.21%                                   | 41. Teachers take pride in being part of the school community.*   | 86.67%                                   |
| 44. Students at this school care about learning.                                   | 84.21%                                   | 43. Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community. | 83.33%                                   |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Both groups rated items 45 (“Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students”) and 41 (“Teachers take pride in being part of the school community”) very highly.

Respondents rated the following items 1 or 2 most frequently:

Table 26

*Dimension 4 - Items with Greatest Percentage of 1 or 2 Ratings*

| <b>Aponte (n=38)</b>   |  | <b>Banniman (n=30)</b>   |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> | <b>Item</b>  | <b>Percentage of 1 &amp; 2 Responses</b> |
| 43. Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community.* | 13.16%                                   | 44. Students at this school care about learning.*  | 6.67%                                    |
| 41. Teachers take pride in being part of the school community.*  | 5.26%                                    | 42. Students take pride in being part of the school community.   | 3.33%                                    |
| 42. Students take pride in being part of the school community.   | 5.26%                                    | 43. Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community.* | 3.33%                                    |

*Note:* \* Top rated item in both groups.

Neither group gave a 1 or 2 rating to item 45 (“Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students”), and the only item in the table above to receive more than 2 ratings of 1 or 2 is item 43 (“Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community”), from the respondents at Aponte Middle School.

## Qualitative Method

**Participants.** Interviews were conducted with fourteen WSD employees between June 2, 2014 and July 2, 2014. Interviewees consisted of the superintendent and assistant superintendent, the building principals and assistant principals from both middle schools, and eight non-administrative staff members (teachers and other non-instructional certificated staff). Of the twelve building-based interviewees, five are based in Banniman Middle School and seven are based in Aponte Middle School. Interviews were conducted both in person and via synchronous online videoconference software; all interviews were audio-recorded and all but one were video-recorded due to technical difficulties with the video recording device.

**Findings.** Initial open coding of interview transcripts and fieldnotes yielded 80 unique codes; subsequent focused coding eventually raised that number to 93. In the axial coding stage, these 93 codes were further analyzed to identify themes. Nine major themes emerged from this analysis, which were further reviewed and refined into two primary themes:

- Professional practice is deliberate and purpose-driven.
- Leadership roles are not restricted to formal leaders.

The primary unifying concept to emerge from these analyses, and the one from which the story of Wellbrook School District will be generated, is that Wellbrook's practice of distributed leadership engenders community and organizational unity of purpose

via a common mission and vision while allowing for localized best practices in achieving them.

### **Themes**

**Professional practice is deliberate and purpose-driven.** Formal leaders in Wellbrook School District are well versed in the philosophy of distributed leadership, and actively incorporate its principles in their daily practice. The overarching mission of equipping all students with the emotional and intellectual tools to thrive in a global society drives all initiatives. Measurable goals aligned with the mission statement are set at both the district and building levels, and progress theretoward is measured via both quantitative data analysis and qualitative practitioner reflection. Stakeholders in the district value collaboration, and to that end, organizational decision-making is shared, not delegated. Finally, professional learning and improvement is highly valued in the district, and teachers are supported as they seek to learn not only from outside resources, but from each other as well.

Table 27

*Axial & Selective Coding of Interview Transcripts and Fieldnotes*

| <b>Emergent Themes</b>  | <b>Refined Themes</b>  | <b>Theoretical Concept</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Climate and culture are consciously considered and deliberately addressed.</p> <p>Decisions are shared and solutions are implemented at the local level.</p> <p>Distributed leadership is a philosophy that is consciously embraced by district leaders.</p> <p>Improvement efforts are driven by a combination of data analysis and practitioner reflection.</p> <p>Mission and vision focus and drive initiatives.</p> <p>Professional learning is an embedded, ongoing process that is highly valued and thoughtfully programmed.</p> | <p>Professional practice is deliberate and purpose-driven.</p> | <p>Wellbrook School District's practice of distributed leadership engenders community and organizational unity of purpose via a common mission and vision while allowing for localized best practices in achieving them.</p> |
| <p>Formal leaders help establish the culture of the school through example.</p> <p>Teacher leadership is not only promoted, but also supported.</p> <p>The school actively involves multiple stakeholders, both internal and external, as leaders.</p>  | <p>Leadership roles are not restricted to formal leaders.</p>  |  |

*Distributed leadership is a philosophy that is consciously embraced by district leaders.* Formal leaders in Wellbrook know that one person – whether a principal, or a superintendent, or a department supervisor – needs the support and talents of colleagues in order to best do the job:

[When I was a principal] I had my individual leadership team. I had my support staff, and I always knew I couldn't do it by myself. Any principal cannot do the role by themselves, you need a nucleus of people. And it wasn't until then I got to this role, assistant superintendent, that I then said on a bigger scale...you still need a support team [...] One thing that I'm seeing with the more successful administrators is that they have distributed their leadership to the people that have the talents to do that, which is a very crucial, important step because you have to be able to see and recognize what you need, what the priority is, and match that with the person that has the best skill you need at that time.

This commitment to distributed leadership is shared by the building principals interviewed for this study. In discussing the poster that illustrates Banniman Middle School's vision statement and supporting principles, Banniman's principal indicated that he initially brought the idea to his building's Leadership Team organized as a "crazy Venn diagram that I came up with that was just not good" and asked, "What do you guys think of this? I mean, how is this all going to come together?" The team then discussed and refined the ideas and the visuals to look more like a building with the roof (vision statement) supported by five columns (the Pillars of Success). The students, staff, parents, and community of Banniman Middle School are represented on the base of the pillars, as the foundation upon which success is built. As the

principal stated, "I would have *never* come up with that on my own!" While some may misinterpret distributed leadership as delegation of responsibility, Banniman's principal refutes that idea:

Distributed leadership is not delegated responsibility, it's shared responsibility. It develops a shared respect because we have shared goals that we are both responsible for... the culture can't shift to, 'we are all fractioned off and have our own responsibilities and if we don't get them done we are under the gun'.

The superintendent's perspective is also that the district is "only as successful as our principals are, and the principals are only as successful as the teachers are, and the students... get success from the teachers". To the end of fostering distributed leadership in Wellbrook, "we do offer continual leadership training because we believe in developing leaders... we are only as successful as the principals in the buildings and them creating leaders within their building, so we are constantly doing book studies." While there is currently not a formalized prescriptive component of training for administrators new to the district, administrators are continually conducting book studies, and

when a new administrator starts, any book we've read, I will give them the book and I always say, 'I realize that you've got a lot on your plate at this point, but this is stuff that we believe in and this is where we are' ... Even when I interview them, I have that discussion with them: what's our model, what do we believe in, and what we are looking for as a leader within our district.

In order to support the spread of distributed leadership throughout the district, Wellbrook's assistant superintendent indicated an interest in developing a more thorough, formal distributed leadership component to new administrator training, due largely to a recent "a-ha moment... I see some principals that are trying to do good work and the ones that are trying to do it alone are the unsuccessful ones." In comparing buildings in the district where leadership is successful and not successful, she said:

In my opinion, I think it was unsuccessful leadership, but because again it was the principal who did not unleash talent, didn't distribute leadership. He was trying to do it all himself, and as a result you had low morale, you had teachers complaining, teachers who felt they had great ideas and they weren't being heard.

Banniman's principal echoed the importance of distributed leadership:

...think about people first. All of your programs and initiatives will work if you think about distributed leadership and buy-in first, getting people's perspective, listening to what they have to say, and want to do something about it, inviting them to the table, empowering people. This is a school for teachers and kids and I think teachers are ignored a lot. I think for lots of people's careers they are ignored.

This principal also drew an interesting distinction between the managerial component of school leadership and the instructional leadership component, and how distributed leadership facilitates that for the benefit of everyone:

I believe great principals should be innovators... and you can't free up your time to be an innovator if you're always bogged down with the management

of stuff. [...] An example of that is, we are starting from the ground up and building what we are calling a Learning Lab School; it's never been done before. [...] We are starting the year with 15 methods students next year and we've partnered with University of Delaware. They've done faculty meetings and full-day trainings on the co-teaching model. It works with our inclusive practices. It gets our faculty into the classroom and the university to teach undergraduate students. It gets me in front of the students, undergrad students and student teachers. It gives us a leg up on hiring. So it's a very innovative way for us to connect with the university in terms of pre-service programming. I spent my time going to lunches and dinners and coffee with university people to work on what that model looks like in our school and that's what I mean by innovation.

Interestingly, when asked about their perceptions of the initial DASL grant for distributed leadership, very few interviewees were even aware of the grant's existence, despite having worked in the district at the time of its implementation in 2005. When asked about the status of any follow-up conversations about the grant since 2005, the superintendent replied

There have been three Secretaries of Education since then, so I think the focus has changed... I don't see them delivering that or giving that grant at this point anywhere else or having that discussion... it would be driven by the district or by the district leadership.

This is consistent with the original terms of the grant, which allowed for a three-year period of culture-building before DEDOE/DASL withdrew support.

***Mission and vision focus and drive initiatives.*** The majority of interviewees spoke to the importance of the mission and vision of both their building and district in

their professional practice. One teacher indicated that “while we develop our own individual goals as a building, there are certain non-negotiables, for lack of a better term, that do come from the district that we work towards”; this sentiment was echoed by multiple interviewees. These “non-negotiables” come from a strategic plan developed four years ago, as described by the superintendent:

We created a strategic plan called *15 for 2015* which has four overarching goals...[with] 15 different measurements [which are] the areas that we focus on that need improvement or need to be driven as far as achievement. So from that each building is given a school success plan and within the school success plan are those 15 measurements.

While the specific plan varied from building to building, all interviewees had slightly different impressions of their roles in helping to further the mission of equipping all students with the emotional and intellectual tools to thrive in a global society. One teacher spoke to the importance of independence:

I'd really like them to be not just independent thinkers, I want them to be problem solvers. Instead of asking me, ‘What do I do next?’, I say, ‘What do you think you should do next?’, and hav[e] them continue to question and not rely so much on me. I really want them to...always ask questions and to always keep pushing themselves... A lot of them say I challenge them, which I was thrilled with.

In reference to the emotional supports she provides her students, another teacher said, “I can’t say we’re just all about academics but we’re lifting kids up in a positive way across the board.” An administrator echoed this sentiment:

We're constantly looking at the vision and mission statements... When you talk about being a critical thinker and communicator, when I'm working with the kids' disciplinary issues, we talk it through. It not just a 'you're suspended, hit the road'. We talk about what could you have done, what led to this, what were your feelings up to this point, when would you have stopped this process before it reached this point.

Another teacher focused on the ways in which their curriculum helps prepare students to thrive in the global community:

One of my primary goals is to have the children ready with their technology skills, software... I just know that challenging our students to make them critical thinkers and to have 21<sup>st</sup> century skills is important and one of my important roles.

Professional development is also instrumental in advancing Wellbrook's mission and vision:

The district initiative... is they want to create global citizens and lifelong learners and I think all of the strategies and professional development that we are doing is to promote [Wellbrook's] overall goal.

The variety of responses spoke to the multitude of roles each person can play in how the district prepares its students to become global citizens. True to the philosophy of distributed leadership, each person brings their unique talents to the table to make a whole greater than the sum of its parts. This idea was not simply given lip service, relegated to strategic plan documents and the district website. This approach had a tangible, positive impact on the staff. One teacher believes that the mission and vision "sets the pace that this is the mission of our school. It keeps

everyone...focused.” For employees whose time at Banniman and Aponte predates the current principals, there is a stark contrast between the present and a time before there were such building-level alignments with the district mission and vision:

I’ve felt in the last two or three years [since distributed leadership was implemented more consistently in his building] there’s been a broader sense of us as a school having a unified mission... there is more of a sense like we have a method, a mission as a school that I haven’t seen as much before.

In describing the state of the school upon his arrival in the position, one principal noted,

Prior to this year, I don’t think there was a vision, I don’t think there were instructional goals... Goals weren’t set with teachers, goals weren’t set with kids... The quick assessment was that there were a large group of people here that wanted direction, they wanted somebody to come in and provide some kind of path forward, but then there were also this group of people that liked being left alone and sort of doing their own thing.

District initiatives such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Learning Focused Strategies (LFS), increasing student engagement, peer walk-through observations, and curricular alignment with Common Core (prior to being state mandated) all originated from the *15 for 2015* strategic plan, and will be discussed in more detail under other themes in the study.

***Improvement efforts are driven by a combination of data analysis and practitioner reflection.*** In education, the term “data-driven decision making” is frequently associated with standardized test scores. In Wellbrook School District,

standardized test scores represent just one data point amongst several in the school improvement process. At the district level, administrators review data pertaining to overall school improvement at the annual administrative retreat. The Wellbrook assistant superintendent explained:

Every retreat, we look at the data from the year. We have a strategic plan, which is our overall goals for the district. We have a progress plan which has data, it has the person who's responsible for that area, and we have measureable targets. So with that said, every year, we will have our overview from our research guide who will stand up and say, 'This is how we did this year, this is what we said we wanted to do – look at where we measure from our goals from last year'.

The assistant superintendent's interest in seeing the distributed leadership philosophy grow throughout the district will start in earnest at this year's administrative retreat. All school administrators in Wellbrook recently completed a survey about their own leadership skills and practice and, under the guidance of the Franklin Covey organization, will spend time at the retreat reviewing results. The assistant superintendent stated that

...that's going to be our baseline as to where we are with our leadership skills. We're going to take that and create action plans moving forward into this next school year, and I'm hoping that will be the grass root of distributed leadership, because from that, we will see the data as to what's needed.

In addition to leadership skills, the district also considers the aforementioned standardized test scores such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS), and Advanced Placement (AP) to

identify areas of strength and weakness in student performance, which informs academic programming and instructional improvement. Wellbrook staff also report regularly analyzing data related to the district's mentoring program (attendance and hours logged), student second language acquisition (second language course enrollment), parent engagement time, Response to Intervention (RTI) programming (progress monitoring and benchmark data), failure prevention (graduation and drop-out rates, extracurricular involvement data), school climate (staff, student, and parent surveys), Positive Behavior Support programming (survey data and discipline referrals), extracurricular programming (enrollment data), and instructional strategies (benchmark data and observation). Data points to help inform improvement efforts seem to be abundant in Wellbrook School District. In addition to survey data and test scores, interviewees report drawing upon collaborative, reflective conversations to flesh out solutions from data points on paper to the classroom, primarily in Professional Learning Communities [PLCs] and Leadership Teams.

Administrative walk-throughs are a practice recently implemented in some of the buildings in Wellbrook, including Aponte and Banniman Middle Schools. These walk-throughs happen frequently throughout the school year; one principal indicated that “we did 1,005 walk-throughs. Last year we did 865. So we set goals on that so teachers can get real time feedback on their instruction.” One teacher gave a detailed overview of her experience with walk-throughs:

[The principal] is my immediate supervisor... but [the assistant principal] has walked through and given us feedback. They email you feedback within that

day – formative feedback about what they saw, what they liked, and [the principal] says that he really hopes it spreads a conversation, that it's not, 'this is what I saw' and that's the end of it, but 'what do you think about that? Would you do it differently?' He'll sometimes offer advice and say it's advice, you take it or leave it at your discretion. It's not a mandate, which is good.

One principal gave an example of the kind of informal feedback he might give:

We'll say... 'You could have used some collaborative structures today with this – might have made it more engaging for kids. If you haven't done so, go see [*teacher name*].' You don't even have to see her teach to see the collaborative structures in her classroom.

This framework provides the opportunity for an administrator and teacher to have a conversation about improving professional practice in an informal setting, which reduces the potential for the teacher feeling reprimanded, or that they have received a negative formal observation. This teacher continued:

[The walk-through observations are] usually five to ten minutes... and the feedback comes back – it's not a form or anything. Usually they're an email in paragraph form or sometimes bullets. They do have an announced sort of skill that they're looking for, so at the beginning of the year it was purely student engagement – that is what they were looking for, and that was really all they were focusing on, because a lot of teachers expressed concern.

There's always a concern when there's random feedback coming back; they wanted to know if the goal was student behavior, if it was the assignment they were working on, was it planning and preparation, were they coming to see our lesson plans? So they do announce to us what it is that they're looking for, and then you get feedback...within about 24 hours. I do think that some

of the feedback can lead to conversations where either the teacher initiates the conversation or the administrator does top down, and then other times it kind of stops at the feedback if it's pretty straightforward.

The specific skills targeted in the walk-throughs are, once again, determined by areas of need already identified. When asked how valuable she found these short observations and what impact they have had on her teaching, her response was

...it's been validating. The majority of the feedback has been positive...it's been questions, more or less. [...] His feedback, there were a couple of positive bullets and then his question was, "Do students have a copy of the map or is it just posted on the board, and do you think it would be beneficial for them to have a copy? Should they fill it in as you go, should it be pre-filled in? [...] I have [made changes based on feedback]. I was a row person, so up until this year we sat in rows, and they'd partner frequently but it was very teacher-directed. This year I tried tables because cooperative learning is one of our goals. One of the Learning Focus Strategies is this idea of turning and talking and distributed summarizing...throughout the lesson. It was much easier to implement some of those strategies in tables and I wouldn't go back, so that was a big change for me. And I tend to like a very organized kind of quiet room, and so the sounds of students working was something I had to get used to, and once I saw that they could come in and walk through in a loud classroom and not have anything negative to say about that, it increased my comfort with some of those lessons where they are working on the floor in groups.

This teacher was able to use the feedback from the walk-through to make a slight, but significant change in the physical layout of her classroom, which lent itself more to the collaborative nature of the Learning Focus Strategy she described. The

recommendation was also in line with one of the building's instructional goals, cooperative learning.

While the nature of the walk-through strives to focus any subsequent feedback and discussion on improving learning and not employee reprimand, at least one teacher seemed to take umbrage to a walk-through:

There was one particular teacher who received a walk-through... when the administrator walked in there was a few students who were very off task; one was sleeping in the classroom. [...] [The administrator] emailed this teacher a list of student engagement activities and the teacher got extremely offended and, you know – 'I've been teaching for 15 years, I know how to engage students', and she walked in first thing in the morning and she was very offended that [the administrator] was sending her teaching strategies. So ever since that moment she's had a very negative attitude about [the administrator] since the beginning of the school year, when to me, the [administrator] was trying to help. But she looked at it as being attacked, more or less.

The teacher who relayed this story also had a different perspective on the nature of the walk-throughs' focus:

Let's say the second week in September, they are going to be on the lookout for summarizing strategies, and it's kind of sneaky. They might not tell you what they're looking for, but they'll go to your classroom for ten minutes and they'll really only be looking for summarizing strategies. So you could have awesome questioning, but if you don't have summarizing and that's what they're looking for it will be noted. It's not a referral, you don't get in trouble or anything, but they will just note, 'we didn't see any summarizing strategies'. But the next week they could be looking for higher-order thinking, so sometimes they don't tell you what they're looking for.

These two teachers work in the same building, so at the very least there appears to be some disparity in how staff members view the walk-throughs. Another teacher made comments throughout her interview that seemed to indicate dissatisfaction with the practices of the current administration, particularly the walk-throughs, such as “our previous leadership was a little less micro-managers [*sic*]. [...] Our old principal let teachers be teachers, sort of, he didn’t watch over us.” As a result of the previous principal’s practice, she said, “...there were people that really weren’t held accountable for their work, and maybe got a little lazy... and a little settled in what they were doing.” Despite these comments, she spoke highly of the principal, saying that he “really challenged us to really be the best we can be” and that in her observation conference “he was great...real easy to talk to... I believe that he has really challenged us.” When asked about how her practice has changed from last year to the current year, she said,

I always have my plans in my plan book but they probably weren’t as detailed as they are this year. [...] I was much more on the ball this year than I was last year – I can safely admit, I can honestly admit that. [...] I was on the ball, the kids learned more. Last year I was a little more laid back, I let the kids slide, you know what I mean?

Reflection is a critical component of professional practice in Wellbrook.

Walk-throughs are designed to get staff members thinking critically about their own practice, whether it is a principal conducting a walk-through in a classroom or a district administrator conducting a building walk-through to spur a conversation with

the building principal and Leadership Team about daily operations, which the Wellbrook superintendent and assistant superintendent do twice monthly in each building. On the district level, case studies, discussion, and reflection comprise a great deal of ongoing leadership training. In discussing the results of a recent school climate survey, one building principal shared that he told his staff, “We’re not perfect, it was a trying beginning of the school year, but we’re going to work over the summer, identify areas we need to improve, and we’ll come back and we’ll be better administrators.” Fieldnotes recorded during a review of this interview recording observed the principal’s willingness to own up to the shortcomings noted in the survey results, rather than deflecting criticism by focusing on the largely positive results in other areas of the survey. This critical, reflective behavior was noted in many interview sessions, namely in the degree to which interviewees appeared thoughtful and deliberate in their responses to questions about professional practice.

*Decisions are shared and solutions are implemented at the local level.* The primary driver for building-based decision making is the building Leadership Team. Each building in the school district has a team comprised of the building administrators and non-administrator volunteers – mostly teachers and department chairs, but also non-instructional staff such as guidance counselors and school psychologists. Aponte Middle School includes the main office secretary on their team (one teacher noted, “she speaks for the support staff of the school, like the custodians, secretaries, lunch staff...”), and staff and parents in both buildings have

standing invitations to attend, though it seems parent attendance at these meetings has been sporadic at best, according to an interviewee who sits on the building Leadership Team. Interviewees in both buildings feel that all groups in the school are well-represented on their respective leadership teams, with the exception of the Special Education staff at Aponte (interviewees expect this to be rectified next school year). In both buildings, the Leadership Team serves two primary purposes: decision-making and information dissemination.

The existence of the Leadership Teams pre-dates the current administration at both the building and district level, going back at least as far as the implementation of the DASL grant in 2005, if not earlier. The Leadership Teams convene monthly (or sooner if necessary) to review data as they pertain to school improvement initiatives and to discuss any issue that might benefit from multiple stakeholder input: initiatives coming down from DEDOE, school improvement initiatives from the district office, or concerns and suggestions from parents, students, or building staff. One interviewee who is also on her building's Leadership Team described the process:

If there's any kind of building-level changes then usually the administrators bring forth their concerns or questions or suggestions to the team leaders. We give our feedback from very different perspectives, from each grade level's perspective as well as related arts' perspectives. We think about the kids involved, we think about lots of different factors relating to these decisions, and once we narrow down our answers we'll then bring that information to the respective departments. For example, if there's a decision about scheduling for next year – that was a very recent decision – the Leadership Team

developed two potential schedules of how time should be divided next school year. The grade level leader brought it back to each grade to vote, and then we decided as a school what should be done about scheduling.

It is worth noting that when it comes to information dissemination, the point is not for the Leadership Team member to simply report back to the team or grade what decision the team made. As one principal put it,

I don't want them to go with an agenda and just go down. 'We discussed this, we discussed this...'. I want them to say, 'We discussed this, what do you think?' And then maybe have a little bit of their own conversation, as opposed to just reporting back information... Just making sure everybody somewhat feels part of the discussion.

Interestingly, this was not a unanimous perception among all interviewees, some of whom indicated, "By the time it gets to the staff, the decisions have really been made", "Ultimately the principals do make the final decision, but like hearing our impact, so they tend to go with the majority, but...they're not afraid to make decisions themselves if they think it's in the best interest of the school", and "...that's something my principal really wanted so we knew it was going to happen. We provided feedback, the pros and the cons, but ultimately we knew that was not really up to us...". Multiple interviewees also acknowledged that some staff in their buildings perceived the Leadership Team concept negatively, specifically the idea that they are "a secret group behind closed doors." One building principal even referenced this perception, to which he responded, "There's 15 people here – what can be secret?!" In reference to the spread of decision-making, this principal also

said, unprompted, “Really, very few decisions were my decision. It all came through the Leadership Team... at this school there is a strong group of teacher leaders, so most of it was making decisions through that team.” A Leadership Team member in another building offered his perspective on the process:

Things are discussed, and there’s a sense of how much buy-in, what’s the best way to get buy-in? How can we get people on-board with a particular initiative, for example, without making them feel like this is coming down from the principal, a ‘you’ve got to do it or else’ sort of thing.

One principal spoke further to the idea of buy-in as it relates to the Leadership Team:

Buy-in looks like this: we go to the table and say, Leader in Me is a great program. It’s working in other schools, the data is clear. Maybe it’s for us, maybe it’s not. What do you guys want to do? Want to take a look? Maybe they didn’t want to take a look; ‘we’re not interested right now.’ Okay... Once in a while you have to force something and say, ‘Guys, we are going to go look at this’, or you have to say, ‘This is the decision, now tell me how it’s going to work.’ [...] How does that look at [our school]; what does that look like? What can I expect when I go in the classroom? And teachers will tell you what that is... [As a formal leader] you need to step back...and get out of people’s way, and I think that’s a distributed leadership model that has buy-in. That’s empowering people to make the right decisions.

In order to remain connected with the teaching staff and consider their feedback, district office staff actively seek their input through surveys, during building walk-throughs, or in Chat & Chew sessions held by the superintendent, during which district staff and district-level administrators eat and discuss topics of

the staff's choosing. One external mandate that Wellbrook has had to navigate has been the implementation of Common Core standards and all that entails. This was a topic that came up recently in the superintendent's conversations with staff; his impression from their conversation was that the teaching staff was generally

very thankful that we started that process when we did [years in advance of it being mandated], because the state actually just started it this last year. They felt that they were ahead of the curve and more prepared. To be honest, we saw real changes in instruction this year. So one of the things they said is they would like more resources that are aligned with the Common Core; rather than them have to go look for them, we provide more resources... and I had also heard that from the principals who have talked to the teachers as well, so that wasn't a shocking thing to me.

State standardized testing is another external non-negotiable mandate with which all school districts in Delaware must comply. Fortunately for the staff and students of Wellbrook, the state provides time windows during which testing can be accomplished and does not prescribe specific days. Wellbrook distributes the responsibility of the testing schedule out to the building principals, who further distribute it amongst the people who will actually be implementing it: the teachers and guidance counselors. What works for one building may or may not work for another building, so rather than try to force everyone onto a one-size-fits-all approach, each building has the autonomy to "take a different route, but we are getting to the same spot."

In speaking to the impact of distributed leadership on school climate, the Wellbrook superintendent notes that “pay is one thing, but teachers want to go somewhere where their opinion is valued and they feel like they are part of the team and part of its success... and that’s what happens here.” This idea was echoed in another interviewee response:

The teachers just want to have a feeling of they’re making a difference, and that they count, and that they’re going to be listened to... I might not always agree with my administration but I respect them and they respect me for my thoughts.

Another teacher indicated that the distributed leadership framework in her building has made “teachers more relaxed and made the staff more open to changes because...our voices are being heard and people are more likely to open up and be willing to work through those changes that are necessary.” This product of distributed leadership cannot be underestimated, as it has a significant impact on the climate and culture of the buildings and district.

***Climate and culture are consciously considered and deliberately addressed.***

In the distributed leadership model, climate and culture are not ignored or left to chance to develop as they may. Relationships and trust are central to the collaborative nature of distributed leadership, and relationships do not grow in a vacuum. Teachers cannot just be collaborative once a month at the Leadership Team meetings; there must be a philosophy of sharing and working together that pervades the atmosphere. The Wellbrook superintendent believes that

distributed leadership is a culture that has to be established, and it's established on trust, and you know, anytime with trust, it's hard to earn but easy to lose, and I think that you have to continually work on it. It's like a marriage or anything... you continually work on that relationship.

Part of developing that trust includes having clearly communicated common expectations and values. In discussing the recent change in her building's administrative team, one teacher said, "I think teachers are excited for leadership. I think the administrators are much more assertive, but in a positive way. They make their expectations clear to staff and I think that was lacking before." Another teacher described the new administrative team's impact on morale as "we have two people who work very well together, have the same vision in mind for the school, and the same expectations for teachers." Still another teacher contrasted the culture of her building under the previous administration and the current one:

In the past, teachers could get away with doing a lot less, and I think a lot of teachers got very complacent and now there is just a very high demand for exceptional teaching. I think that's where a lot of the weaknesses have been identified, is through these walk-throughs and high expectations.

This was corroborated by another teacher: "The former administration did not have structure, they didn't have rules, so when [the new building administrators] came in, [they] are very structured people... it's taking a while to build that trust." The new emphasis on walk-throughs and regular constructive feedback has added an "accountability piece" that is holding staff to higher expectations than previously, sending the message that the administrators "want you to be the best teacher you can

be. They also want the students to learn as much as they can and they want us to challenge our students.” One teacher described her building’s culture as “very structured...you always know what to expect, you know what [the principal’s] expectations are.”

As overarching cultural expectations are established and maintained, the day-to-day climate, or morale, of the school adjusts accordingly. In discussing changes from the previous building administration to the current, one teacher identified morale-building as “a need” which has “improved since [the new building administrators have] gotten here. It feels like it’s a goal for the staff and the administrators, so I think it’s been received very well.” She continued, “I do think there is a good climate at the school. I feel like there’s respect for what everyone does and a genuine interest in what they’re doing.” While there have been some socially-based initiatives to raise morale (“we’ve had more social hours, we’ve done the Yankee swap at Christmas, the carnival...”), those are finite, fleeting experiences that generally do very little to maintain a positive climate by themselves. To this point, one interviewee stated

Do people want a positive note in their mailbox? Yeah, it’s nice. Do people want... breakfast once in a while? Yeah. Do they want me to say thank you? Yes. I’ve done all that stuff; that still hasn’t improved morale. I think what gets at morale are all the expectations... it’s important that we have certain expectations, but it can’t change every two years.

While Wellbrook cannot stop the changing and increasing mandates coming down from the state, what they can – and have – done is to be mindful of the tasks asked of teachers and modified requirements so as to try to keep focus more on teaching and learning and less on paperwork. By reducing required paperwork and making more efficient use of face-to-face meeting time (“I totally eliminated delivering information at [faculty] meetings; I do that through e-mail”), the staff of Wellbrook has been able to focus their professional time on the business of improving instruction. Formal leaders have also been flexible in meeting state-required DCAS testing mandates – both building principals stated they have distributed the scheduling of that monumental task to their guidance counselors and grade-level team leaders, who they feel are better equipped to make decisions that best meet the unique needs of each team than they are. That has not gone unnoticed by staff; those who mentioned it appreciated that their formal leaders recognized and appreciated the strain they were under, and were proactive in improving the situation. Most interviewees felt that having a consistent professional culture based on trust, communication, and collaboration goes much further to improving morale than “bagels and cards in their mailbox.”

One way to build trust in an organization is to make sure that all voices are heard, even dissenting ones. In one building, the Leadership Team has “targeted specific people who are the negative force in there and we are trying to actively bring them more into the fold” and are “looking at those five percent of people who are

always going to be against everything... to give them a voice.” Participants believe this helps to battle the perception of secretive Leadership Teams or certain staff members receiving preferential treatment because of their support of an initiative. They felt this sends a clear message that all staff members are valued equally and that conflict is a natural, healthy part of growth. This speaks to a collaborative culture that all interviewees referenced. The superintendent spoke to his own growth on the topic of healthy conflict:

I used to think when I did a Leadership Team meeting... if no one asked any questions and we went through the agenda, that was a successful meeting. But I really found out quickly that when you have discussions and you may have disagreements and you’re able to have those back-and-forth discussions and come up with the best solution that’s truly the best for kids, that’s a more effective leadership team. [...] When you have those conflicts and you have that trust... and know that [another team member] is not going to be mad at me because I disagreed with him... he knows what my true intention is as a leader – that I’m trying to voice my opinion on what’s best for kids. I’m not looking out for [myself], I’m looking out for kids, and everyone is in that same agreement.

According to participants, approaching conflict from the perspective of finding ways to best serve children, as opposed to feeling personally attacked or diminished, has yielded positive results in Wellbrook. As a result of distributed leadership practices, “we had some of the grumpiest people tell us that this was their best year ever.

Somebody said today to an outsider, ‘You want to come work here. The grass is greener.’” Another person in this focus group added, “What was cool was that if you

knew him two years ago, it would have been a totally different message.” He elaborated:

What’s cool is when you see people who are... overly grumpy, or beat down by education... when people come back and say, ‘I’ve been failing 20 kids a year for 17 years. I’ve never been asked why, and now I looked at it, and I looked at my data, and realized... This is the best year I’ve had teaching ever; I wish I had done this every year!’

The same data-driven approach to addressing climate and culture can be seen in the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program in place at Banniman Middle School, as described by one interviewee. Under this framework, discipline referral data are analyzed for problem-solving purposes and positive behaviors are rewarded, in both students and staff. An example of the PBS approach to climate can be found in Banniman Middle School’s cafeteria. In reviewing discipline referral data, the PBS committee noticed a pattern of many referrals coming in immediately following lunch. Rather than continue to hand out consequence after consequence, the PBS committee developed more positive solutions:

[We had] discussions with the team and challenge them to think – What are some things they might do to increase the structure of that time, since they’re having so many discipline referrals on that period? So we made it a point for teachers to go down and pick up their kids from the lunch room, either by team or having them come up with teachers at strategic points on their return to their instructional areas, so that kids would come back more grouped and less crazy. Also, a lot of the classes opted for before lunch, having kids take their books to the next period class, so that there was one less transition that students had to make, so they could just go directly into their class after lunch

and they wouldn't have to go to the locker and remove books. That was such a time of all the excitement from lunch, then it spills over into the hallway... seemed pretty effective.

Making slight alterations to the environment led to a reduction in discipline referrals, which leads to improved climate and student-teacher relationships, and also sends a message about broader behavioral expectations without being punitive. Beyond that example, the PBS committee developed a reward schedule that students can earn through demonstrated positive behavior (e.g., an end-of-the-year trip to the movies for all students who received zero discipline referrals during the year). The PBS team at Banniman also developed staff awards to recognize the positive contributions of various staff members throughout the year. A survey of staff conducted by the building PBS committee indicated the desire for more recognition of staff. In response to the survey data,

PBS committee came up and said, 'We'd like to recognize staff every month. Two people are going to select two other teachers to recognize two other teachers, then those teachers will then have to pass that along, and so on', and then [the principal] and I jumped on and said, 'Well let's make an award for ourselves [to give], too!'

As with bagels and thank-you notes, the awards system, while nice, does not sustain the culture in daily operations. The collaborative approach taken to decision-making, discussed earlier, is embedded in Aponte and Banniman Middle Schools.

Teachers meet regularly in PLCs to discuss student progress and concerns, to plan together, and to "increase the rigor of what we do". One interviewee described this as

“sacred time” for professional collaboration that “helped with morale” when it was instituted four years prior. Teachers are not simply asked to collaborate without guidance, however; the data review process of the PLCs was initially supported by data coaches hired to come in and help teachers understand data “to ensure that we were using that to the best of our ability and truly changing instruction.” Non-instructional staff members such as school psychologists and guidance counselors also attend these PLC meetings in order to discuss and brainstorm solutions to social-emotional concerns. Collaboration is such an integral part of professional practice in Wellbrook that “it’s hard to hide”, as one interviewee joked.

At the heart of every classroom, professional community, and committee are the human beings who comprise the students, staff, and community of Wellbrook School District. One interviewee said, “You can’t have distributed leadership in a bad culture.” The relationships that exist between these people, regardless of their individual role, are what drive the respective cultures of Banniman and Aponte Middle School. Interviewees were unanimous in describing the relationship between staff and students in both schools as positive. Comments such as, “Every teacher there cares about their students’ success” and “my team is phenomenal with [knowing how to relate to different students]” stand out among the more generic positive descriptions of the staff-student relationships. One interviewee remarked about the nature of middle school teachers:

I think middle school teachers are some of the best teachers out there, because they care about the kid but they also understand the content. At the high

school level they are so zeroed in on the content they forget there's a human being sitting in the desk, and then I think sometimes at the elementary school... you want to worry about the kids and their feelings and all that, but you need to get down to business, too. So middle school, you tend to get the best of both worlds and I think many of my teachers do. I think it's a good staff; I think they care about kids.

Interviewee descriptions of relationships among staff members varied; descriptions were generally positive and collegial, but physical and social isolation as barriers to improving relationships and collaboration seemed to be a common theme in one building which is shaped like a capital letter "E", with each arm representing a hallway (or "pod") for each grade level six through eight. One interviewee related a story from when her building's 2013-2014 Teacher of the Year was announced:

When [she] was named, we were sitting at lunch and one of my colleagues said, 'Well, who's that?' I kind of laughed... it was very foreign to me how you work in the building for four years and you don't know all the staff.

A seventh grade teacher described her perspective on the layout of the school:

I like the teachers I work with, but the way our school is set up, it's divided into pods... I would never go down to the eighth grade pod or the sixth grade pod because I have no need to. So that does kind of separate the staff's ability to even communicate with each other throughout the day, because we are so segregated by grade level.

Another teacher in that building acknowledged that improving staff relationships has been an ongoing topic of discussion on the Leadership Team:

We realized that we as a school need to do a better job of improving a lot of those relationships... To me... the seventh grade pod is a black hole. I know nothing about what they do. I hardly know those teachers. [...] that's kind of the feeling, you're stuck in a pod and you don't see anybody, you don't interact with anybody outside of your pod, so a lot of negative ideas are thought of about different people in different areas, when we really don't know.

A sense of organizational unity is hard to achieve when most of the people in a building are isolated by thirds. The Leadership Team has discussed altering the schedule in order to provide more common planning time and cross-grade level planning times, but these alternatives are still in the discussion stages. Another option being discussed is reassigning staff members across grade levels; the principal explained that this due not only to battling staff isolation, but also to pre-existing concerns regarding staff certification and re-assigning them to teach in areas in which they are considered "Highly Qualified."

The efforts to decrease isolation and remove or reduce barriers to collaboration speak to the commitment the district has made to consciously considering and addressing climate and culture. Relationships between staff and administrators were described as generally positive; interviewees felt they could speak openly with their administrative team and bring concerns to them, and trust that their administrators will listen to and support them. Administrators were characterized as "a presence in the building" and highly visible and accessible to staff. Interviewees described some interpersonal issues with one administrator who,

at the start of the school year, was new to the building and “came in like gangbusters” (multiple interviewees used this phrase). The understanding of some interviewees was that this administrator was brought in to “light a fire under a couple of people” one interviewee characterized as “dead weight... people who kind of came in, didn’t really do their job... showed movies, made up grades”. As a result, “there have been some issues with [the administrator] and the way [the administrator] deals with the staff”, largely “offend[ing]... a lot of people”. Subsequently, “[this person] did some damage for [this person’s] own leadership”. Participants related that the issues have since been addressed and relationships are improving, but the negative experiences of just one or two months at the start of the school year cast a long shadow for multiple interviewees to mention them the following June.

Beyond the people in the building each day are the parents, whom all interviewees described as generally supportive and involved in their children’s education. There is a steady flow of information from the school to the parents via multiple methods, including e-mails, newsletters, and automated phone calls:

If we get phone calls asking us different questions multiple times, then we decide that’s something these parents need to know. [...] Our sixth graders are all getting iPads next year. We knew that was going to be an interesting topic for the parents and so we brought the technology guy in to do a presentation on why they were getting them, what it was going to look like. We just want it to be relevant to the parents.

Teachers also make concerted efforts to foster the home-school relationship with regular communication:

We... try to send home positive notes so that the contact we have with parents isn't always negative. So we have note cards that we can send home to parents to touch base and say, 'Your child was caught doing this' – positive behavior. My staff tries to send emails or have websites up so that we can keep in contact with the parents, so then they get a feeling of what's going on in school.

Another teacher spoke to the rate at which she communicates with her students' parents:

I usually, on a daily basis, have at least ten different parent communications I have to make, whether it's reaching out to a parent if [they] ask me a question, or whatever it may be... and I would say that most teachers probably would say the same thing.

Parents also assume leadership roles in the distributed model, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Maintaining clear, open lines of communication between and among teachers, students, administrators, and parents are a key component of maintaining the positive climate and culture of collaboration and trust in Wellbrook.

***Professional learning is an embedded, ongoing process that is highly valued and thoughtfully programmed.*** If data analysis and reflection inform improvement efforts, then improvement efforts inform professional development [PD] opportunities in Wellbrook, at least as far as formal PD opportunities go. Once Leadership Teams identify areas for improvement (which vary building to building) the PD program is one way the district goes about helping teachers to make those improvements. As the assistant superintendent explained, the district does not rely

solely on outside PD providers. While the district does bring in external providers, they also - as the assistant superintendent phrased it - draw upon the strengths of their own staff and “unleash the talent” to help teach their colleagues a new skill or instructional strategy. She elaborated on this approach:

At one point...you had PD days that were strictly [same PD for all buildings]... We’ve moved away from that more...giving the principal the autonomy to say, ‘My school needs this, therefore I want...’<sup>3</sup>. The school down the street may be very good at that and doesn’t need that, therefore they’re going to go here. So this past year we just trained LFS trainers, so now in every building you have...more people to do LFS so this one person is not running between schools. There is now a person in every building distributing.

One interviewee was selected to go to Michigan for a similar facilitator training in a mathematics program; she also spoke of her colleague, a Language Arts teacher, who does similar training in her content area. The “teachers teaching teachers” model is not limited to formal PD days, however. Aponte and Banniman Middle Schools draw upon the considerable talents of their staff members to drive professional learning in smaller, less formal settings as well. A principal spoke of two of his staff members who recently provided such services:

○ [This teacher] has great checking for understanding, great collaboration strategies. [...] We hired her to teach collaboration strategies at faculty meetings and in department meetings, and we paid for a substitute so that she could have PD development and PLCs all day. Same thing with DPAS II

[Delaware's statewide teacher evaluation program] – I don't teach the teachers how to do their own DPAS II... we have a teacher leader who does that.

An administrator in another building tries to get at least one staff member to share out a practice or skill at which they are successful at each month's faculty meeting. According to this administrator, "some of them are very nervous, but we just tell them, 'what you're doing is so incredible, we want you to get it out there', and they always do an excellent job." Another teacher told of a math teacher who presented to the staff about free online courses and another colleague who ran a quick session on checking for understanding. This practice yet again illustrates the collaborative culture that exists in these buildings.

When staff members do go off-site for a conference or training, the expectation is that they will come back to the building and provide turnkey training to staff members, as mentioned by the assistant superintendent above. The turnkey training is not necessarily a one-time event; a teacher said, "We had four teachers attend an inclusion training, and then they came back and shared things they had learned. They are constantly a resource in the building...." In considering funding individual PD opportunities, administrators consider not only the value for the person attending the function, but also how the entire staff will be able to benefit – in the words of one administrator, "If they can better themselves and bring something back to the school, that's what I usually like to see."

One recently-implemented element of the pervasive culture of professional learning is the peer walk-through. Unlike the administrative walk-through, in which

the administrator observes for a short amount of time and then provides constructive feedback, the purpose of the peer walk-through is for the observer to learn something by observing a peer. The process was described by teachers and administrators alike as informal and non-evaluative, and teachers are provided with substitutes in order to allow them to leave the classroom to conduct their walk-throughs. This was implemented in both Aponte and Banniman Middle Schools this year and was received very well by staff, according to multiple interviewees. At Aponte, Leadership Team members piloted the effort in 2013-2014, with a goal of expanding that to all teachers in 2014-2015; Banniman's principal explained that in his school, every teacher is currently expected to conduct walk-throughs in three other classrooms per marking period and write up a brief (one paragraph) reflection on each visit. True to the shared decision-making philosophy, this format sprung from an idea the principal brought to the Leadership Team:

All I said was, 'Wouldn't it be great if people were moving in and out of each other's classrooms to learn all of the great stuff that we are doing here so that it's transferable?', and the answer was 'Yes, that would be great.' And I said, 'Okay, guys, tell me: how are we going to do that next year systematically so that everybody is on board?' And they came up with that!

The Banniman principal firmly believes that the success of this initiative is due largely to the fact that it was developed and vetted by the Leadership Team ("Then, by the way, you already have ten people on board") rather than issued as a directive from him. The Leadership Team was able to take a relatively amorphous idea,

develop some parameters, and make it a practical reality, with minimal, if any, pushback from staff, according to Banniman building administrators. In addition to improving professional practice, peer walk-throughs have also fueled the staff recognition awards at Banniman, since so many more teachers are aware of the good things their colleagues are doing, so this is tied into school climate as well.

**Leadership roles are not restricted to formal leaders.** Wellbrook not only recognizes leadership potential in all stakeholders, but also actively seeks to promote leadership in all stakeholders. Formal leaders such as superintendents and principals lead by example, helping to establish and maintain the culture of the district and building. Leadership capacity in non-administrative staff members, parents, students, and other community members is sought out and nurtured.

*Formal leaders help establish the culture of the school through example.*

Distributed leadership is a philosophy that sounds easy enough to support in theory, but because of the shared element of decision-making (and therefore, perceived power), some leaders may shy away from implementing the principles. This is not the case in Wellbrook, where district and building administrators regularly demonstrate their commitment to distributed leadership. When asked at the end of his interview if there was anything else he thought was important for me to know in order to understand distributed leadership in Wellbrook School District, one interviewee replied:

...there is a true desire, at least in our building, to make leaders out of all the teachers, whatever level they are, and to help them see their roles as leaders,

so there is a lot of time and energy spent in doing that... [Our principal] is very explicit about how he sees people being leaders in the building regardless of their position...

Formal leaders actively seek out potential teacher leaders. Principals in both Banniman and Aponte Middle Schools make general public calls for people to join various committees, as well as approach people individually. One teacher related, "This past January [my principal] had come to me and asked if I would attend... a week-long training... I'm a certified LFS trainer now, so I can train the staff."

Another principal related:

We've made conscious efforts to make sure that we at least asked people to be on a committee or be on something... Last year we started an enrichment restructuring committee and we actually sat down and looked and said, 'Okay, who *doesn't* participate?' I mean, those are the people we focused on so they do have a say in something, and I think that was important.

One distributed task discussed earlier was the autonomous scheduling of test dates for the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System [DCAS II]. One principal's message to his staff illustrates the mindset behind the process: "If it [the schedule the team develops] works and it meets the needs of the various groups around the building, let's do it." The distributed leadership model calls for formal leaders to embrace the concept of seeking input from multiple stakeholders in order to develop solutions that meet or address the unique needs of various groups. The concept sounds simple, but the act of relinquishing some or all decision-making power, especially in a high-stakes context such as state-mandated testing, can be

difficult if one does not trust the process. It is imperative to do so, however; the culture of distributed leadership cannot exist without the investment of all stakeholders, including formal leaders. As one teacher put it, her administrators “are right there, backing us up and working as hard as they would expect us to work. That leads to a more positive environment.”

***Teacher leadership is not only promoted, but also supported.*** When interviewees were asked about the qualities that constitute a teacher leader, the answers varied, but revolved around a few core characteristics. Taken in composite from these responses, the consummate teacher leader is honest, has a proactive, solution-oriented approach to problem-solving, maintains a positive outlook, and influences peers through their actions. While most teacher leadership opportunities in Wellbrook rely upon the unique strengths and abilities of each individual person, there are some formal training opportunities for teacher leaders. One interviewee spoke of a teacher leader training program called Vision Leadership in which she participated with other schools in the district. The district also partners with an outside firm called Creative Mentoring in order to provide skill-specific training to employees, parents, and community members who volunteer in the mentoring program mentioned earlier. A program that is unique to Wellbrook and illustrates their commitment to developing leadership capacity from within is their Aspiring Administrator program.

The Aspiring Administrator program was started under the direction of the previous assistant superintendent. The program is designed to provide Wellbrook employees the opportunity to gain practical experience as educational leaders. Teachers who take part in the program are typically either currently studying or have recently completed graduate work in educational leadership, but the superintendent stressed that some participants would

rather just lead from the classroom after they go through that leadership training, which we are perfectly fine with. We need those leaders that drive instruction, because even as a principal you don't have all the answers and you can't have all the answers.

Wellbrook's current assistant superintendent co-chairs the program with the district's Director of Human Resources, and echoed the superintendent's appreciation for "stronger teacher leaders" as well as those who aspire to formal leadership positions.

She shared that interested teachers complete an application and interview process, and must also receive a recommendation from the building principal. A typical cohort includes approximately 15 staff members and runs for a two-year cycle (this will be changing to one year after the current cohort completes the program). Throughout the program, participants meet with the program chairs once monthly for two hours to discuss different aspects of leadership. The first session of the year is spent discussing participant areas of interest for learning, which helps to inform the course of study for the year. Remaining sessions are spent on a variety of activities, including book talks, case studies (including those drawn from current events in the

district), and developing practical projects addressing areas of need in the district, such as a training seminar for new district substitute teachers. No graduate credits can be offered in this program, but participants do receive PD clock hours for their participation. An interviewee who completed the program several years ago recalled her experience:

We met with every person in the district office. At one point the finance person came in and talked about how they do unit count and what affect that has on you. [Someone] came in from Human Resources and talked about his aspect. We heard from Special Ed/Student Services, [the superintendent at the time] came in and did a whole thing one day with us about just what a leader looks like, and being a leader. Then as we went back into the buildings, we were given assignments every week of things we needed to try back in the buildings, or things we needed to develop, and then we would come and report out. We had to attend a board meeting, and sure enough, in my experience, the administrators I worked with did try to pull me in, and they let me start doing some discipline, they let me start doing some investigations. They let me be the person in charge when they weren't in the building, so it just grew from there.

When asked to compare the value of the Aspiring Administrator program to that of her educational leadership graduate program, this interviewee responded:

[The Aspiring Administrator program] was much stronger. It was practical, it was on-the-site experience with real people, real situations. It wasn't writing papers over and over and over again, or reading the textbooks. You were there, you were part of it, you were dealing with an angry parent. I couldn't have traded it for the world.

The Aspiring Administrator program also received a positive appraisal from another interviewee who had not participated in the program, but knew several people who had:

...most of those people [program participants], within a year or two, as positions opened up, became administrators. So we have a lot of administrators that are home-grown through that program. [...] When people see their former colleagues getting positions of leadership they feel like, 'Okay, this person gets this, understands what we're about', as opposed to an outsider coming in and having to figure out what the system is. I think it's been really positive, actually.

Between the Aspiring Administrators program, mentoring, Leadership Team, and the myriad informal leadership opportunities that arise regarding decision-making on a regular basis, there are several opportunities for teacher leadership at Wellbrook. The district administration's explicit support of teacher leadership through both word and deed illustrate this crucial element of distributed leadership.

*The school actively involves multiple stakeholders, both internal and external, as leaders.* While the term "distributed leadership" is often used interchangeably with "teacher leadership", true distributed leadership involves recognizing leadership potential in all stakeholders. In Wellbrook as in most schools, most non-administrative staff members are indeed teachers, but non-instructional staff bring their own unique perspectives to conversations. As mentioned earlier, Aponte Middle School includes the office secretary on the Leadership Team; she represents the concerns and suggestions of building support staff. Non-instructional certificated

staff such as guidance counselors and school psychologists serve on all three grade-level PLCs in the buildings; another interviewee spoke to the dual nature of that role on the PLCs:

I think it helps them [classroom teachers] to see that even though we have a non-academic role, ultimately our goal and our mission is to take away the barriers that are keeping them [students] from being successful academically. Some referrals are academic, some are behavioral. So hopefully they see us as a support to what they're trying to accomplish.

In collaborating regularly with classroom teachers, non-instructional staff serve not only to support students in need of academic and social-emotional assistance, but also to help maintain positive relationships between themselves and teachers, and to combat some of the negative misconceptions discussed earlier that stem from lack of communication between groups.

The custodial staff in that building also has taken the initiative to recruit student leaders in beautifying and maintaining different areas of the school:

Our custodial staff has done a really good job of reaching out to a few of our eighth graders and allowing [them] to take ownership of different areas... such as our cafeteria, our bathrooms, and our pod... by helping clean up, helping set up for different things for the different lunches, or dances, or things like that.

There are a few leadership dynamics at play in this example. First, the custodial staff has demonstrated leadership in engaging the students in this way, rather than by asking an administrator or teacher to organize student assistants.

Second, in doing so, they have empowered the students to feel invested in their school

environment, thereby developing their own leadership potential by participating in this initiative. Student leadership is an emerging concept at Banniman and Aponte Middle School, but one that is being fostered and that is valued in the culture. In addition to the custodians' initiative, one interviewee shared that the Leadership Team at Aponte Middle School has discussed starting a student group called "Techno Sharks". According to this teacher, the concept is still in the planning stages, but the discussion currently centers on organizing a group of students with advanced proficiency with technology to assist staff and students with solving technology problems. The timing of this initiative coincides with the implementation of a one-to-one iPad pilot program in the sixth grade; Techno Sharks would not be limited to assisting with iPad issues, but that would likely be a central area of need, according to this teacher. Student leadership opportunities can also be found built into the curriculum, such as in business classes where students learn about entrepreneurship and leadership by becoming Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of their own fantasy company and learning how to deal with logistical and operational challenges.

Student leaders are also finding increased voice on the Leadership Team at Banniman Middle School. In discussing the principal's practice of seeking input from multiple stakeholders, one interviewee listed Student Council as an example. When asked about the degree to which students have a voice in decision making at Banniman, he replied:

It's limited, but I think it's been growing. I know the Student Council president talks to the principal about how students feel about how things are

run in the cafeteria, the instruction system there, just sitting on teams... and so they were exploring possibilities on how to loosen that up a little. They were pretty good; we challenged them to come up with ideas to announce to the student body, under what conditions we would loosen things up where they could sit wherever they wanted and they could still have the cafeteria be clean. And so the student council announced that to the student body and they bought into it, so that was a good step forward. [...] The president of the student body...was good at seeing both sides, what the needs of the staff were and what concerns the staff had, and what the wishes of the student body were. There was a good balance there.

Banniman Middle School has further demonstrated its commitment to developing student leaders by seeking to implement the “Leader in Me” program in their school within the next two to three years. The program, based on Stephen Covey’s *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, is currently in place in three elementary schools in Wellbrook School District and is specifically designed to help students develop leadership skills. The Wellbrook superintendent describes the program as:

a cultural change in the building where students take ownership of their behavior and their seven habits... that they live by. In those buildings, we have seen a real cultural change with the kids... Parent-teacher conferences are no longer, now they’re student-parent-teacher conferences, where the students are talking about their data, the students are talking about their progress, the students run the conference. The teacher is just kind of the facilitator. [...] Kids are going through... their grades, talk about their strengths... I mean, it’s just impressive how these students are developing as leaders. [...] When an adult goes in the classrooms, there is a student leader

there that welcomes you and asks [if visitors have] any questions, so it's just a real neat process.

This cultural shift does not limit student involvement to conferences, but rather allows students to take on leadership roles in different capacities throughout the school day and year. While Banniman is still in the preliminary planning stages of implementing this program, the principal explained that he took the same initial approach to this as he did when he brought the concept of peer walk-throughs to his Leadership Team: it started with the basic premise of, "Students need to take ownership and be more organized and learn leadership skills. Anybody disagree with that?" With no disagreements, the conversation progressed. The Banniman assistant principal explained:

We talked a whole bunch, but then we went to sixth grade and said... 'How can we do that?', and [the sixth grade team leader said], 'Why don't a few of us go over there, we'll take a look, we'll bring some ideas back, and we'll distribute that through sixth grade.' [...] We just gave it to them and they ran with it.

With the Leadership Team and sixth grade teaching team involved in the process from the start and taking ownership of the implementation of the initiative, the Banniman principal and assistant principal explained, the process remains true to the philosophy of distributed leadership. The objectives for the students stated by the principal will ostensibly expand leadership capacity to another group of stakeholders.

Many schools have a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), which tends to be the primary vehicle for parent involvement in the schools. Interviewees at Aponte

Middle School characterized their PTA as “strong” and spoke of some of the initiatives spearheaded by the group:

...we have a summer reading program at our school and usually every year the PTA will very generously pay for the author of that book to come in and speak to us. Two years ago they... paid for [the author’s] transportation and his speaking engagement [fee] so the kids could meet the author. Last year the author lived in California, so they organized a Skype session and also paid for the speaking engagement.

The Aponte Middle School PTA also funds the annual carnival at the end of each school year, complete with food, inflatable attractions, and a dunk tank. PTA members also made up the majority of adult staffers at this event, and they frequently volunteer to chaperone field trips. The PTA, however, is not the only avenue for parents to get involved as stakeholders in the schools.

Parents and teachers actively seek each other out to work together for the betterment of the school. The district regularly solicits the community for feedback, such as in the annual school climate survey sent to parents of students in every building. One interviewee spoke of a parent who recently reached out to her with a request. The parent works for a credit union, and wanted to help set up a bank in the school, to help teach financial literacy. The interviewee welcomed the offer, and the program will be in place for the 2014-2015 school year. Aponte Middle School staff repeatedly spoke to the high degree of parent involvement at the school; one interviewee indicated that Open House attendance is routinely in the hundreds, and concerts and plays are equally well-attended.

Somewhat less well-attended by parents are the monthly Leadership Team meetings. One interviewee indicated that while two parents officially sit on his building's Leadership Team, they each only attended two meetings during the 2013-2014 school year. Other parents have been invited to attend, but have never done so, usually citing a scheduling conflict. In an effort to bolster parent voice on the Leadership Team, staff members at Banniman Middle School are discussing starting a parent advisory board. One interviewee who is directly involved in these discussions indicated that at present, the idea is that it would function less as a formal committee and more as a way for parents to meet, discuss school issues, and provide feedback to school staff. The concept is still in the planning stages, she said, and has yet to be fully formed.

School staff, students, and parents make up the majority of stakeholders directly involved in school operations, but schools can also establish relationships with the community at large. One way the Wellbrook schools do that is by inviting community members to serve in the district mentoring program discussed earlier. One interviewee spoke of her still-nascent plans to start a speaker's bureau for her school, a bank of community members with expertise in certain areas (e.g., entrepreneurship, business) who would be willing to come speak to students, as needs arise. While this is an emerging area of distributed leadership in Aponte and Banniman Middle Schools, it is possible that increased parent involvement in an advisory capacity may also lead to further community connections.

## Chapter V

### Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

In January 2005, Wellbrook School District was one of four Delaware public school districts to be awarded a \$25,000 mini-grant to develop and implement distributed leadership practices on a districtwide basis. This grant was paid out over the course of three years, during which the district worked with DEDOE to train staff and build a culture that would sustain distributed leadership practices into the future. In 2009, Buttram and Pizzini conducted a study of grant recipients in order to identify if and how distributed leadership initiatives had impacted the schools. They found that in order to be successful, distributed leadership must be anchored to other school improvement efforts, the cultural shift to a distributed leadership model takes time, and that granting teachers autonomy to work without administrators is a stronger indicator of successful distributed leadership implementation than is collaboration between teachers and administrators. Since then, however, no further studies have been conducted to determine if the promising distributed leadership practices have been sustained, and if so, which ones, and why? The current study was undertaken in order to address the gap in the research literature about how schools enact distributed leadership practices.

The *hows and whys* of distributed leadership were examined in this study via a mixed methods approach. Quantitative rating scale data were obtained through the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale [DLRS], with an additional five items about

school climate. Qualitative interview data also were analyzed in order to provide a more detailed explanation of these practices than survey data alone could provide. Staff members at Banniman Middle School and Aponte Middle School in the Wellbrook School District ( $n=68$ ) responded to rating scale data about practices in their buildings, and fourteen interviews were conducted with staff from both buildings, as well as the district superintendent and assistant superintendent.

### **Limitations**

The author acknowledges limitations in the present study. The study did not address distributed leadership practices throughout the entire Wellbrook School District; rather, it focused on a small subset of school buildings within the district. Additionally, the study did not examine distributed leadership practices in all three of the district's middle schools. Finally, while the qualitative phase of the study did compare data from interviews and fieldnotes, true triangulation was not achieved, thereby weakening the study's credibility and increasing the potential for bias.

### **Summary of Research Findings and Conclusions**

Responses to the DLRS indicated that the two buildings in the study have established cultures in which distributed leadership is frequently practiced. School climate in both buildings was also largely characterized as positive. The main overarching theoretical concept to emerge from interviews is that Wellbrook's practice of distributed leadership engenders community and organizational unity of purpose via a common mission and vision while allowing for localized best practices

in achieving them, which places their practices squarely in accordance not only with best practices from the research literature, but also with recommendations from Buttram and Pizzini's (2009) broader study of Delaware schools implementing distributed leadership.

The research base identifies some key cultural components necessary to distributed leadership: professional collaboration (Angelle, 2010; Klar, 2012; Law et al., 2010; Mascall et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009), a supportive, constructively critical environment with multiple, pervasive opportunities for professional growth (Angelle, 2010; Helterbran, 2010; Klar, 2012; Law et al., 2010; Mascall et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009), high degrees of trust and open lines of communication between teachers and formal leaders (Angelle, 2010; Harris et al., 2003; Helterbran, 2010; Hulpia et al., 2011; Mascall et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009; Rice, 2006), and high degrees of investment in implementing distributed leadership from both teachers and formal leaders (Angelle, 2010; Harris et al., 2003; Helterbran, 2010; Park & Datnow, 2009; Timperley, 2005). Themes from the current study's interviews that support Wellbrook's commitment to these elements are:

- Climate and culture are consciously considered and deliberately addressed.
- Distributed leadership is a philosophy that is consciously embraced by district leaders.

- Professional learning is an embedded, ongoing process that is highly valued and thoughtfully programmed.
- Formal leaders help establish the culture of the school through example.
- Teacher leadership is not only promoted, but also supported.
- The school actively involves multiples stakeholders, both internal and external, as leaders.

Equally as important as the philosophical and cultural commitments to distributed leadership are the practical considerations. A clearly defined mission and vision, including common vocabulary and agreement on what constitutes progress theretoward (Goldstein, 2007; Park & Datnow, 2009; Rice, 2006) and a wide spread of decision-making authority (Angelle, 2010; Leech & Fulton, 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009) are distributed leadership best practices that are found in Banniman and Aponte Middle Schools. Relevant themes to emerge from the interviews include:

- Decision making is shared and solutions are implemented at the local level.
- Improvement efforts are driven by a combination of data analysis and practitioner reflection.
- Mission and vision focus and drive initiatives.

Buttram and Pizzini's (2009) follow-up study of DEDOE/DASL grant recipients indicated three main findings:

- Distributed leadership cannot exist in a vacuum and must be anchored to school improvement efforts.
- The cultural shift to a distributed leadership model takes time and cannot be rushed.
- Teachers having autonomy to work without administrators is likely more important to schools seeing benefits of distributed leadership than teacher collaboration with administrators.

Wellbrook's integration of distributed leadership with school improvement efforts is well documented in this study, as is the overall level of cultural buy-in to distributed leadership evident in Aponte and Banniman Middle Schools, as well as in the district office. It is worth noting that very few interviewees had any knowledge of or familiarity with the grant that brought distributed leadership to Wellbrook. This may imply that distributed leadership is such an engrained part of daily operations at the school that it is not thought of as an initiative, or an "extra" piece – it is just the way things are. The present study cannot speak to Buttram & Pizzini's (2009) assertion about the relationship between teacher's professional autonomy and distributed leadership, but that may be a topic for future research.

Before examining survey data and interview responses, it is important to pre-emptively contextualize any comments that may sound critical of the district. By all standards, Wellbrook School District is a district that has embraced the tenets of distributed leadership, at least in the buildings in the present study, since the

implementation of their distributed leadership grant in 2005. It is one thing for administrators to say that they are in favor of distributed leadership, but the actions and structures described in this chapter firmly support the assertion that Wellbrook School District backs their words with deeds. Both DLRS results and interview data are indicative of a school culture that embraces the core concepts of distributed leadership as outlined in the DLRS as well as in the best practices gleaned from the literature base listed at the end of Chapter 2. Items on the DLRS rarely earned scores lower than 3, indicating that of the 40 statements on the DLRS, most of them are occurring with some degree of regularity. Of those 40 statements, 28 earned ratings of 4 or 5 from at least 70% of respondents. Banniman and Aponte Middle Schools are distributing leadership; therefore, any discussion of low ratings of an individual item on the DLRS or suggestions for improvement must be viewed in the context of good practices being made better, not poor practices needing to be made acceptable. Discussion of high ratings indicates the highest of otherwise high scores, not outliers among low to average scores.

**Research Question 1.** In answer to the question, “how is distributed leadership practiced in the Wellbrook School District?”, in Dimension 1, DLRS respondents identified their schools as having clear mission and vision statements. Items regarding curricular alignment with state standards and staff understanding of the mission also rated very highly. Most survey respondents agreed that Wellbrook sets and reviews goals regularly, and has plans in place to achieve

those goals via a school improvement plan. In Dimension 2, items regarding school support for new instructional ideas and innovation also rated highly, as did those regarding principal participation in PD and consistency between his words and deeds. The majority of respondents indicate that Wellbrook uses staff input in the decision making process and that building principals are knowledgeable about instructional issues. In Dimension 3, respondents strongly endorsed that the school provides PD aligned with school mission and goals. The schools not only allow informal leaders to have a role, but the school has expanded its capacity and ultimately benefitted from the involvement of teacher leaders. In Dimension 4, there was nearly unanimous agreement among respondents that teachers and administrators have high academic expectations for students and that academic achievement data are readily available to inform instruction. Schedules also appear to be conducive to professional collaboration. Most items in this dimension received a generally positive endorsement: teachers and administrators share accountability for student performance, school is a learning community that learns from both successes and failures, school clearly establishes a chain of contact so parents know how to get in touch with questions and concerns, and instructional decision-making is informed by data analysis. Responses to the five additional questions on school climate were positive. Each item was rated 4 or 5 by at least 70% of respondents; the majority of respondents feel that both teachers and students take pride in their school, that teachers build and maintain strong relationships with their students, that students care

about learning, and that efforts are in place to engage all students in the school community. The high rate of 4 and 5 responses to these items is synchronous with the high rate of 4 and 5 responses on the DLRS items.

The items on the DLRS with the highest rate of 1 and 2 responses indicate areas district leaders may wish to target for further analysis. The two items that received the highest rate of 1 and 2 responses on the DLRS regarded parent and student ability to speak clearly to mission and vision of the school. Other items that received notable percentages of 1 and 2 scores involved:

- My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan.
- My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual professional needs and school needs.
- Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient school time to permit them to make meaningful contributions to the school.
- There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making.
- School district resources are directed to those areas in which student learning needs to improve most.

Analysis of interview transcripts and field notes yielded 93 unique codes in the

text from which nine themes evolved, describing the ways in which Wellbrook distributes leadership:

- Climate and culture are consciously considered and deliberately addressed.
- Decision making is shared and solutions are implemented at the local level.
- Distributed leadership is a philosophy that is consciously embraced by district leaders.
- Improvement efforts are driven by a combination of data analysis and practitioner reflection.
- Mission and vision focus and drive initiatives
- Professional learning is an embedded, ongoing process that is highly valued and thoughtfully programmed.
- Formal leaders help establish the culture of the school through example.
- Teacher leadership is not only promoted, but also supported.
- The school actively involves multiple stakeholders, both internal and external, as leaders.

These nine themes were further refined into two primary themes:

- Professional practice is deliberate and purpose-driven.
- Leadership roles are not restricted to formal leaders.

The primary unifying concept to emerge from these analyses was that Wellbrook's practice of distributed leadership engenders community and organizational unity of

purpose via a common mission and vision while allowing for localized best practices in achieving them.

Wellbrook's structured and supported PLCs, peer and administrative walk-throughs, administrator visibility in the buildings, culture of practitioner reflection, student leadership initiatives, Aspiring Administrator program, deliberate concern for and actions to improve school climate voiced by interviewees, and the district's commitment to both professional development are all examples of how middle schools in Wellbrook School District practice distributed leadership. While the district does have a mission and vision to which all school improvement initiatives are aligned, each building is granted autonomy in how they make progress toward the vision according to local strengths and needs. Leadership Teams comprised of ten to fifteen people participate in decision-making in Aponte and Banniman Middle Schools, and input from all employees is sought after. A wide array of types of data beyond standardized test scores is used in identifying areas for improvement or progress monitoring.

**Research Question 2.** In answer to the question, "why does Wellbrook School District engage in distributed leadership practices?", the short answer is that distributed leadership creates conditions and frameworks that clearly support continuous and sustainable improvement, and therefore student learning. A collaborative culture in which stakeholders have trust and open communication creates a positive working environment, which is a hiring advantage in bringing

aboard high-quality teachers. Collaboration in conjunction with shared decision-making and problem-solving processes in which multiple perspectives are genuinely considered leads to high degrees of investment and buy-in from staff, students, and parents, which further leads to increased sustainability of improvement initiatives. Sustained improvement initiatives, vetted and customized at the building level, have led to increased rigor and student engagement. Mutual trust allowed principals to feel free to distribute leadership tasks to capable staff members, freeing up their time to be more present in classrooms and more directly involved in daily building operations, offering constructive feedback and continually identifying and monitoring areas for improvement in the building. All these factors contributed to improved learning environments for children, not only academically but socially as well. The Wellbrook superintendent readily admitted that this philosophy is not yet pervasive throughout the entire district, but he and the assistant superintendent have seen the positive effects it has had in buildings like Banniman and Aponte, and that drives their desire to expand the leadership philosophy to the entire district.

Additionally, observations of the focus group yielded further potential insight as to the impact of the relationships in one building on school climate. The atmosphere was very relaxed, with interviewees alternately reclining or leaning forward as they made points in their discussion. The interaction between interviewees seemed relaxed and friendly, and they laughed and joked with one another. This may speak to the degree of comfort they have with one another on both

the personal and professional levels. Throughout the focus group session, interviewees referred repeatedly to the importance of relationships in distributed leadership, and it seemed that the relationship between the interviewees was a positive, friendly one. It is possible that this positive relationship between administrators is also illustrative of the types of relationships they speak of maintaining with and among the staff of their building.

**Research Question 3.** To answer to the question, “what are staff and administrator perceptions regarding the impact of distributed leadership practices on school climate in Wellbrook School District, and do they vary by sub-group?”, DLRS rating scale data were disaggregated by administrators (principals and assistant principals) and non-administrators (any respondent not employed as a principal or assistant principal). They were also disaggregated by respondent building, Aponte Middle School or Banniman Middle School. While results were not identical, there were typically more areas of agreement than not in comparing the sub-groups. Additionally, it is difficult to make a fine-grained comparison between administrator and non-administrator survey data, as there were only four administrator respondents (the maximum possible between two buildings).

***Administrators and non-administrators.*** The following items were all among the highest-rated items for both administrators and non-administrators:

- The school has clearly written mission and vision statements.
- The school’s curriculum is aligned with the state’s academic standards.

- The principal actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school.
- My principal's practices are consistent with his/her words.
- The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school's mission and goals.
- Informal school leaders play an important role in the school in improving the performance of professionals and the achievement of students.
- The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles.
- Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students' academic performance.
- The school makes available a variety of data (e.g., school performance) for teachers to use to improve student achievement.
- The school's daily and weekly schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues.

The following items were given low ratings by both administrators and non-administrators:

- If parents are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe the mission clearly.
- If students are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe it clearly.

- Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school.
- There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making.

The primary area of disagreement between administrators and non-administrators appeared to be the frequency with which they perceive the practices on the DLRS are taking place. Non-administrators were more likely to rate items 1 or 2; only 5 items on the DLRS received a rating of 1 or 2 from any administrator, as opposed to 33 from non-administrators.

***Banniman and Aponte.*** The following items were all among the highest-rated items for both Banniman and Aponte:

- The school has clearly written mission and vision statements.
- The school's curriculum is aligned with the state's academic standards.
- The principal actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school.
- The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school's mission and goals.
- The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles.
- Informal school leaders play an important role in the school in improving the performance of professionals and the achievement of students.

Similarly, both groups consistently gave low ratings to the following items:

- If parents are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe the mission clearly.
- If students are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe it clearly.
- My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan.
- My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual needs and school needs.
- Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient school time to permit them to make meaningful contributions to the school.
- Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school.
- New teachers are provided opportunities to fill some school leadership roles.
- School district resources are directed to those areas in which student learning needs to improve most.
- There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making.

As far as areas of disagreement between buildings are concerned, the Aponte staff rated items in Dimension 2 (School Culture) 1 or 2 at a higher average rate (9.92% of responses) than staff from Banniman (3.07% of responses). The Banniman

staff rated items in Dimension 2 and Dimension 4 (Shared Responsibility) 4 or 5 at higher average rates than Aponte staff.

Table 28  
*Average Percentages of 4 or 5 Responses*

| Dimension                          | Building |          |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|
|                                    | Aponte   | Banniman |
| Dimension 2: School Culture        | 70.24%   | 86.67%   |
| Dimension 4: Shared Responsibility | 72.37%   | 81.34%   |

As stated above, results of the additional items on school climate were largely positive. There were no significant differences between responses from administrators and non-administrators. Respondents from Aponte and Banniman both gave their highest proportion of 4 and 5 ratings to the same two items: “Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students” and “Teachers take pride in being part of the school community.” The most significant difference in this section was in how respondents rated the item, “Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community.” This item was rated 1 or 2 by 13.16% of respondents from Aponte; just 3.3% of Banniman respondents rated this item 1 or 2.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

While Banniman and Aponte Middle Schools appear to be models of distributed leadership in action, the study results carry some implications for the district. The negative perception of the Leadership Team that exists among some

Aponte staff members is potentially damaging to the building culture and counterproductive to the goals of distributed leadership. Staff responses to the DLRS indicate that more focused outreach work may be necessary in order to familiarize parents and students with the mission and vision of the district. Also, the district administration's intentions to implement distributed leadership throughout the entire district will require some targeted conversations about philosophy, mission, vision, and goals with personnel in every building in an effort to establish buy-in on a much wider scale than has been attempted in the district, at least in the recent past.

As a district that values reflection and continuous improvement, district officials may want to consider the following suggestions for addressing the above implications, as well as for improving and expanding distributed leadership in Wellbrook:

1. Hold up Aponte and Banniman Middle Schools as models of distributed leadership, both to other buildings in the district and to other districts seeking to shift their cultures. Encourage site visits and walk-throughs in these buildings. The professionals working in these schools have much to offer.
2. Administer the DLRS to other buildings in the district to assess baseline levels of distributed leadership implementation and identify areas for improvement.
3. Increase ways to engage parents and students specifically in embracing the mission and vision of the school. For stakeholders to be on equal footing and

be able to contribute to movement toward the vision, they need to know and be invested in them.

4. Further examine the representation of novice, mid-career, and veteran teachers on Leadership Team to ensure equal opportunity for leadership. DLRS results indicated that both novice teachers and veteran teachers “infrequently” fill school leadership roles. These seem potentially contradictory, and may not accurately reflect what is happening in the schools, but this issue is worth further investigation.
5. Consider expanding age-appropriate authentic leadership opportunities for all Wellbrook students.

### **Consideration for Future Research**

The present study illustrates practical applications - the “*hows* and *whys*” – of distributed leadership in order to fill a gap in the research literature (Spillane et al., 2004). This study, however, only captures a snapshot of attitudes, opinions, and practices that exist within a narrowly defined period of time. If more school districts wish to adopt distributed leadership, the research base pertaining to positive outcomes must grow. The following recommendations for further research are offered:

1. A longitudinal study documenting the early stages of distributed leadership adoption would be beneficial as a point of entry for districts seeking to enact that cultural shift.

2. A comparative study of school improvement initiative outcomes in districts that distribute leadership versus districts with more traditional leadership structures.
3. A comparative study of successful distributed leadership practices in a variety of settings (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural; schools in areas of high socioeconomic status vs. low socioeconomic status) to determine the extent to which the variable studied impacts ability to distribute leadership.
4. More focused study of the roles of student, parent, and community leaders within a distributed leadership framework.

It is worth noting that while quantitative studies may be of some value in providing some “at-a-glance” statistical correlations, it is recommended that future research into distributed leadership emphasize the qualitative approach. The practical academic and social-emotional benefits of distributed leadership – the *hows* and *whys* – are best relayed not in standardized test scores and rating scales, but in the stories of the people living them every day.

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APPENDIX A

**DLRS Permission Request Process**

**Participants: Larry.Jacobson@ct.gov, damian@bariexca.net**

**Jacobson, Larry** Tue, Jan 7, 2014 at 8:47 AM

Dear Damian Bariexca,

On behalf of the Connecticut State Department of Education, you are granted permission to reproduce, distribute and use the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale (DLRS) for purposes of your dissertation research.

We only ask that the DLRS survey include the following citation: Copyright © 2004 by the Connecticut State Board of Education in the name of the Secretary of the State of Connecticut.

We would certainly appreciate it if you might share your findings at the conclusion of your research.

Best regards,



Larry Jacobson, Ph.D.  
Project Leader  
Educational Leadership Program  
Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification  
Connecticut State Department of Education  
[860-713-6819](tel:860-713-6819)

## APPENDIX B

Dear Participant:

My name is Damian Bariexca, and I am a doctoral student at Wilmington University working on my Ed.D. in Innovation & Leadership. I am writing to explain my dissertation research project and to request your participation. The goal of my study is to conduct a case study of distributed leadership practices in [REDACTED] School District middle schools.

The potential benefits of this study are providing information to help school districts to employ distributed leadership practices in their own schools. The risk to survey respondents is minimal, but if you feel anxiety, doubt, or fear about participating, you may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time. The survey will ask you some general demographic questions for data analysis purposes; you will not be asked to give your name and all demographic data will be reported in aggregate.

The procedures for this project include collecting data from non-administrators (e.g., teachers, library media specialists, school psychologists, guidance counselors, etc.) as well as administrators.

This survey will take approximately **5-10 minutes** to complete. If you choose to participate, please click the link below for instructions on how to complete the survey.

Once collected, data will be maintained by me, the researcher, on my home computer. Data will be stored for 3 years past the completion of this study, as per federal regulations. After 3 years, these data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email at [damian@bariexca.net](mailto:damian@bariexca.net) or by telephone at 267.980.6228. You may also contact me at any time to request the results of this survey.

**Clicking this link indicates your consent to participate in this study.**

**Click here to proceed to the survey.**

## APPENDIX C

Dear Participant:

My name is Damian Bariexca, and I am a doctoral student at Wilmington University working on my Ed.D. in Innovation & Leadership. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which concerns distributed leadership practices.

If you agree to participate in my research, I will conduct an interview with you via Skype, Google+ Hangout, or some similar videoconference service **at a time of your choice**. The interview will involve questions about distributed leadership practices in the district, including professional collaboration and shared responsibility and decision-making.

**I would appreciate your participation as in interviewee** regarding distributed leadership practices in [REDACTED] School District. This interview will take approximately **45-60 minutes** to complete. I will conduct the interview at your convenience. If you choose to participate, please click the link below for instructions on how to indicate your consent.

The interview will be recorded. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only; the recording will not be seen by anyone other than myself. I expect to conduct only one interview with you; however, if I need clarification, I may contact you by email or phone to request this.

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. It is hoped that the research will enable other school districts to employ distributed leadership practices.

Your study data will be handled confidentially. Individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be published in my dissertation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email at damian@bariexca.net or by telephone at 267.980.6228. You may also contact me at any time to request the results of this survey.

**Click here to provide your consent to participate as an interviewee.**

APPENDIX D

Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale

Edit this form

Copyright © 2004 by the Connecticut State Board of Education in the name of the Secretary of the State of Connecticut.

\* Required

Demographic Information

All responses will be held in strictest confidence. Demographic information will only be reported in aggregate, never to identify an individual respondent. Please select the best answer for each item.

Gender \*

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to answer

Race/Ethnicity \*

- Native American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black/Non-Hispanic
- White
- Hispanic
- Multiracial
- Prefer not to answer

Highest Degree Earned \*

- HS Diploma/GED
- Associates
- Bachelors
- Masters
- Educational Specialist
- Doctorate
- Prefer not to answer
- Other:

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**Total Years in Education \***

- Less than 1
- 1-5
- 6-10
- More than 10
- Prefer not to answer

**Total Years in This District \***

- Less than 1
- 1-5
- 6-10
- More than 10
- Prefer not to answer

**Total Years in This School \***

- Less than 1
- 1-5
- 6-10
- More than 10
- Prefer not to answer

**Primary Building Assignment \***

Select the building to which you are assigned at least 51% of your time. If you split time evenly between buildings, please indicate which ones under "Other".

- [REDACTED] **Building names redacted for publication**
- [REDACTED] **Building names redacted for publication**
- [REDACTED] **Building names redacted for publication**
- Other:

**Primary Responsibility \***

- Classroom Teacher
- School Administrator
- Non-Instructional Certificated Staff (e.g., nurse, guidance counselor, etc.)
- Paraprofessional/Classroom Assistant
- Support Staff (e.g., custodial, cafeteria, etc.)
- Other:

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Do you currently hold an administrative certificate in any state? \*

- Yes
- No

Continue »

50% completed

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## Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale

Edit this form

\* Required

### Rating Scale Responses

On a scale of 1 ("Rarely/Never") to 5 ("Continually"), describe how regularly the following statements apply to you and your school.

**The school has clearly written vision and mission statements. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Teachers and administrators understand and support a common mission for the school and can describe it clearly. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**If parents are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe the mission clearly. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**If students are asked to describe the school's mission, most will be able to describe it clearly. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**School goals are aligned with its mission statement. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school uses a school improvement plan as a basis for progress. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Teachers and administrators collectively establish school goals and revise goals annually. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school's curriculum is aligned with the state's academic standards. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Teachers and administrators have high expectations for students' academic performance. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Teachers and administrators share accountability for students' academic performance. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**School district resources are directed to those areas in which student learning needs to improve most. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school is a learning community that continually improves its effectiveness, learning from both successes and failures. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**There is a high level of mutual respect and trust among the teachers and other professional staff. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**There is mutual respect and trust between school administration and the professional staff. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school administrator(s) welcome professional staff members' input on issues related to curriculum, instruction, and improving student performance. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school supports using new instructional ideas and innovations. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school's daily and weekly schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**School professionals and parents agree on the most effective roles parents can play as partners in their child's education. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school clearly communicates the "chain of contact" between home and school so parents know whom to contact when they have questions and concerns. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school makes available a variety of data (e.g., school performance) for teachers to use to improve student achievement. \***

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1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Decisions to change curriculum and instructional programs are based on assessment data.**

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**There is a formal structure in place in the school (curriculum committee) to provide teachers and professional staff opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision making.\***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The principal actively encourages teachers and other staff members to participate in instructional decision making.\***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Professional staff members in the school have the responsibility to make decisions that affect meeting school goals.\***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school's mission and goals.**

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Administrators participate alongside teachers in the school's professional development activities.\***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The principal actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**My supervisor and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual professional needs and school needs. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Teachers actively participate in instructional decision making. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Central office and school administrators work together to determine the professional development activities. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The principal is knowledgeable about current instructional issues. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**My principal's practices are consistent with his/her words. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Informal school leaders play an important role in the school in improving the performance of professionals and the achievement of students. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional staff formal opportunities to take on leadership roles. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient school time to permit them to make meaningful contributions to the school. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient resources to be able to make meaningful contributions to the school. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Veteran teachers fill most leadership roles in the school. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**New teachers are provided opportunities to fill some school leadership roles. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

**Teachers are interested in participating in school leadership roles. \***

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

Teachers take pride in being part of the school community. \*

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

Students take pride in being part of the school community. \*

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

Efforts are in place to ensure that ALL students have some meaningful connection to the school community. \*

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

Students at this school care about learning. \*

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

Teachers at our school build and maintain strong relationships with students. \*

1 2 3 4 5

Rarely/Never      Continually

Thank you very much for your participation in my study! YOU MUST HIT "SUBMIT" BELOW for your responses to be recorded. If you would like to be entered into a drawing for a \$25 Visa gift card, please enter your personal email address below and click "Submit". If you do not wish to be entered into the drawing, please leave it blank and hit "Submit".

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