

Exploring the Leadership Practices of Principals of Blue Ribbon Schools

Submitted by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctorate of Education

Grand Canyon University

Phoenix, Arizona

November 17, 2015

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November 17, 2015

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Exploring the Leadership Practices of Principals of Blue Ribbon Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to explore how the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in schools in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. The theoretical foundation and conceptual model of this study is comprised of servant leadership and Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning's (McREL) Balanced Leadership Model. Robert Greenleaf coined the term to describe the style employed by leaders who focus on developing others instead of satisfying their own need for power. Six research questions guided this study with the goal of understanding the perceptions of five highly effective Blue Ribbon Principals regarding servant leadership, the influence of accountability requirements on leading, instruction, and learning, the principal's role contributing to the success of his Blue Ribbon school, their roles in advancing the mission, program, and positive school climate, and their collaborative shared leadership practices to earning the Blue Ribbon designation. Sources of data included interviews with five principals, the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) survey taken by 27 teachers, and the Blue Ribbon Applications for each school. Through these sources, the researcher discovered that all the Blue Ribbon principals included in this study believed they were servant leaders and displayed three servant leadership characteristics; listening, committing to the growth of teachers, and building community. The practical implications of this research are that other school leaders can learn and possibly benefit from the experience of these highly successful principals.

Keywords: Servant leadership, Blue Ribbon Schools, education, student achievement, effective schools, principal characteristics, school leadership

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Gina and daughter, Alyssa.

Acknowledgments

My first acknowledgment is to my wife who took this journey with me. She read and reread this dissertation at least a hundred times. Thank you for believing in me. My second is to my daughter who understood that daddy had to work on the course work and then on his dissertation. I regret the time it took away from our time together. My third acknowledgment is to my mom and dad. Although they did not place emphasis on education, they did provide me with morals and a good work ethic. The final acknowledgment is to Dr. Piercy, the best chair in the whole world. I may not be able to quantify this statement, but I know it with all my heart it is true. I can't even imagine going through this without him. When all of these people's contributions are added up, it turns out that I had very little to do with being able to achieve this level in education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction and Background to the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals whose schools earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. Additionally, principals' perceptions of the servant leadership behaviors and the self-reported instructional leadership practices were the foci of data collection. The U.S. Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell, created the Blue Ribbon School Program. Blue Ribbon Schools are public or private schools that perform at very high levels or have shown significant improvements in student academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Since 1982, the program has developed into a national school improvement strategy that has three main purposes: (a) to identify and recognize outstanding public and private schools across the nation, (b) to create research-based effectiveness criteria that are available to all schools in an attempt to allow them to assess themselves and plan improvements, and (c) to encourage schools to share information about best practices based on a common understanding of criteria related to educational success (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Oklahoma, the state targeted for data collection in this study, places high levels of importance on educator performance and student learning. The state passed Oklahoma State Law 70 O.S. § 6-101.16 in 2010 to establish the Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System (TLE). The TLE focuses on teacher and leadership effectiveness. The aim of the law was to encourage continuous professional growth on the part of principals and teachers with the goal of improving student achievement in

Oklahoma (Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System, 2012).

Clearly, the state's lawmakers felt school leadership and high-performing teachers made a positive difference in student achievement. This study focused on the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals of some of the state's most effective schools, identified as those that have earned the coveted Blue Ribbon Award.

Over time, researchers have conducted numerous studies on the factors that influence teacher performance (Herlina, Basri, Kahar, & Ihsan, 2015; Morgan, Hodge, Trepinski, & Anderson, 2014; Mpungose & Ngwenya, 2014) and student achievement (Gok, 2014; Lemberger, Selig, Bowers, & Rogers, 2015; Thomas & Green, 2015). Black (2010) found that servant leadership helped to create a positive climate and improved student achievement in Catholic Schools. Furthermore, Waters and Cameron (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of over 5,000 studies on school leadership and its effects on student achievement. From the 5,000 studies, the researchers selected 69 that best answered the question about school-level leadership and student achievement. These researchers concluded that school leadership had a significant, positive influence on student achievement by as much as 10 percentile points on norm-referenced tests. The authors additionally identified a concrete set of instructional leadership roles and practices that principals can use to improve student achievement.

The results revealed that using transformational leadership and developing the collective self-efficacy of teachers were important factors that these principals felt contributed to their school's success. Maslyk (2012) noted the study set the foundation for the study of other leadership styles in Blue Ribbon schools and recommended that additional research was necessary to gain a more thorough view of principals' leadership

at award-winning and high-performing schools. Thus, the importance relevance of school leadership became a central focus to this study.

Research is necessary to address which types of leadership models are most beneficial for all schools so that student achievement increases. Servant leadership is a focus of many scholarly studies and may prove to be a leadership style for effective schools (Crippen, 2010; Hays, 2008; Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012; Spears, 2004). Crippen (2005) stated that servant leadership provides the promise of an effective educational leadership and management model.

Greenleaf (1970) noted that the servant leader is a servant first. The process begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, and then he or she makes the conscious choice to lead. This type of leader is sharply different from the person who leads to satisfy an unusual power drive (Greenleaf, 1970). The servant leadership model includes an emphasis on personal integrity and serving others and is based on the premise that, in order to bring out the best in their followers, leaders need to rely on one-on-one communications to better understand the needs, abilities, desires, goals, and potential of individuals (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). Armed with knowledge of the individual followers' unique characteristics and interests, the leader can assist followers in achieving their potential, thus increasing the potential of the organization (Liden et al., 2008).

Since the origination of servant leadership, many studies have been published about the topic (Crippen, 2010; Hays, 2008; Liden et al., 2008; Waterman, 2011). Over time, servant leadership has been linked to many attributes that are tied to effective schools (Barnabas, Joseph, & Clifford, 2010; Black, 2010). Researchers have shown

parallels between servant leadership and school climate (Black, 2010), organizational commitment (Hoveida, Salari, & Asemi, 2011), and employee trust (Del & Akbarpour, 2011). Previous researchers focused on servant leadership associations to a variety of components that could potentially lead to an organization's success (Black, 2010; Del & Akbarpour, 2011; Hoveida et al., 2011). However, the focus of this research was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics and behaviors of principals in schools that earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. The results of this research study add empirical evidence to the field regarding the instructional leadership of principals who lead their schools to earn the Blue Ribbon award.

Chapter 1 contains a background of servant leadership and the Blue Ribbon Award followed by the problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions that drive the study. Additionally, Chapter 1 contains a discussion concerning the advancement scientific knowledge, the significance of the study, and the rationale explaining why the use of a qualitative methodology. Further, Chapter 1 contains a discussion of the design of the study and provides definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations present in the study. Finally, a summary and organization for the remainder of the study completes this chapter.

Problem Statement

It was not known how the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in schools in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. Rhodes and Brundrett (2009) and Wilson (2011) indicated that leadership is important to the overall effectiveness of school systems, especially in

reference to student learning. Waters and Cameron (2007) found a statistical significance between school-level leadership and student achievement of 10% point difference in student achievement on norm-referenced tests, and additionally identified a set of responsibilities and practices that principals can use to improve student achievement. Interestingly, Waters and Cameron (2007) also found that, in some schools that were led by an effective principal, student achievement was not high. Even if teachers rated the principal's leadership as effective, student performance was not always strong. The authors speculated there were two potential reasons for this gap. First, the principal has to be focused on practices that actually improve student learning. Second, even if the principal is focused on the right strategies, the teachers and other stakeholders have to implement those changes by adopting the appropriate, targeted behaviors for student learning to actually improve. Maslyk (2012) studied the leadership practices of principals whose schools attained Blue Ribbon status in Pennsylvania schools and recommended that future research be conducted to consider other leadership styles beyond transformational leadership. Thus, the focus of this study was the principal's perceptions of servant leadership and their instructional leadership practices.

Blue Ribbon schools have demonstrated consistent, high achievement on norm-referenced tests or they could not have been selected for the honor. Clearly, leadership contributed, at least in part, to the success of these schools. By using a qualitative approach, a better understanding of the leadership characteristics of principals whose schools have earned a Blue Ribbon designation was obtained. The results of this study provided information to demonstrate how principals perceived the influence their leadership behaviors had on achieving the Blue Ribbon Award.

A relationship exists between servant leadership and school climate (Black, 2010) as well as employee trust (Del & Akbarpour, 2011) and organizational commitment (Hoveida et al., 2011). Prior studies contained evidence that the principal and teachers, as instructional leaders, play a large role in students' learning outcomes (Black, 2010; Coddard & Miller, 2010; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009); however, less was known about the specific leadership practices that contribute to a school receiving the prestigious Blue Ribbon Award. Maslyk (2012) conducted a study on leadership in Blue Ribbon schools and recommended that additional research be done to gain a more thorough view of the leadership of principals at award-winning and high-performing schools, including a view of other leadership styles.

Irving (2008) stated that more work is necessary in assessing and confirming that servant leadership and team effectiveness are present in all major organizational sectors. Black (2010) recommended more research in the field of servant leadership and education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels to enhance understanding of the implications of servant leadership and its effect on education. Ebener and O'Connell (2010) suggested that servant leadership enhances organizational citizenship, but recommended future research over servant leadership. This study answered many past servant-leader researchers' call for more research (Black, 2010; Crippen, 2005; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Irving, 2008). This research provides schools with empirical evidence regarding how principals perceived the leadership practices they have used that contributed to their schools receiving the Blue Ribbon Award. Further, this study could help spur more research in servant leadership and effective schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals in schools that have earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. Twenty-seven teachers in the targeted schools completed the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) online survey (Laub, 2012). Additionally, five principals of Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools were interviewed along with the examination of the schools' Blue Ribbon application. The Blue Ribbon application contained many categories that provided both statistical information and explanations of school practices in essay form.

The phenomena for this study included the leadership characteristics and behaviors of principals who are in charge of highly successful schools. Schools in the United States selected as Blue Ribbon schools have proven their ability to create and sustain student achievement for at least five consecutive years (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Some of these schools obtained this honor despite their location in a high poverty area. This research helps to identify how leadership contributed to schools increasing their students' achievement, which led to the schools earning the Blue Ribbon Award.

This study provided insight regarding how the leadership behaviors of principals enabled schools to develop the characteristics needed to become a Blue Ribbon School and help superintendents and school boards identify which leadership qualities to look for in the selection of future leaders. Choosing effective leadership in a school district is one of the most significant decisions a superintendent and school board can make to help a

school achieve its goals (Clifford, 2012). School administration could utilize data gathered from this research to determine what professional development to include for current school employees in regards to leadership.

This study helps schools gain further insight into how the leaders of Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools practice servant leadership attributes, thus increasing the knowledge concerning school leadership and servant leadership. With a better understanding of servant leadership and its connection to Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools, valuable information concerning servant leadership in the school systems was uncovered. Research has linked servant leadership to a variety of components that lend to an organization's success (Black, 2010; Irving, 2008; Jones, 2012). Empirical studies that focus on servant leadership are necessary to lend to the credibility of this theoretical leadership model. The expectation for this study was to give school systems direction for choosing leaders or choosing a leadership model to implement. Educators wishing to become school leaders now have empirical evidence identifying if servant leadership is effective for schools that achieved the Blue Ribbon Award. The theory of servant leadership is founded on the characteristics of empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, and building a community (Crippen, 2010). Tate (2003) discussed servant leadership and its benefits for schools and youth programs. The results of this study contributed to the understanding of how servant leadership contributed to earning the Blue Ribbon Award.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study. The overarching question was how do principals perceive the leadership characteristics and behaviors that led to their schools earning the Blue Ribbon designation.

R1: How do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools?

R2: How do principals perceive accountability requirements influence leading, instruction, and learning in their school?

R3: How do principals perceive their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon schools?

R4: How do principals from Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing the school's mission, instructional program, and creating a positive school climate?

R5: How do principals perceive their collaborative and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation?

R6: What recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?

This focus of this study was to understand the principals' behaviors that contributed to a school gaining the Blue Ribbon Award. Research questions were framed to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics and behaviors of principals in schools that earned the Blue Ribbon award. The researcher took into account the possibility that servant leadership was not present in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools.

The prediction was that principals practice servant leadership in the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools, which contributed to the school gaining the Blue Ribbon designation.

It was feasible to answer the research questions with the data collected from the OLA assessment tool, principal interviews, and examination of the Blue Ribbon School's application. The OLA can only be utilized in three of the six research questions. The OLA tool is designed to measure the organizational assessment that provides the perception of the teachers on the six key areas of servant leadership. By surveying the staff at Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools, and interviewing principals, as well as reviewing archival documents, enough data was obtained to understand how leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in Oklahoma schools.

Advancing Scientific Knowledge

The theoretical foundation of this study was servant leadership. The term, coined by Greenleaf (1970), was based on the premise that servant leaders are servants first. The leaders want to serve but also make the conscious choice to lead with the goal of developing others as opposed to satisfying their own need for power (Greenleaf, 1970). By learning their individual followers' unique characteristics and interests, servant leaders can assist followers in achieving their potential, thus increasing the potential of the organization (Liden et al., 2008).

Servant leadership is built upon the theory that if followers are treated as ends in themselves, rather than means to an end, they will reach their potential and so perform optimally (Greenleaf, 1970). Blue Ribbon school employees and their students demonstrated the ability to perform optimally or they could not have met the rigor to

achieve the award. If servant leadership contributed to a school receiving the Blue Ribbon Award, it could help to validate the portion of the theory that servant leadership contributes to the organization performing at high levels.

Researchers have provided evidence that demonstrates improved academic achievement results from effective school leadership practices and leaders who attend to the needs of the school organization (Black, 2010; Coddard & Miller, 2010; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Black (2010) recommended more research in the field of servant leadership and education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels to enhance understanding of the implications of servant leadership and its effect on education. Crippen (2005) posited that servant leadership is a potentially promising model for educational leaders to practice, but the model requires further research in the school setting. This study not only adds to the body of research on servant leadership in education organizations but also to the practices of instructional leadership that principals implement. The purpose of the Blue Ribbon Award is to identify and disseminate knowledge about best school leadership and teaching practices and to recognize schools in which students attain and maintain high academic goals (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2013). For these reasons, a Blue Ribbon School provided an ideal organization to use in a study aimed at advancing scientific knowledge about servant leadership.

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) balanced leadership framework also informs this study. Waters and Cameron's (2007) research, sponsored by McREL, was based on a meta-analysis of studies in educational settings on student leadership and principal leadership. The authors identified 21 leadership duties

and 66 associated activities that provided concrete evidence of instructional leadership. The responsibilities centered on domains such as school culture, discipline, resources, the curriculum and instruction process, visibility and presence in classrooms, communication, relationships with teachers and staff, and beliefs. Based on these responsibilities and tasks, McREL developed the balanced leadership framework and concluded the need for effective and inspired leadership is paramount in today's educational field. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 in the theoretical framework section of the study.

Significance of the Study

Many researchers have recommended more research concerning servant leadership in a variety of areas (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Irving, 2008; Jones, 2012; Liden et al., 2008; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008; Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, & Jinks, 2007) with Black (2010) and Crippen (2005) specifically recommending more research regarding servant leadership in education. Maslyk (2012) recommended additional research to gain a more thorough view of the leadership of principals at award-winning and high-performing schools, including a view of other leadership styles. The significance of this study is that it fulfilled, in part, the call for more research in servant leadership in the field of education. Research from this study helps schools because they now have empirical evidence concerning the effect of a specific leadership style on increasing student achievement.

Furthermore, this study added to the knowledge of servant leadership and its effect within schools. The outcomes of this study provided support for the use of the servant leadership model in the educational setting. Researchers have provided proof of

improved academic achievement through effective school leaders who attend to the needs of the school organization (Black, 2010; Coddard, & Miller, 2010; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). However, there was not an established study that determined how the presence of leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in Oklahoma schools. Stakeholders can use this information to focus their attention on whether to implement servant leadership or certain characteristics of servant leadership. The predicted result is that leadership contributed to at least some schools achieving the Blue Ribbon Award.

The researcher predicted the results from this study will affect servant leadership knowledge by giving more insight into how it might contribute to schools earning the Blue Ribbon Award. Brown and Green (2014) used Blue Ribbon school principals to determine practices to improve student achievement in high-poverty schools. Data collected from this study revealed seven leadership strategies in the literature on school transformation including leadership, collaboration, professional development, school organization, data analysis, curriculum alignment, and student intervention. The findings also revealed that the school leaders perceived a noticeable difference in teachers' behavior and students felt competent and capable of learning the curriculum taught with the execution of such practices.

Other studies concerning servant leadership also influenced this study (Black, 2010; Jones, 2012; Taylor et al., 2007). The prediction was that this study will prompt future studies regarding the effects of servant leadership in highly effective schools. Not only will further gaps about servant leadership be filled as a consequence, but other components of what contributes to schools gaining the Blue Ribbon Award may be

determined. Another prediction was that the results from this study would help school administration determine if servant leadership is worthy of implementing into their school districts.

Rationale for Methodology

Qualitative methods are useful for understanding social phenomena through the perspectives of the individuals involved and allow for in-depth understanding of a situation that is not possible with quantitative methods (Szyjka, 2012). The purpose of using a qualitative method is to contextualize, understand, and interpret a situation, especially if the situation is complex and difficult to measure (Szyjka, 2012). Researchers can measure servant leadership in an organization using Laub's (2012) OLA instrument, but understanding if servant leadership contributed to a school earning the Blue Ribbon Award would have been difficult to measure with a quantitative methodology. By using a qualitative approach, the researcher was able to search for the answers to the questions outlined in the study. Instead of relying on statistical data alone, this study allowed the researcher to interview the participants and thus view leadership through the lens of school leaders.

The focus of the project consisted of four Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools. Using elite schools in Oklahoma helped to provide insight into leadership practices in Blue Ribbon Schools. This information can potentially fill gaps in the knowledge of servant leadership and instructional leadership by helping educators understand how the presence of servant leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in schools.

Nature of the Research Design for the Study

A descriptive design allowed the researcher to examine the schools' Blue Ribbon application, interview principals, and measure the level of servant leadership in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools. A qualitative descriptive approach offers a comprehensive summary of an event in everyday language (Sandelowski, 2000). When using a qualitative descriptive study, the researcher stays closer to the data and to the surface of words and events than researchers conducting grounded theory, phenomenological, ethnographic, or narrative studies (Sandelowski, 2000).

The collection of data for this qualitative study came predominantly from the interviews of five principals from four of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools that received the award during the 2012-13 school year (note one school had two principals). The researcher also downloaded the Blue Ribbon applications from each school and school employees were asked to participate in the OLA survey via an email (Appendix A). Access codes and directions for taking the OLA were provided to all participants in their email invitation. The researcher then monitored the progress of each organization taking the OLA. Once all assessments had been completed, an OLA Report for each organization was provided to the researcher from the OLA research organization.

The researcher interviewed five principals to glean further information regarding their perceptions of how their leadership behaviors and styles influenced the high success rate of their schools. Qualitative methods allowed the researcher to attempt to understand phenomena through the perspectives of the individuals involved (Argode, 2012; Szyjka, 2012). It is common in qualitative research to utilize interview questions that are open-ended as opposed to close-ended questions as they allow the participants to expound on

the subject in immense detail (Jones, 2012). Finally, the researcher reviewed the Blue Ribbon applications of these schools. This information provided insight into how the Blue Ribbon principals perceived their leadership style and what perceived leadership practices contributed to student achievement in these schools.

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this study are defined here to assist in understanding the study.

Achievement gap. The achievement gap is the difference in academic achievement between low-income, African American, and Latino students and the more affluent students of European and Asian origins (Gaynor, 2012).

At-risk students. At-risk students are those who have at least one of the following attributes associated with them: eligible for a free or reduced-priced meals, receive Title I services, have limited English proficiency, migrant, or in need of special services and are at risk of not completing their education through the 12th grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Blue Ribbon School program. The Blue Ribbon School program is a federal award designed to honor the best schools in the United States and to recognize those schools that show significant academic improvement over a five-year period (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Instructional leadership. Instructional leadership refers to leadership practices that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning (Robinson, 2010).

Servant leadership. The servant leadership approach was introduced by Greenleaf in 1970 and noted defines servant leadership as the leader having a natural feeling to serve others and put the needs of the followers first (Crippen, 2005).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

As with every study, the researcher proceeded with certain assumptions that appear to be self-evident. The researcher encountered inherent limitations within the study. There were several assumptions for this study.

1. The researcher assumed the participants of the survey and interviews would be truthful with their answers.
2. The researcher assumed that the leaders at the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools are at least partially responsible for schools' nomination for the Blue Ribbon Award.
3. The researcher assumed that, by using the 2012-2013 Blue Ribbon School, data gathered would be current.

The following limitations were present in this study:

1. In 2012, there were only six Blue Ribbon schools in Oklahoma.
2. The responses for this study come from voluntary respondents.
3. Many teachers did not complete the OLA survey, which limited the information gained from the survey.
4. Qualitative descriptive studies utilizing categorical coding limits what can be learned about the meanings participants give to events and leave less opportunity for the researcher to find unanticipated information (Sandelowski, 2000).

There was one delimitation to the study. The list of Blue Ribbon Schools is public information found on the state Department of Education website. Therefore, determining the names of possible participants in this study would require little effort. A simple cross reference of the Blue Ribbon Schools with who was working at the school at the time of the survey could reveal possible participants.

Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Researchers have found evidence of the importance of effective leadership in student achievement (Black, 2010; Coddard, & Miller, 2010; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Blue Ribbon schools are schools that receive the award are among a state's highest performing schools measured by the state assessment in mathematics and language arts. Oklahoma had six schools that earned this honor in 2013 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). If current research identifying the importance of leadership in the school and student achievement is correct (Waters & Cameron, 2007), then studying an Oklahoma Blue Ribbon school and the presence of servant leadership within the district may help add to the body of knowledge in the area of servant leadership and effective schools.

This researcher contacted each school district using an e-mail invitation (Laub, 2012) to obtain permission to conduct the study, which included interviews with the principals. Employees of 2013 Blue Ribbon schools in Oklahoma took the OLA web-based review to assess organizational leadership. The researcher also examined the schools' Blue Ribbon application.

Qualitative methods help researchers understand social phenomena (Szyjka, 2012). For this study, the phenomenon was Blue Ribbon schools, and the purpose was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics and behaviors of principals in those schools. The information contained in this study filled gaps in knowledge with regard to servant leadership, instructional leadership, and how principals' practices of these leadership styles affect students' achievement in the educational setting (Black, 2010; Crippen, 2005; Waters & Cameron, 2007). The qualitative method was an acceptable research method for this study because it allowed the researcher to understand

the phenomena through the perspective of the individuals involved and acquire an in-depth understanding of a situation that is not possible with quantitative methods (Szyjka, 2012).

Chapter 2 contains a comprehensive literature review including effective school leadership, servant leadership, and the Blue Ribbon School program. Clifford (2012) stated that strong leaders lead high-performing and dramatically improving schools. This study helps schools gain an insight into characteristics of servant leadership within the school setting and how it contributed to a school achieving the Blue Ribbon Award. This information adds to the body of knowledge concerning school leadership. Chapter 3 contains an in-depth description of the research methodology that responds to the problem statement and research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Chapter and Background to the Problem

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics of principals in schools that earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. The phenomenon for this study was how servant leadership and instructional leadership influence a school that achieves the Blue Ribbon Award. The U.S. Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell, created the Blue Ribbon School Program. Blue Ribbon Schools are public or private schools that perform at very high levels or have shown significant improvements in student academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Since 1982, the program has developed into a national school improvement strategy that has three main purposes.

Schools selected as Blue Ribbon winners have proven their ability to produce an increase in student achievement or they could not have received the award (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). For the 2012 and 2013 school year, six Oklahoma schools received this prestigious honor (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2013). Based upon the connection between leadership and student achievement (Waters & Cameron, 2007), the question that drove this study was how the leadership practices and behaviors of principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in four Oklahoma schools. A review of current literature with regard to servant leadership, instructional leadership, and student achievement provided a foundation for this study. A working knowledge of the Blue Ribbon program is necessary to aid in the understanding as to why a Blue Ribbon school is significant to this study.

The context for this study came from past research concerning servant and instructional leadership. Black (2010) found a link between servant leadership and school climate while Hoveida et al. (2011) found a correlation between servant leadership and organizational commitment. Ebener and O'Connell (2010) stated servant leaders encourage people to go beyond their immediate interests by performing organizational citizenship behaviors. Additionally, researchers found an empirical link between student achievement and school leadership (Black, 2010; Mendels, 2012; Waters & Cameron, 2007).

The focus in education is now shifting to school administration as empirical research linking student achievement to school leadership emerges (Mendels, 2012). Wilson (2011) stated that successful educational leadership and high student achievement are not a random phenomenon. Visionary, principled, creative, and inspiring educational leaders are vital to building and fostering a positive school environment to meet the demands of educational goals in the 21st century (Black, 2010).

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was believed that leaders were born instead of made, that good management made successful organizations, and one should avoid failures at all costs (Crippen, 2005). During this time, researchers defined leadership as hierarchical, patriarchal, coercive, and related to wealth and influence (Crippen, 2005). Certainly, leadership research has evolved considerably over the past century. However, this evolution does not mean a clear, agreed-upon definition of the concept exists among scholars. This lack of consensus causes leaders to choose the most effective leadership theory for their organizations without having clear data (Black, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) identified accountability provisions that were strong and very clear. The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirement in NCLB established new standards defining school and student success (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The federal government's influence is, without a doubt, present in school systems in every state. Under NCLB, states have clearly defined goals and standards that ensure schools are on target for teaching learning objectives. Each state had to set specific benchmark goals that established the expectation that schools would work to improve students' proficiency over time. Schools are now accountable for their students' overall achievement, especially in reading and mathematics. This expectation applies to all students regardless of socio-economic status or demographics. Every child in America will be able to do math and reading/English to the best of his or her ability and that data will be tracked (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

This chapter begins with the theoretical foundations of servant leadership and the balanced leadership model followed by a literature review of servant leadership and the Blue Ribbon Award. The literature review contains a discussion of servant leadership in the educational setting and the specific characteristics of servant leadership including listening, empathy, healing, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Additional servant leadership topics include implementing servant leadership, the weaknesses of servant leadership, and school climate. Next, the chapter provides a literature review concerning the methodology chosen for the study, which disaggregates why a qualitative descriptive

design is the best way to determine how the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award.

To survey the literature, the researcher primarily used EBSCO HOST online library, including the databases Academic Search Complete, eBook Collection, Education Research Complete, GCU Fleming Library Catalog, MAS Ultra- School Edition, and Teacher Reference Center. Google Scholar, Oklahoma State Department of Education, and U.S. Department of Education websites were used as well. *Servant leadership, educational leadership, instructional leadership, Blue Ribbon Award, and Blue Ribbon Schools* were the search terms used throughout the literature survey. Servant leadership in combination with leadership characteristics, weakness, and school climate was used in these databases to help narrow searches. The researcher used peer-reviewed articles with the majority published within the last five years of the writing of this dissertation.

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Model

The theoretical foundations for this study were servant leadership and the McREL's balanced leadership model (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Greenleaf (1970) coined the term *servant leader*, noting that a leader should be a servant first. The inspiration came from Greenleaf reading *The Journey to the East* (Greenleaf, 1970), but the idea of servant leadership came, at least in part, from Greenleaf's half-century of experience in working to shape large institutions (Spears, 2010). Greenleaf spent most of his organizational life in the field of development, management research, and education at AT&T. After a 40-year career at AT&T, Greenleaf served as an influential consultant for another 25 years, and he worked with a number of institutions including MIT and the Ford Foundation (Spears, 2010).

Servant leadership. Servant leadership is an increasingly popular concept that places leaders as servants to their followers (Hirschy, Gomez, Patterson, & Winston, 2012; McCuddy & Cavin, 2009). Greenleaf (1970) explained that servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. After the natural feeling of wanting to serve comes an aspiration and choice to lead. Under this leadership model, those who are served grow as people and become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and thus more likely to become servants themselves (Greenleaf, 1970).

Even though Greenleaf introduced servant leadership to the world over 30 years ago, scholars have rediscovered the concept only recently (Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). One reason for this renewed interest is that the 21st century has brought about a shift in the interest in leadership theories as organizations begin to realize that leadership is a key factor for engaging employees and creating an innovative environment. Black (2010) stated that leadership research has evolved over the past century but has not created a clear, agreed-upon definition.

Servant leadership is characterized by a leader encompassing moral, ethical, and spiritual values (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012). Servant leadership enthusiasts feel an organization can be more effective if the unique talents of the employees are recognized, utilized, and developed (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012). Leaders play a critical role in helping employees realize their potential. Servant leadership focuses on developing employees to their fullest potential in the areas of task effectiveness, community stewardship, self-motivation, and future leadership capabilities (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012).

One idea behind how and why servant leadership works is that by meeting followers' needs, those followers reach optimal performance. Servant leaders treat the followers as the ends rather than means to an end. When leaders respect, value, and motivate followers, they are practicing, at least in part, servant leadership (Waterman, 2011). Servant leaders encourage people to transcend their immediate interests by performing organizational citizenship behaviors (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010). The vision servant leaders create often reflects the shared concerns of the followers and supporters, thereby giving inspiration and momentum to the delivery of the organizations' objectives (Waterman, 2011).

Servant leadership theory deviates from some of the more traditional leadership styles in that it does not dominate the subordinates by telling them what they must do (Jones-Burbridge, 2012). Rather, servant leadership empowers subordinates and inspires them to perform (Peterson, Galvin, & Lange, 2012). This framework places importance on relationship and team-building. The team concept is that each member of the team plays a significant role in fulfilling the organization's goals and mission, especially in times of flux or reform. Servant leaders strive to help the organization's employees understand their strengths and weaknesses, beliefs and values, and identify their potential (Jones-Burbridge, 2012).

The problem was addressed in this study by using Blue Ribbon schools in Oklahoma that have demonstrated high degrees of student success to determine how the presence of leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributes to their success rate. The first research question concerns how principals of Blue Ribbon Schools perceive servant leadership. During the data analysis, three servant leadership

characteristics emerged including listening, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Thus, the theoretical foundation of servant leadership becomes an important component of this study.

Balanced-leadership model. Waters and Cameron's (2007) meta-analysis of school-level leadership and its impact on student achievement began with a review of more than 5,000 studies that purported to have examined the effects of principal leadership on student achievement. These 5,000 studies were reduced to 69 based on quality of the design, rigor, reliability, and relevance of data to evaluate the effect of school leadership on student achievement. The 69 studies included more than 14,000 teacher ratings of principal leadership for 2,802 principals (Waters & Cameron, 2007). The researchers then correlated the ratings of principal leadership with more than 1.4 million student achievement scores. The meta-analysis of quantitative and standardized data produced two major findings. Finding 1 was that there was a statistical significance between school-level leadership and student achievement of .25, which was a one standard deviation increase in principal leadership behavior corresponding to a 10% point difference in student achievement on a norm-referenced test (Waters & Cameron, 2007). This clearly showed that school leadership made a difference in student achievement.

The study also produced an unexpected finding as well. Finding 2 was that not all strong leaders had a positive impact on student achievement (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Principals whose teachers rated them as strong leaders were associated with below average student achievement in a number of studies. Waters and Cameron (2007) stated two possible explanations for this finding. First, the effect of strong leadership could be mitigated if a principal focused on practices that do not influence student achievement.

Second, principals who focused on the correct classroom and school practices did not understand the implications these changes have for stakeholders and so failed to adjust their leadership accordingly. This data also aligns with this study and helps answer the research question. Waters and Cameron (2007) used the results of their meta-analysis to develop the balanced leadership framework used in this study.

Waters and Cameron (2007) identified 21 leadership responsibilities with statistically significant correlations to student achievement and 66 practices or behaviors for fulfilling these responsibilities. Two examples of the responsibilities and the practices associated with them are discussed. According to Waters and Cameron (2007), under the responsibilities of culture, the school leader should promote cooperation among staff, create a sense of well-being and cohesion among staff, develop an understanding of purpose, and develop a shared vision of what the school could be like. Under the responsibilities of order, the leader should provide and enforce clear structure, rules, and procedures for the students as well as the staff. The leader must also establish routines regarding the running of the school that staff members can understand and follow. The Balanced Leadership Framework model provides leaders with a guide to increase student achievement through leadership (Waters & Cameron, 2007). In Chapter 5, the findings of this study will be compared to the Waters and Cameron's (2007) study to determine if there are any correlations.

The Balanced Leadership Model contains evidence that leadership affects student achievement. Without this knowledge, the validity of this study would be hampered. If leadership did not affect student achievement, there would not be a reason to study leadership in Blue Ribbon schools. Providing the theoretical foundation for the Balanced

Leadership Models provides a better understanding concerning how leadership plays a role in student achievement.

Review of Literature

Servant leadership. Greenleaf, who was interested in developing collaborative communities based on caring attitudes, originally identified servant leadership (Crippen, 2010). The model emphasizes the importance of the followers in the organization in contrast to other leadership styles that view employees as expendable resources (Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009; Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012). One way to recognize servant leadership is through characteristics that are often associated with the leadership model. These characteristics help to define this model of leadership and provide a means to recognize if an organization or leader is implementing servant leadership.

Characteristics of servant leadership. Research completed concerning servant leadership points to a leader who possesses moral and ethical character and does not regard the title of leader as a status symbol but as a way to serve others while moving the organization forward (Williams & Hatch, 2012). The premise of why servant leadership works is that by meeting the needs of the followers, those followers can reach optimal performance. Servant leaders encourage people to exceed their own immediate interests by performing organizational citizenship behaviors (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010). The vision that servant leaders create will often reflect the shared concerns of the followers and supporters, thereby giving inspiration and momentum to the delivery of the organizations' objectives (Waterman, 2011). Servant leaders thrive on the opportunity to

share ideas because the process of sharing creates accountability for the results that are generated from their actions (Savage-Austin & Honeycutt, 2011).

Listening. Leaders who want to become servant leaders must develop their listening skills. To listen effectively, a person must remain quiet; however, there is more to listening than not talking. Good listening begins with paying close attention to what is being said while, simultaneously, searching for understanding. Part of this understanding comes from the listener's perception of the speaker's mood and expressions, not just the words the speaker uses (Greenleaf, 1970). Leaders who want to listen well must also be accessible to their employees (Lynch & Friedman, 2013).

A practiced listener assesses what the speaker is expressing by separating facts from opinions. The listener should also be aware of the speaker's feelings and attitudes. The discipline of listening can positively affect face-to-face relations and save time in communicating. It has the potential to lift the listener and the speaker to a higher level of communication. Listening alone does not make a person a servant leader; however, it is considered an important attribute of one (Beazley, Beggs, & Spears, 2003).

Listening helps leaders identify and meet the needs of others. The leader can use suggestion boxes, informal interviews, formal interviews, surveys, focus groups, and other means to help start a discussion (Keith, 2009). Crippen (2010) stated that the first thing a servant leader does when responding to an issue is to listen. This action includes paying close attention to nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, body language, gestures, and the tone of a person's voice. The servant leader not only listens to what is being said, but what is being left unsaid (Crippen, 2010).

Spears (2010) claimed that the servant leader needs to reinforce verbal skills by learning to listen intently to others. The servant leader should seek to clarify the message and intent by hearing an inner voice and then reflecting on the meaning (Spears, 2010). The servant leader understands the situation before taking action and listening receptively is a way for the leader to accomplish this understanding (Black, 2010). When a leader listens with an open heart and mind, he or she can truly understand people (Hays, 2008).

Empathy. The servant leader's trait of empathy means the leader attempts to understand the actions, behaviors, and intentions of others (Black, 2010; Lynch & Friedman, 2013). Hays (2008) defined empathy as the ability to understand the effects different situations have on others. A servant leader is supportive, not patronizing. A leader achieves this supportive attitude by empathizing with other people, which aids in the development of trust (Crippen, 2010; Hays, 2008). A servant leader will take action to change a situation so that people are more positively influenced (Hays, 2008).

Spears and Lawrence (2002) stated the servant leader strives to understand and empathize with others. The most successful servant leaders are those who become skilled empathetic listeners (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Followers should be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). A servant leader attempts to understand and empathize with others while also seeing followers as people who deserve respect and appreciation for their personal development (Jones-Burbridge, 2012). Spears (2010) stated that leaders can develop empathy by striving to understand and empathize with others and to accept and recognize them for their special and unique spirits. The servant leader should assume the good intentions of others and not reject them as people, even when the leader may not accept certain behaviors or

performance standards (Spears, 2010). Servant leaders are able to understand the follower's problems and sympathize with them. Sympathy is the ability to perceive another person as that person might perceive him or herself. An empathic person can see the world using someone else's viewpoint (Karimzadeh Bardeh, Mohsen Allammeh, & Harooni, 2013).

Healing. Jones-Burbridge (2012) stated that the healing characteristic is a great strength of a servant leader and provides him or her the ability to heal themselves and others (Spears and Lawrence, 2002). Black (2010) stated that in this context, healing refers to addressing spiritual and emotional damage from life experiences, not alleviating physical illness. An example of this occurs when the leader realizes that one of the followers is feeling stressed because of a task he or she was assigned. In this case, the servant leader does not take away the responsibility of the individual but does strive to help the follower develop the emotional health that is necessary to accomplish the task with less apprehension (Hays, 2008). In this way, the servant leader heals the stress of the follower while at the same time empowering the individual to be productive to the organization.

Crippen (2005) stated that the servant leader not only understands about personal health but also institutional health as well. Healing in the educational setting leads to a happy, positive school environment, where the staff, students, and parents feel welcome and there is a sense of wellness (Crippen, 2010). Servant leaders should learn to understand relationships and be able to heal his or her relationships with others if they become damaged (Spears, 2010). Servant leaders should learn to recognize when their

followers are suffering emotional pain and take the time to help those with whom they come in contact (Lynch & Friedman, 2013; Spears, 2010).

Persuasion. Crippen (2010) stated that persuasion is a vital leadership attribute. The ability to persuade comes only after the leader has developed the trust of the followers. Employees are eager to accomplish task assigned to them by the leader if they feel the leader has their best interest at heart (Crippen, 2010). Leaders may have the power to order followers to accomplish any given task, but servant leaders persuade the followers to achieve tasks (Lynch & Friedman, 2013; Spears, 2010). Crippen (2005) stated that servant leaders use persuasion to convince others to accomplish a task rather than coerce compliance. Persuasion offers one of the clearest examples of the distinctions between the traditional authoritarian models of leadership and servant leadership (Jones-Burbridge, 2012). This characteristic is effective at building consensus within a group (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

Conceptualizing. Another characteristic of servant leaders is the ability to conceptualize what the leader wants to achieve by seeing the whole picture and recognize a common or shared goal (Herman & Marlowe, 2005). The ability to conceptualize enables leaders to understand how each individual will contribute to the overall group. As with other servant leadership characteristics, conceptualization takes practice and focus to perfect, yet it can mean the difference between success and failure (Herman & Marlowe, 2005).

Servant leaders' ability to conceptualize requires them to look beyond the day-to-day realities to examine an issue (Black, 2010). Traditional leaders focus on short-term operational goals whereas servant leaders stretch their thinking to encompass long-term

goals (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Those who can conceptualize possess the ability to communicate ideas (Lynch & Friedman, 2013). Different forms of communication between leaders and employees can reduce uncertainty and increase job satisfaction, commitment, reliability, and honesty (Rezaei, Salehi, Shafiei, & Sabet, 2012).

Foresight. Foresight is closely related to conceptualization. Leaders need to be able to see possible future outcomes so that they can predict future problems. By predicting future problems, leaders can devise pre-planned scenarios to combat them (Crippen, 2010). Spears and Lawrence (2002) stated that foresight might be the one servant leader characteristic that a person may be born with whereas the others can be consciously developed. Having foresight enables servant leaders to understand lessons they learned in the past, the realities of the present, and the consequence a decision may have in the future (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

Foresight, in this context, is not a mythical power granted from another plane but a way to predict outcomes of a situation generated from logic, education, and experience. Foresight has acquired prominence as a process aiming to support forward-looking thinking in decision-making (Havas, Schartinger, & Weber, 2010). Boone and Makhani (2012) stated that servant leaders have a vision for the future. Black (2010) suggested servant leaders develop foresight through superior awareness and perception, which allows the leader to face the unknown.

Stewardship. Stewardship encourages organizational members to act authentically, accept personal responsibility for their behaviors, place the interest of the organization along with their own, and develop the courage to act in service to others (Mason & Simmons, 2012). The notion that leaders are stewards is replacing the

traditional philosophies of organizational leadership that detail ownership and exploitation. Leaders using stewardship are focused on the service to others, using collaboration, and a commitment to community (Mason & Simmons, 2012).

Stewardship is the obligation to help and serve others. Openness and persuasion are more important to servant leaders than having control (Jones-Burbridge, 2012). The servant leader stewards an environment that develops the organization while serving the needs of all the followers. The focus will then become the greater good of the entire community. The leader exhibiting this characteristic accepts the responsibility of providing and protecting their followers' rights, property, and welfare of (Hays, 2008).

Commitment to the growth of people. Spears and Lawrence (2002) stated that Greenleaf cast the role of the leader much differently than most leadership theorists of his time. Many leadership writings suggested leaders directed and followers responded. Leaders, not the followers, brought their talents, gifts, and aspirations to an organization. Spears and Lawrence (2002) also stated that Greenleaf's view was that leaders put the needs of the followers first to help those served to become healthier, wiser, freer, and more autonomous. Through this leadership, the followers are more likely to become servants.

Servant leaders have a strong commitment to the growth of others (Spears, 2010). This commitment applies not only to the professional lives of the followers but also flows into their personal life as well. Servant leaders should want their followers to grow as people and do whatever is necessary to help the followers in that process. By processing a commitment to the growth of people, the followers will have an intrinsic value that goes beyond their contributions as workers (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). The servant leader is

deeply committed to the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of every individual within his or her institution (Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011). This can include concrete actions such as making funds available for personal and professional development, taking a personal interest in the ideas of and the suggestions from everyone, and participating in shared decision-making (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

Builds community. The final characteristic that Greenleaf (1970) described is the ability to build community. One of a servant leader's greatest tasks is to shape and sustain the community's focus and unity (Hays, 2008). The servant leader should see that the employees interact with each other in positive ways. This interaction allows the followers to learn from each other and support each other, thus becoming more effective (Hays, 2008). Servant leaders seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution. Servant leadership proponents suggest that true community can be created among those who work in businesses and other institutions (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). The servant leader identifies the means to build a strong community both inside and outside the organization (Reed et al., 2011).

Implementing servant leadership. Implementing servant leadership is difficult unless there are fundamental changes in an organization (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012), which include the attitudes and behaviors of all people within the organization. Using servant leadership means the leader becomes the glue that holds the organization together as a virtual community working for the common good of the organization (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012). There is a sense of common identity that links a common purpose, which must be fed by an infectious energy and urgency. This energy and urgency start with the leader and move throughout the organization. Critical to the success of servant

leadership is a creation of healthy and productive relations between the leadership and the employees (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012).

A good leader sets the tone for the values and expectations of the school (Halfacre, 2011). Halfacre (2011) suggested one of the first things to do when implementing servant leadership is to eliminate the reserved principal parking spot. Having a special parking space might give the impression the principal is more important than the other faculty members, which is inconsistent with the concept of servant leadership. Further, principals who implement servant leadership should assume someone such as a teacher or staff member is always watching. The leader must lead through his or her example, such as picking up trash while walking the campus (Halfacre, 2011).

Halfacre (2011) suggested the school principal could also spend a day as a student each year. This effort would require the leader to do everything a student might do, such as ride the bus, complete homework, and eat in the cafeteria. The principal/student should raise his or her hand to answer questions, play at recess, and all the other things that students do in a given day. Doing this will allow the educational leader to see things from the eyes of the students (Halfacre, 2011).

School board members can help implement servant leadership as well. Board members connect the community and the district by facilitating communication. This communication is one of the reasons the Board of Education is important (Cassel & Holt, 2008). School systems that want to implement servant leadership in their districts should provide their members with professional development based upon the characteristics of servant leadership. School board members wishing to implement servant leadership should approve professional development geared towards servant leadership and

encourage their leaders to take advantage of that learning opportunity (Cassel & Holt, 2008).

Servant leaders in the classroom. Crippen (2005) stated that, once a person becomes a teacher, he or she becomes a leader in the classroom, school, and learning community. This leadership role creates a scenario for the teacher to contribute to the moral environment. For teachers to embrace servant leadership, they need to feel that they are a servant to their students and apply the characteristics that Greenleaf (1970) outlined. Teachers in public education do not have the luxury to choose the students they teach. Working with a population of students that often exhibits serious emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, poor home environments, hostile parents, and a variety of other issues is a real possibility and even likely (Herman & Marlowe, 2005). Many teachers leave the teaching profession due to burnout and frustration. A major source of burnout is the personal conflict that occurs when teachers have predetermined beliefs about their authority and oppositional children who trust no one and lack direction in life (Herman & Marlowe, 2005).

Weaknesses of servant leadership. A major function of leadership is realizing the goals of an organization. Servant leaders give primary importance to the needs and aspirations of the employees and try to make them perform through inspiration. This method does not always work and does not always effectively resolve issues regarding the individual-organizational fit. Unresolved cases of individual goals can conflict with the organizational goals, which can lead to organizational goals remaining unfulfilled. This can happen if the employee did not give attention or priority to the organizations goals thinking only of his or her personal goals. Along these same lines is the chance that

employees do not want a commitment to building a community within the organization and wish to keep work and family separate (Nayab, 2011).

McMahon (2012) asked if servant leadership only helped deal with the ethical treatment of employees without really changing the nature of how an organization deals with the rest of society. McMahon (2012) presented this example to illustrate a question: An Exxon employee decides to serve the corporation but by doing so damages the environment and hurts people. While serving the best interest of the corporation, he or she did not serve human kind. Additionally, Waterman (2011) stated that servant leadership could be perceived as a religious concept and, therefore, alien to modern sensitivities. Humility, which is often associated with servant leadership, can be perceived as a weakness and some workers may not respond to servant leaders who display a perceived weakness (Waterman, 2011).

The other key criticism of servant leadership is that it sometimes seems unsuited to a competitive environment. The potential for the servant leader to be caught up in inspiring and serving creates a situation where accountability and/or responsibility become diluted (Nayab, 2011). A characteristic of servant leadership is listening. In an ideal situation, leaders should always listen to their followers. However, in a crisis, the time to listen is a commodity that a leader will not always have (Nayab, 2011).

Many companies and organizations use some form of a power model of leadership. This model of leadership is about attainment, exercise, and retention of power where the boss has only one goal: ensure that employees do what he or she wants. It consists of strategies to win over morality and ethics (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009). One major problem with this model is that power has become a goal in and unto itself.

The idea that the leader is giving up power could cause rivalry and infighting between management and followers (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009).

Fear of the unknown is a completely natural feeling with people seeing the world through their individual perspectives. Change has the potential to cause discomfort (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009). A leader changing from a power model to a servant model could cause this discomfort in the employees. It is completely possible that some employees like to be told what to do and not have a say in the daily workings of the organization. They would prefer the leader not to use servant leadership characteristics, but instead tell them what to do and how to do it so that there is not any confusion as to what is expected of them.

Spears and Lawrence (2002) stated that servant leadership holds that the primary purpose of a business should be to create a positive impact on its employees and community. Profits should not be the sole motive. Some companies may disagree with this tenant of servant leadership, believing that they owe it to stockowners of the company to place profit as the most important component of the business. In much the same way, schools may hold that student test scores are the most important goal of the school because of the importance the post-NCLB era has placed on them. Therefore, leaders may fear to implement a leadership model that places such a high value on serving the followers and not on what they perceive as the key to success.

Another important concern with implementing servant leadership is that it might not be right for every culture. Chatbury, Beaty, and Kriek (2011) found a positive and significant relationship between servant leadership and trust in a sample of low-level workers and their managers in a South African firm. Servant leadership is also prominent

in North America and Europe (Irving & McIntosh, 2006). However, the study of servant leadership in Latin America has received limited attention (Irving & McIntosh, 2006). The term *servant* for instance may not gain support in a Brazilian culture due to its associated religious and historical factors (Irving & McIntosh, 2006).

School climate. The school climate is an abstract psychological concept that describes the school's atmosphere and can affect individuals' behaviors (Gülşen & Gülenay, 2014). Improving the school climate can increase students' chances for academic success (Okaya, Horne, Laming, & Smith, 2013). A positive school climate erases outside pressures so that students can focus on academic achievement. Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Oke (2010) found servant leadership ameliorates positive employee attitudes and creates climates that directly benefit individuals and the work group.

Black (2010) wanted to ascertain the extent that servant leadership linked with perceptions of school climate to identify if a relationship existed between principals' and teachers' perceived practice of servant leadership and school climate. Black (2010) stated that research supported the concept that a positive school climate influenced student achievement. The data revealed a significant positive correlation between servant leadership and school climate. This study aligns with Black's (2010) research by using schools proven to have high student achievement to determine if there is a connection between these schools and servant leadership.

Black's (2010) study led to this proposed study to determine if servant leadership contributed to a school receiving the Blue Ribbon Award. Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools were chosen for this study because they met high standards based on a criteria developed by the United States Department of Education. The Blue Ribbon program

honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools that made significant progress in closing the achievement gap or whose students achieved at a very high level of success over a period of five years. The program is part of a larger Department of Education effort to identify and disseminate knowledge about best school leadership and teaching practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). For this reason, schools selected for the Blue Ribbon Award are excellent choices to use to determine if servant leadership is effective in the school systems.

High-stakes testing and school accountability have increased the complexity and demand on educational systems (Velasco, Edmonson, & Slate, 2012). This increase also adds a burden on teachers because of media exposure that leaves teachers and administrators open to scrutiny based on published test scores (Velasco et al., 2012). Velasco et al. (2012) stated that school principals' behaviors influenced the climate and health of a school and thus student achievement. School principals can benefit from knowing how and when to modify their authority behaviors and leadership styles, principals can create positive school climates and cultures (Velasco et al., 2012).

Public schools have little control over the population of the students they serve (Bodovski, Nahum-Shani, and Walsh, 2013). Researchers have shown that schools with higher socioeconomic status (SES) enjoy stronger climates while schools with low SES demographic characteristics produce a weakened disciplinary climate. This disparity suggests that the average school is unable to buffer or compensate for the lack of the resources children have at home. Students' performance growth in mathematics over time was steeper in schools with a strong academic and disciplinary climate and suggested that

schools located in stronger SES locations have an easier time creating a climate that is conducive to learning (Bodovski et al., 2013).

The Blue Ribbon program. The Blue Ribbon program sets a standard of excellence for all schools striving for the highest level of achievement. Starting in 1982, the U.S. Department of Education (2011) has pursued schools where students attain and maintain high academic goals. The Blue Ribbon award means the school is in an elite group of just 6,000 schools identified over 28 years. These schools are urban and suburban, large and small, traditional and innovative. They serve children from every economic, social, and ethnic background found in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Every year about 80 members of the National Review Panel gather at a Washington hotel to decide which schools will earn the Blue Ribbon School award (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The group, the National Review Panel, consists of about 80 volunteers. The members of this panel cannot have met or spoken to a principal, parent, child, or teacher from any of the nominated schools or have set foot in any of sites (Richard, 2000). Schools must meet one of two criteria for nomination; either they must be exemplary high performing schools or exemplary improving schools. These schools must rank among a state's highest performing schools in their state assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics.

For public schools, the Chief State School Officers (CSSO) of each state determines the criteria by which a school is deemed high performing. However, one standard criterion is that a school's students must outperform most other students in the state on state assessment tests. It also requires that (a) disaggregated results for student

subgroups must be similar to the results for all students tested and (b) one-third of the schools nominated by each state must be schools with at least 40% of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Public schools must make AYP two years prior to nominations and in the year of their recognition (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

For non-public schools, high performing means the achievement of the school's students in the most recent year tested places the school among the highest performing schools in the nation in reading/language arts and mathematics as measured by a nationally normed test or as measured by a state test (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). If a non-public school administers both state and nationally normed tests, the school must rank among the highest in both. As in public schools, disaggregated results for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and demographics must be similar to the results of all the students tested within the school (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Exemplary improving schools must have at least 40% of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds and have reduced the achievement gap by making the most progress in improving students' performance in reading/language arts and mathematics on state assessments or tests referenced by national norms in at least the most recent year tested. For public schools, 'made the most progress' is defined by the CSSO of each state, but, at a minimum, it means that the school is among the schools that have shown the greatest improvement in student achievement in the state over the previous five years on state assessments of reading / language arts and mathematics. The disaggregated results for student subgroups must show improvement similar to that of all students including those from disadvantage backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Non-public schools under the exemplary improving schools grouping are those that have shown the greatest improvement in student achievement in the nation over the previous 5 years in reading/language arts and mathematics as measured by nationally normed assessments. Schools must also show disaggregated results for student subgroups that include those students from disadvantaged backgrounds and must have shown similar results on these assessments for all their students. A special note concerning this topic is that schools must rely on norm-referenced tests to qualify as an Exemplary Improving school (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

The Exemplary Improving section of the Blue Ribbon award targets and rewards schools that have closed the achievement gap between subgroups and socioeconomically disadvantaged students and that of their white, middle class counterparts. The socioeconomic status refers to an individual's standing regarding income, level of education, employment, health, and access to resources. According to the United States Census Bureau (2012), poverty thresholds set family size and composition but do not vary according to geographic location because these thresholds come from the Consumer Price Index. In 2011, a family of five with an income that is less than \$27,517 is living below the poverty level (United States Census Bureau, 2012).

For school programs, poverty is often determined by using the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Other factors to consider when defining poverty include the length of time a family has been in poverty, home ownership, college funds, and poverty level of the family when the children were under 5 years of age. These factors also affect the achievement level of the students (Burney & Beilke, 2008). A child's socioeconomic status will play an important role in their education. Poverty often

causes difficulty for school officials when they try to identify which students qualify for programs like the gifted and talented program (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Such high achieving students can be difficult to identify because of the lack of resources and prior knowledge with which they entered the school setting. A student living in poverty may well have the same abilities as a child who comes from a family with needed resources.

Schools earning the Blue Ribbon award are nationally recognized as some of America's most successful schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The award validates the hard work of students, staff members, families, and communities in reaching high levels of student achievement. However, this is not all the award signifies. Blue Ribbon schools report a renewed sense of pride and accomplishment at their school. Other schools desire to use Blue Ribbon schools as their example. Blue Ribbon schools may find that receiving grants and raising funds is easier. Communities report that the award makes their neighborhood a more desirable place to live because parents want their children to attend a Blue Ribbon School. Real estate agents use the Blue Ribbon award as a selling point for those neighborhoods. Tangibly, each fall, all winning schools get an invitation to Washington, D.C. for a ceremony to celebrate their success, share information, and receive a plaque and flag to commemorate their achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

In 2006, Cleveland Elementary School had a long history of poor academic achievement, low morale, rising poverty, social marginalization, unimpeded behavioral issues, and negative school culture which landed it as one of the lowest performing schools in New York. By 2010, it was named as a Blue Ribbon School, the highest honor for academic excellence bestowed by the federal government. Eiffe (2011), principal of a

Blue Ribbon School, attributed investment in relationships to the success of his school. Eiffe (2011) avowed the turnaround of the school came from a combination of many things. One was the principal's commitment to hear the teachers' concerns and then address these issues, allowing the faculty to be better at their jobs. Another was the principal's attendance at after-school parent-teacher conferences, events, and student activities. Also, Eiffe (2011) offered support and guidance to teachers when they needed it and demonstrated moral, ethical, and professional leadership.

Student achievement is the cornerstone of the Blue Ribbon Award. NCLB requires the testing of students in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies starting in the third grade and continuing through the course of the student's education. Much is at stake for school systems in the United States because they are mandated by law to ensure that no child is left behind as measured by state assessments (Herndon, 2007); school administrators have little time to concern themselves with winning awards. Every school district employee is accountable for the performance of students on assessment tests. Dire consequences can happen to schools where students do not perform well (Herndon, 2007).

Studies of Blue Ribbon schools. Maslyk (2012) conducted research on the leadership practices of principals in Pennsylvania whose schools had attained Blue Ribbon status. Maslyk (2012) used a qualitative research methodology utilizing interviews of six elementary Blue Ribbon principals in Pennsylvania to address the research questions driving this study. The results revealed that applying transformational leadership and developing the collective self-efficacy of teachers were important factors these principals felt contributed to their school's success. Maslyk (2012) noted the study

set the foundation for the study of other leadership styles in Blue Ribbon schools and also recommended that additional research be done to gain a more thorough view of the leadership of principals at award-winning and high-performing schools. Thus, the relevance of school leadership becomes important and a central focus to this study.

Brown and Green (2014) conducted a study to identify reform strategies used by leaders of Blue Ribbon schools that successfully reversed low performance and attempted to determine if the use of the strategies altered the instructional behaviors of teachers. The researchers used a survey instrument to collect data from schools that received the Blue Ribbon Award between the years of 2007-2010 in various states. The data collected in Brown and Green's (2014) study validated seven leadership strategies in the literature on school transformation: leadership, collaboration, professional development, school organization, data analysis, curriculum alignment, and student intervention. The study also revealed that the school leaders perceived a noticeable difference in teachers' performances and students felt capable of learning the curriculum when the listed practices were implemented (Brown & Green, 2014).

Giffing (2010) explored what teachers considered as effective leadership characteristics of principals in both Blue Ribbon and non-Blue Ribbon Schools. To accomplish this task, the researcher compared teacher surveys of Blue Ribbon School principals to non-Blue Ribbon Schools in Pennsylvania with follow-up interviews. The research produced unexpected results. The researcher, while inputting data, discovered that non-Blue Ribbon teachers were scoring their principal "very effective" more frequently than the Blue Ribbon teachers. Most notable was that teachers in non-Blue Ribbon schools rated principals to be more effective in seven out of nine elements

(Giffing, 2010). Giffing (2010) concluded that, although there is prestige and distinction in being recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School, this recognition does not necessarily indicate high levels of principal effectiveness in the perception of teachers.

McKinney (2012) used Blue Ribbon Schools to identify the professional and personal strategies principals used to cultivate a school culture that promoted academic success. The researcher used a non-experimental quantitative approach. Survey design instruments were used to determine what professional strategies and attributes principals at Blue Ribbon schools used to cultivate a progressive culture. The sample size for this study was 263 teachers or staff members and 12 principals in 11 Mississippi Gulf Coast Blue Ribbon Schools. The demographic data collected for this study came from a researcher-designed questionnaire. The Leadership Practices Inventory instrument provided quantitative data aimed at identifying the principal's personal and professional leadership strategies that enabled the school to receive the Blue Ribbon Award. Finally, the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO) provided data to analyze and interpret teacher morale. McKinney (2012) determined a strong correlation exists between the behavioral practices of Blue Ribbon principals and their rapport with the teachers and staff members that they lead. Another significant statistical factor of the study was that principals and, more important, teachers rated their leadership traits high and the level of leadership they received as excellent.

Instructional leadership. The demands of the public educational system have become greater with new accountability measures coming from both state and federal legislation; however, new methods of attaining student academic achievement are becoming increasingly elusive (Black, 2010). Significant research exists regarding the

relationships between student learning and selected school leadership practices (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Wilson, 2011). Researchers have demonstrated that instructional leadership is important to the overall effectiveness of school systems, especially in reference to student learning (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Wilson, 2011). Furthermore, school leaders who attend to the needs of the school organization produce higher student achievement than those who do not (Black, 2010; Coddard & Miller, 2010; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009).

Principal leadership is vital to school success and are expected to successfully perform a variety of functions and to demonstrate competency in educational administration. If principals are to be instructional leaders, they must provide supervision in the areas of teaching, learning, and student achievement. The teaching process, subject-matter content, and principles of learning are three themes where instructional leaders focus (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013). While there is considerable evidence about the influence of instructional leadership on student outcomes, far less is known about the leadership capabilities required to teach others how to teach (Robinson, 2010). Evidence regarding effective leadership practices is not the same as evidence about the capabilities that leaders need. Capabilities describe what a principal needs to be able to do to carry out the functions of an instructional leader (Robinson, 2010). Robinson (2010) suggested a need for research-informed preparation and development opportunities for school leaders that build instructional leadership capabilities.

An important element in this study is the Blue Ribbon Award. The Blue Ribbon program recognizes schools that instruct at any levels and can be both public and private (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The limited amount of research on school

leadership in charter schools suggests that the roles and practices of principals may be different than those in traditional public schools (Goff, Mavrogordato, & Goldring, 2012). Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach (2003) attempted to answer research questions concerning the core roles that all principals play regardless of the type of school they lead and how these roles differed across traditional public, magnet, charter, and private schools. Portin et al. (2003) drew five major conclusions. First, the core of the principal's job is diagnosing his or her particular schools' needs and providing the resources and talent available to achieve those needs successfully (Portin et al., 2003). According to Goff et al. (2012), a key argument for charter schools pertains to the notion that principals have more freedom to recruit and hire high-quality teachers due to deregulation that allows school leaders to circumvent certification requirements. Second, regardless of school type, whether public or private, elementary or secondary, schools need leadership in the critical areas of instruction, culture, decision-making, human resources, educational strategies, external development, and micropolitics. Third, principals are responsible for ensuring there is leadership in these seven critical areas, but that they need to achieve in these critical areas in a manner similar to how an orchestra conductor achieves harmony (Portin et al., 2003). Fourth, a school's governance structure affects the way key leadership functions are performed. Finally, principals learn through action. However they received training, the principals in this study felt they learned the skills they needed on the job (Portin et al., 2003).

Leadership is one of the most comprehensively researched social influence processes in the behavioral sciences (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Since the 1980s, school leadership has been changing. This change is evident in the numerous educational

reforms and school restructuring movements around the world (Yin Cheong, 2010).

These changes have affected traditional thinking on the practice of leadership in education and have driven the emergence of new leadership techniques in education (Yin Cheong, 2010).

Salameh (2011) found that administrators within the educational system who are responsible for leadership training would benefit from training in the principles of servant leadership. Salameh (2011) used a quantitative methodology utilizing the OLA to measure servant leadership among school principals as it was perceived by a random sample of 432 teachers. One question guiding the study sought to find the extent to which principals in Oklahoma perceived the practice of servant leadership. In the categories of builds community, displays authenticity, and shares leadership, the leaders' were rated high. The other three categories: values others, develops people, and provides leaders, were found to be in the moderate level (Salameh, 2011). Additionally, Salameh (2011) noted that training in servant leadership could potentially improve administrators' leadership skills that could, in turn, improve individual job satisfaction among all employees.

Methodology. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics of principals in schools in Oklahoma that earned the Blue Ribbon designation during the 2012-2013 school year. When a subject matter is too complex to be answered with a yes or no response, qualitative methodology can be very useful and is generally the precursor to quantitative research (Shuttleworth, 2008).

Quantitative and qualitative methods have different strengths and weaknesses. Quantitative methodology can provide coverage over a variety of situations and can be a fast, economical way to acquire information from large population samples (Amaratunga, Badry, Sarshar, & Newton, 2002). The research situation dictates the research strategy. Each research strategy has its own specific approach to collect and analyze empirical data. This research situation requires a qualitative method but with a quantitative element generated by measuring servant leadership with the OLA. The OLA tool contains strong psychometric properties and can be trusted to measure the characteristics of servant leadership by instantly and anonymously recording feedback entered by survey respondents. The OLA has rapidly become a standard in servant leadership research (Irving, 2008). The OLA has been used in over 30 dissertations and is considered an appropriate tool for servant leadership measurement (Laub, 2012).

Qualitative methods create the ability to examine how processes change over time, understand people's meanings, adjust to new issues as they emerge, and contribute to theory generation (Amaratunga et al., 2002). However, data collection can be tedious and require more resources. Further, data interpretation may be more difficult with qualitative research. As well, the research is harder to control, and many policy makers give low credibility to results from the qualitative approach (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

Yin (2011) stated that the research strategy should be chosen as a function of the research situation. Laub (2012) has developed a proven instrument that provides numerical data showing that servant leadership is present in an organization. The OLA survey adds quantitative data but is only used for the measurement for the level of servant leadership in each school and does not answer the research questions guiding this study.

Black (2010) recommended more research in the field of servant leadership and education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels to enhance understanding of the effects of servant leadership on education. Further research will add to the body of knowledge, enabling educators to make informed decisions to improve students' education. Depending on the findings of this study, the next step is to determine if this study's findings are replicable in other states using their Blue Ribbon Schools or other schools that have proven to be effective.

There is evidence that demonstrates improved academic achievement can be achieved through educational leadership (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Black (2010) showed a direct correlation between servant leadership and a positive climate of the school. The existing literature has inspired this current study to help understand how the presence of leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon School principals in Oklahoma contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award. The servant leadership model includes a focus on developing employees to their fullest potential in the areas of task effectiveness, community stewardship, self-motivation, and future leadership capabilities (Liden et al., 2008).

Summary

This comprehensive literature review demonstrated evidence of the important components of this research by reviewing the areas of the Blue Ribbon Award, school leadership, and servant leadership. The chapter started with the history of the federal government in education, which, along with legislation and many other programs, led to the creation of the Blue Ribbon Award. The achievement of this award occurs through demonstrating effectiveness in student achievement. Because of the rigorous

requirements to become a Blue Ribbon School, one could argue they are among the best schools in the nation. What was not known is how the presence of leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributed to earning the Blue Ribbon Award in Oklahoma schools. This study filled gaps in the body of knowledge concerning servant leadership, instructional leadership, and Blue Ribbon Schools. Black (2010) called for more research in the field of servant leadership and education at all levels to enhance understanding of the effect servant leadership has on education.

This study introduced a new lens with which to view servant leadership. Many studies have linked servant leadership to educational themes, such as Black's (2010) study, which found a connection between servant leadership and school climate. This study filled gaps in the educational leadership field on whether servant leadership is present in a highly effective school by interviewing principals, analyzing schools' Blue Ribbon application, and measuring servant leadership in Blue Ribbon Schools.

Prior research has provided empirical data that shows a correlation between school climate (Black, 2010), employee trust (Del & Akbarpour, 2011), and organizational commitment (Donghong, Haiyan, Yi, & Qing, 2012; Hoveida et al., 2011). This research allows educators to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics of principals and teachers in Oklahoma schools that have earned the Blue Ribbon designation. Chapter 3 contains a detailed outline of the methodology of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 contains an explanation of the methodology used in this study to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics of principals in Oklahoma schools that earned the Blue Ribbon designation during the 2012-2013 school year. Servant leadership, established in 1970 by Greenleaf, emphasizes personal integrity and serving others. The premise of this leadership model is to bring out the best in followers by relying on one-on-one communications (Liden et al., 2008). The Blue Ribbon award is a federally funded program that identifies schools that provide and maintain high academic goals, including those that are able to succeed despite high numbers of at-risk students. Two different categories of schools are eligible to receive the Blue Ribbon Award: exemplary high performing or exemplary improving schools. Schools must fit into one category or the other if they hope to earn this honor (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2013).

Many researchers have linked servant leadership to organizational success (Black, 2010; Del & Akbarpour, 2011; Hoveida t., 2011). Researchers have also linked instructional leadership to school success (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Waters & Cameron, 2007; Wilson, 2011). The goal of this qualitative, descriptive study was to explore how the instructional and servant leadership characteristics and practices of principals may have contributed to their schools attaining Blue Ribbon status. This research added empirical evidence to research literature regarding servant leadership by using four Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools, determining their level of servant leadership, and then interviewing principals with the aim of discovering the instructional leadership

practices they used to help their school earn the Blue Ribbon Award. The study contained three parts. The first part was the OLA survey, which is designed to measure servant leadership in organizations (Laub, 2012). The second part was the interviews of Blue Ribbon principals. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions concerning what programs they have implemented, what they do on a daily basis to make a difference, and what best practices they utilize. The third part was the examination of the schools' Blue Ribbon application.

Chapter 3 contains the problem statement, research questions, methodology, research design, population, instrumentation, validity, reliability, collection procedures, data analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations of the proposed research. The chapter contains a detailed outline of the methodology for this study as a way to understand how the data was gathered and why it should be considered valid and useful. Chapter 3 also includes a presentation of the steps taken to conduct this research in a way that future researchers would have little trouble understanding how the data was gathered.

Statement of the Problem

It was not known how the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals contributed to earning the Blue Ribbon Award in Oklahoma schools during the 2012-2013 school year. Research indicated that leadership is important to the overall effectiveness of school systems, especially in reference to student learning (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Wilson, 2011). Waters and Cameron (2007) found a statistical significance between school-level leadership and a student achievement difference of 10% points improvement on norm-referenced tests. Additionally, they identified a set of responsibilities and practices that principals can use to improve student achievement.

Waters and Cameron (2007) also found that, in some schools that were led by an effective principal, student achievement was not high. Even if teachers rated the principal's leadership as effective, student performance was not always strong. The authors speculated there were two potential reasons for this seeming contradiction: the principal has to be focused on practices that actually improve student learning and, even if the principal is focused on the right strategies, the teachers and other stakeholders have to implement those changes by adopting the appropriate, targeted behaviors for student learning to actually improve. Maslyk (2012) studied the leadership practices of principals whose schools attained Blue Ribbon status in Pennsylvania schools and recommended that research be done to consider other leadership styles. Thus, the focus of this study was on teacher perceptions of their principal's servant leadership attributes and their instructional leadership practices as well.

Blue Ribbon schools have students who have demonstrated high achievement on norm-referenced tests or the schools could not have been nominated for the honor. Clearly, leadership contributed, at least in part, to the success of these schools. By using a qualitative descriptive study approach, the researcher in the current study obtained a better understanding of the leadership characteristics of principals who have led their schools to a Blue Ribbon designation. This study provided empirical evidence to demonstrate how principals perceived their leadership behaviors contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in Oklahoma schools. There is a relationship between servant leadership and school climate (Black, 2010) as well as with employee trust (Del & Akbarpour, 2011) and organizational commitment (Hoveida et al., 2011). Prior studies contained evidence that the principal and teachers, as instructional leaders,

play a large role in the learning outcomes of students (Black, 2010; Coddard & Miller, 2010; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009); however, information about the specific leadership practices was scant that contributed to a school receiving the prestigious Blue Ribbon award. Maslyk (2012) recommended that more research be done to gain a more thorough view of the leadership of principals at award-winning and high-performing schools, including a view of other leadership styles.

Irving (2008) stated that more work is necessary in assessing and confirming that servant leadership and team effectiveness are present in all major organizational sectors. Black (2010) recommended more research in the field of servant leadership and education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels to enhance understanding of the implications of servant leadership and its effect on education. Ebener and O'Connell (2010) suggested that servant leadership enhances organizational citizenship, which has been linked to organizational performance, but recommended future research about servant leadership to make these researchers claims more profound.

This study answered many previous servant leader researchers' calls for more research (Black, 2010; Crippen, 2005; Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Irving, 2008). This research provided schools with empirical evidence that servant leadership is found in at least some highly effective schools in Oklahoma. This study could help spur more research in servant leadership and effective schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

R1: How do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools?

R2: How do principals perceive accountability requirements influence leading, instruction and learning in their school?

R3: How do principals perceive their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon schools?

R4: How do principals from Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing the school's mission, instructional program and creating a positive school climate?

R5: How do principals perceive their collaborative and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation?

R6: What recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?

This researcher's focus was to understand how the presence of leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributed to earning the Blue Ribbon Award in schools. The above research questions helped to identify the focus of this study and give other school leaders the opportunity to understand what they may do to help their schools succeed. The researcher also took into account the possibility that servant leadership was not present in the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools.

The researcher used a qualitative method because it is useful for interpreting a situation that is complex and difficult to measure (Szyjka, 2012). This study created statistical data by obtaining a measurement of the servant leadership in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools; however, this alone does not address the questions of the study. A qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to seek out the answers to the above

questions. Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the meanings of a phenomenon as understood by the participants (Arghode, 2012). For this study, the participants were the principals of four 2012-2013 Blue Ribbon Oklahoma schools and their teachers. The constructs under study were servant leadership, instructional leadership, and how those practices contributed to producing high levels of student achievement in these schools.

The researcher sought to determine whether the presence of servant leadership contributed in any way to a school gaining the Blue Ribbon Award. The rest of the researcher's questions attempted to determine the feelings and thought processes of the principals of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools. It was feasible for the research to measure servant leadership using the OLA assessment tool and then to answer the research questions with the data collected by interviewing principals and analyzing each school's Blue Ribbon application. The OLA tool is designed to measure the perception of the teachers on the six key areas of servant leadership. The researcher interviewed the principals of these schools to understand how their servant leadership behaviors contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in their schools. The Blue Ribbon application contained many categories that provided both statistical information and explanations in essay form. The purpose of this research was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics and behaviors of principals in schools that have earned the Blue Ribbon designation. The researcher used ATLAS.ti (2014) qualitative data analysis software to help analyze the school leadership within each Blue Ribbon school.

Research Methodology

Researchers use qualitative methods to understand social phenomena through the perspectives of the individuals involved and allow for an in-depth understanding of a situation that is not possible with quantitative methods (Szyjka, 2012). The purpose of using a qualitative method is to contextualize, understand, and interpret a situation, especially if the situation is complex and difficult to measure (Szyjka, 2012). Servant leadership is measurable in an organization using Laub's (2012) OLA instrument; however, understanding how the presence of leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributed to the achievement of a school gaining the Blue Ribbon Award is difficult to measure with a quantitative methodology. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher interviewed principals and analyzed the schools' Blue Ribbon applications in an attempt to seek out answers to the research questions. Qualitative research is conducted through intense contact with the situation and in the situation's natural setting (Amaratunga et al., 2002). Researchers should not impose their perception of the phenomenon on the interpretation of the participants' view (Arghode, 2012).

Researchers began to use the qualitative approach in the early 1900s. In 1942, Mead used observations in an attempt to improve teaching and, in 1952, Becker utilized interviews to collect data regarding school teachers in Chicago (Bogdan, 2009). Use of the qualitative approach suffered criticism, at first, but currently is widely accepted as a valid means of acquiring information and projects that use it are being funded by federal agencies (Bogdan, 2009).

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies hold an important position in the field of research (Arghode, 2012); however, a better understanding of the context and settings

of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools was discovered using a qualitative methodology with a descriptive design. Qualitative methodology is used when a researcher's goal is to explore the meaning as understood by the participants (Arghode, 2012). Therefore, the best way to discover how leadership behaviors of principals contributed to the Blue Ribbon Award is to interview principals of Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools.

Qualitative methods involve a high level of descriptive writing and attention to detail (Szjka, 2012). The context of the project consisted of four Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools. The names of the school systems that received the award are found on both the Oklahoma State Department of Education website and the United State Department of Education's web site. An organizational assessment taken from the perception of the workforce of Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools was used to measure the six key areas of servant leadership within the schools.

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive study design was employed to answer the questions driving this study. Research questions used in descriptive studies are employed to determine the concerns of people about an event (Sandelowski, 2000). This researcher used similar research questions seeking how principals perceive certain topics or events. A descriptive design is often categorical and provides a comprehensive summary of events (Sandelowski, 2000). The researcher used categories taken from the research questions to organize the data using ATLAS.ti software and ultimately identified data to address the research questions.

The data for this qualitative descriptive study came from teachers and principals in the Oklahoma schools that received the Blue Ribbon Award in the 2012-2013 school

year. The reason for using the most recent schools was to ensure the most accurate data possible. With teacher turnover in schools, data collected from a school that won the award might not accurately represent the school at the time it achieved Blue Ribbon status. During the measurement of servant leadership through the OLA survey from employees of the schools, the researcher interviewed the principals. Teachers, for example, will have insight if servant leadership is present within the school, but only principals will be able to answer the question of how the presence of leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award.

Population and Sample Selection

The setting for this study was four Oklahoma schools that received the Blue Ribbon award for the 2012-2013 school year. The study population included teachers and principals who worked in Blue Ribbon Schools in Oklahoma for the 2012-2013 year. Five Oklahoma Blue Ribbon School principals ensured that the sample size included most of the perceptions of the principals while simultaneously preserving participants' anonymity. If all six schools were included in the study, anyone would be able to determine the principals' names who were interviewed. However, anonymity becomes more likely as only four schools with a total of five principals participated in the study (one school had two principals). There were 101 teachers in all four of the schools included in the study. The sample size also included 27 teachers from the four Blue Ribbon Schools, thus the response rate of teachers was 26.7%.

Selecting the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools for this study also determined the study's population size. Choosing deliberate samples is a common technique in qualitative research. Also known as purposive sampling, researchers use this method

when their goal is to select specific study units (Yin, 2011). The researcher only needed principals and teachers at Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools, so a purposive sampling strategy was utilized. Blue Ribbon Schools were chosen for this study because they have been nationally recognized for stimulating high student performance (Maslyk, 2012). With qualitative research, the sample size must be big enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are likely to be heard (DePaulo, 2000).

The Blue Ribbon list came from the Oklahoma State Department of Education, which contained information about the selection process and the names of school districts and school sites dating back to the 1982-83 school year. The researcher identified the names of the schools from the website. Principals of Blue Ribbon schools in Oklahoma in the 2012-2013 school year were contacted and asked if they would be interested in participating in the study. After the principals of the Blue Ribbon Schools had provided site authorization (Appendices G, H, I, & J), the researcher asked the principals to provide email addresses of all staff members and teachers employed at the schools or help in the data collection by forwarding the researcher's email to staff members. The researcher used these addresses to contact the individual participants of the four schools included in the study. The researcher stated in this email that the study is voluntary and, by taking the survey, the participants give their consent and acknowledge that they were not coerced into participating in the study. The researcher saved a copy of each email on a password-protected computer.

The school employees received an e-mail invitation with a link to the OLA survey (Appendix A). The OLA instantly and anonymously recorded the feedback the respondents entered (Laub, 2012). The OLA web-based tool facilitated anonymous,

multi-angle performance assessments of individuals and organizations. After reaching as many of the sample as possible, the OLA allows for a composite report (Laub, 2012). Information gathered by the OLA helped to determine the presence or absence of servant leadership as demonstrated by the principals in the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools.

Additionally, the researcher sought permission to conduct interviews with the principals. The principals were contacted by phone and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed. Upon their verbal permission, the principals were faxed the informed consent form (Appendix B). The researcher conducted the interviews by phone during times suggested by the school administrators after the informed consent form was signed and faxed back to the researcher for documentation. The teachers of the Blue Ribbon School received the informed consent form in an email. The email contained two items: the informed consent form and a hyperlink to the OLA survey. The researcher assigned each Blue Ribbon school a letter: A, B, C, or D. The same letter was used to designate all principals of that school. In this way, there was a clear understanding of which school is tied to which principal while ensuring that the exact names of the schools and participants were protected. The Blue Ribbon applications are public records and do not require a consent form to be analyzed.

Sources of Data

The data for this study came from five principal interviews, the OLA survey taken by 27 teachers, and each school's Blue Ribbon application. The interview questions were modified from Maslyk's (2012) interview questions (Appendix C). The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of how the presence of leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in schools.

The researcher in a qualitative study is considered the main instrument (Szyjka, 2012). The researcher conducted interviews, and asked teachers of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools to complete the OLA survey. The researcher also analyzed each school's Blue Ribbon application. During the interview process, Laub's (2012) OLA instrument was employed to measure the principals' servant leadership as perceived by teachers in their respective schools.

OLA. The OLA (Laub, 2012) is a web-based tool that facilitates anonymous, multi-angle performance assessments of individual employees and leaders (Appendix D). The OLA instrument measured the degree of servant leadership in the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools. This instrument aided in assessing teacher perceptions of servant leadership characteristics in the principals of Blue Ribbon schools in six key areas of effective organizational leadership. These areas are (a) displays authenticity, (b) values people, (c) builds community, (d) provides leadership, (e) develops people, and (f) shares leadership. This instrument measured six key areas of both organizational and leadership practices based on the answers employees provided while taking the survey. The report designated a power level to the six levels of organizational health that described the school. An organization considered to be in optimal health received Org6. This designation translates to a high degree of servant leadership presence. If the school received Org1, the organization is considered to have toxic health and consequently translates to having little servant leadership presence within the school. The schools may also receive a measurement of Org5 - Excellent Health, Org4 - Moderate Health, Org3 - Limited Health, or Org2 - Poor Health.

Principal interviews. Additionally, the researcher conducted interviews with the principals of Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools. The following interview questions were modified and developed from Maslyk's (2012) interview questions (Appendix C) in conjunction with collaboration with Grand Canyon University experts in the field of leadership. Maslyk (2012) provided permission to modify and use the interview questions in this study (Appendix E). Prior to the actual study, the researcher employed a pilot study to determine if the interview questions encouraged a proper discussion with regard to the research topic. The following interview questions stemmed from the research questions driving this study:

1. Describe how legislation requirements, such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Common Core standards have influenced instruction and learning in your school.
2. Describe how your leadership role and practices contributed to the overall success of your school.
3. How do you think your specific leadership style and practice impacted your school getting designated as a Blue Ribbon School?
4. Please describe your school's mission and how it guides your work as a leader.
5. Describe your role as an instructional leader in your school.
6. Describe the overall "health" or climate of your school and some strategies you use to maintain that health.
7. How do you share leadership efforts and practices with the teachers and staff at your school? Can you describe the role they have in setting goals?
8. Describe how the teachers and staff contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation.
9. What programs have you implemented that may have contributed to your school's success?
10. What do you feel you do differently from other schools that helped you receive the award?
11. Describe what you feel are some of the best practices you implemented that helped you win the Blue Ribbon Award.
12. Describe your perception of servant leadership and how you might use this style of leadership to oversee your school.

13. What recommendations do you have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?

Blue Ribbon applications. The Blue Ribbon application for each school was also analyzed. The Blue Ribbon applications were accessible to the public via the Internet. The 2013 application can be accessed, saved as a Portable Document Format (PDF), and printed from the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program website (2014). The Blue Ribbon applications were downloaded onto the researcher's computer to be analyzed with the aid of ATLAS.ti (2014) software (2014). The Blue Ribbon application has eight sections that include: Eligibility certification, school demographic data, a summary which includes a narrative description of the school, curriculum and instruction, school supports (climate and motivating students), indicators of academic success (a practice that makes the school a unique success), a section for non-public schools (tuition, structures), public school information and results of norm-referenced tests (US Department of Education, 2011).

Validity

The validity of qualitative research is dependent on how a study regulates and substantiates its data (Szyjka, 2012). To add higher ecological validity to qualitative research, an intense contact with the situation is necessary (Amaratunga et al., 2002). First, the teachers completed the OLA to measure their perceptions of the servant leadership behaviors of their principal. The OLA is an accepted instrument that has appeared in over 30 dissertations. Laub's (2012) OLA has a record showing it to be highly reliable. Further, it has a strong construct and face validity. An expert panel determined the necessary and essential characteristics of servant leadership for constructing the 60 items within the instrument with a Delphi process to bring the experts

to consensus on the constructs that represent the servant minded organization (Laub, 2012). The Delphi process usually begins with an open-ended questionnaire given to a panel of selected experts (Custer, Scarcella, & Stewart, 1999). The participants rate the relative importance of individual items and make changes to the phrasing or substance of items (Custer et al., 1999). Through a series of several rounds, typically three, the Delphi process usually yields a consensus within the group of experts (Custer et al., 1999).

Since 1999, at least 30 completed doctoral dissertations have utilized this instrument (Laub, 2012). The OLA possesses strong psychometric properties and can be trusted to measure the characteristics of healthy servant-minded organizations. The utilization of the Delphi process allowed these experts to come to a consensus on the constructs that represent the servant minded organization. In the original field test, the OLA obtained a reliability score of .9802 using the Cronbach-Alpha coefficient (Laub, 2012). Cronbach-Alpha is a measure of internal consistency or how closely related a set of items are as group (Laub, 2012). The reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is considered acceptable in most social science research situations (SPSS FAQ, 2013). The original field test of the OLA, the lowest item-to-item correlation was .41, and the highest was .77, showing that all items have a strong correlation with the instrument as a whole (Laub, 2012).

Qualitative researchers use triangulation to to establish validity (Guion, 2002). This study incorporated methodological triangulation, which involves the use of multiple qualitative and quantitative methods (Guion, 2002). The triangulation of this study included the OLA instrument providing a quantitative measurement of servant leadership as well as qualitative data gleaned from principal interviews, and the Blue Ribbon

application. Having the quantitative measurement of servant leadership does not answer the research questions but does provide for multiple methodologies and helps the validity of the study.

Internal validity. The OLA itself protects against the internal concern for the research study. The OLA tracks participants to prevent multiple submissions from one source while simultaneously maintaining anonymity by indicating only that participants provided an answer, not the specific answer they gave. In this way, participants realize there is no chance that anyone else will see how they answered questions on the survey. By allowing only one response from an existing email address, the instrument itself protects the validity of the study. The interviews took place in a setting that affords privacy to the principal so that his or her answers were not overheard. The recordings were stored on a password-protected device and will be kept for a minimum of 3 years after the study is complete.

External validity. To prevent external concerns from affecting the validity, the researcher used representative samples drawn from Oklahoma schools that received the Blue Ribbon award in the 2012-2013 school year. Every teacher employed by the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools had an equal opportunity to take the survey and those interviewed were the principals who were at the site when the award was earned. This practice prevented the researcher from selecting who participated or who did not participate in the study, thereby affecting the study's results and the external validity of the study. Once the interviews were conducted and transcribed into a Word document, a member check was employed to assure the validity of the answers. Member checking is primarily used in qualitative studies and is also known as participant verification (Harper

& Cole, 2012). To accomplish member checks, the researcher typed the recorded questions and answers and emailed the document to the respective participants. The participants were asked to validate their answers with the researcher's text. Only after each participant had responded affirming his or her responses to the questions did the researcher continue with the study.

Reliability

One of the first steps was to acquire the names of the Blue Ribbon Schools in Oklahoma and gain permission to conduct this study. This information came from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (2013) and the U.S. Department of Education (2013). The school superintendent or designee was asked to acknowledge that they did, in fact, receive the Blue Ribbon Award at the time the researcher was given permission to conduct the study. The next step was to find a reliable way to measure servant leadership in the Blue Ribbon Schools. The OLA instrument has proven to be a reliable means for ascertaining six key areas of servant leadership (Irving, 2008) and has been used in over 30 dissertations (Laub, 2012).

To ensure that the data collected is reliable, the researcher recorded the interviews of the principals and transcribed them in a Microsoft Word document. The interview questions were modified from Maslyk's (2012) study over Blue Ribbon principals' perspectives on promoting student achievement (Appendix C). The interview guide contained the same questions to ensure that everyone in the study received the opportunity to answer the same questions. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 provided an understanding of the current literature on servant leadership and the Blue Ribbon award. Szyjka (2012) stated that the researcher is the main instrument in a

qualitative study. With this in mind, the researcher could not perform this study reliably without this knowledge and an understanding of the phenomena.

Data Collection and Management

The researcher first identified the Oklahoma schools that were designated as Blue Ribbon Schools in the 2012-2013 school year. The Blue Ribbon list came from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (2013) and the U.S. Department of Education (2013), which contained information about the selection process and the names of school districts and school sites dating back to the 1982-83 school year. The researcher asked the superintendents or designees of the schools in writing for permission to collect data. After approval was received, the researcher contacted the selected Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools to ask if they would allow teachers to complete a survey and the principals to be interviewed to provide information regarding the presence of servant leadership within their school and if servant leadership contributed to the school achieving the Blue Ribbon Award.

The OLA survey began with an Informed Consent question. The Blue Ribbon application for each school was also analyzed. The Blue Ribbon applications were accessible to the public via the Internet. The 2013 application can be accessed, saved as a Portable Document Format (PDF), and printed from the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program website (2014). The Blue Ribbon applications were downloaded onto the researcher's computer to be analyzed with the aid of ATLAS.ti (2014) software (2014).

The teachers in the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools were invited to take the OLA survey to answer the overarching research question concerning how principals perceive the leadership characteristics and behaviors that led to their schools earning the Blue

Ribbon designation. The contact email explained the directions for taking the survey and provided the link to the survey. The email also explained that participation was voluntary and that, by taking the survey, they gave their consent (Appendix A). After the minimum number of respondents is reached or when the time allotted for the survey expires, the OLA produces a composite report (Laub, 2012). The minimum number of respondents is determined by the population of the teaching staff for each Blue Ribbon School. Laub (2012) constructed a table to help the researcher confirm the number of responses to the survey needed to have a fair representation and adequate description of organizational perception. The number of Blue Ribbon School teachers was compared to the OLA critical mass chart to determine the number of respondents for each school. This data helped to measure the extent that servant leadership is present within these schools in the six key areas.

This study began after IRB approval (Appendix F) and careful documentation of proper consent from the school superintendent or designee and all participants in the study. The researcher received a report of the school organization as a whole from the OLA tool, but not how individuals in the group responded. The OLA instrument kept track of who has and who has not taken the survey without disclosing how the individuals answered the questions in the survey. The emails of the participants were stored in a password-protected computer. Maintaining data security was a top priority. Electronic data was securely stored on a password protected computer and a hard copy placed in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home. The research will be maintained for a minimum of three years after the research concludes (Grand Canyon University, 2012).

After the OLA survey, the researcher conducted interviews with Blue Ribbon School principals. The principals were asked to sign a consent form to be interviewed and elaborate on any or all interview questions providing any insight they wished to share. The interviews, designed to be completed in under an hour so as not to be too disruptive to the principal's schedule, were conducted over the phone. The names of the participants who took the survey and interviews will be kept on the researcher's password protected laptop until the study is completed and to ensure confidentiality for the participant's protection. The researcher later transcribed the recordings and notes in to a Word table. The transcriptions were positioned into ATLAS.ti (2014) software to allow an easy comparison among the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools. Notes concerning the leadership portion of the Blue Ribbon applications were also analyzed using ATLAS.ti (2014) software. The information within the Blue Ribbon application provided another viewpoint of the perceived leadership characteristics that led to the school achieving the Blue Ribbon Award. The descriptive design required the researcher to use a well-considered combination of sampling, data collection, analysis, and representational techniques (Sandelowski, 2000).

Data Analysis Procedures

To answer the questions driving this study, devising a way to determine if servant leadership is present in organizations was necessary. This required an instrument that measures the presence of servant leadership in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools. The instrument's validity is an important consideration for data reliability. Irving (2008) stated that the OLA has become the dominant instrument for measuring servant leadership at the organizational level in recent years. The OLA is comprised of 66 survey

questions measured on a 5-point Likert scale that range from No Response to Strongly Agree. There are six distinct constructs of servant leadership within the OLA: (a) shares leadership, (b) values people, (c) develops people, (d) builds community, (e) displays authenticity, and (f) provides leadership (Laub, 2012). Each of these constructs includes nine to 12 questions (Appendix D).

The employees of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools took the OLA survey that instantly and anonymously recorded feedback entered by the survey participants (Laub, 2012). Based on Laub's (2012) critical mass number, once the designated number of respondents completed the survey, the OLA provided an in-depth report regarding organizational attitudes and opinions of the teachers regarding the presence of servant leadership based on the percentage of responses to the six areas of servant leadership. The OLA also designated a power level in each of the six areas of organizational health based on the percentage of the participant's answers to the survey. A rating of Org5 or Org6 indicated the perceived leadership area is present, whereas Org1 or Org2 indicated that servant leadership characteristic is mostly absent from the organization. Org3 or Org4 represented a varied mix of servant leadership characteristics (Laub, 2012). The Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools selected for this study received an average power level for the entire organization and a power level in each of the six areas of servant leadership measured. After servant leadership was measured in the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools, principals were interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to discover how the presence of leadership behaviors of Blue Ribbon principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award. The interviews were recorded and then manually transcribed into a Microsoft Word document.

Once all the interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document, the principals' responses were compared against one another and generalized. The employment of ATLAS.ti (2014) software assisted with discovering emerging themes and concepts by helping the researcher organize and analyze content from interviews, the OLA reports, and the Blue Ribbon Applications. Following Hatch's (2002) recommendations for data analysis, the researcher used typological coding to compile and sort the data collected into seven categories; legislation requirements, leadership practices, shared leadership, servant leadership, school mission/vision, school climate, and recommendations. These categories corresponded to the research questions used in this study. For example, the first research question concerned the principal perception of servant leadership behaviors in Blue Ribbon Schools. The researcher placed all information coded "servant leadership" under the first research question.

The principal interviews, teacher responses to the OLA survey, and the Blue Ribbon applications were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. According to Thomas (2003), the raw data should be arranged into a common format such as font, size, and margins. Once the raw data has been prepared, the text is read in detail and categories are formed. Friese (2013) recommended keeping code names brief. To help answer the questions driving this study, the following categories were used for coding: legislation requirements, leadership, shared leadership, servant leadership, school mission, school vision, school climate, and recommendations for school success. According to Thomas (2003), a segment of text may be coded into more than one category and a continuing revision of categories may result from new insights as the study progresses.

Triangulation. A study's conclusions are usually derived from the triangulation of data from different sources. This triangulation adds to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study (Yin, 2011). The researcher incorporated methodological triangulation and data triangulation. A methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple qualitative and quantitative methods (Guion, 2002). The triangulation of this study included a quantitative measurement of servant leadership as well as qualitative data gleaned from principal interviews, and the Blue Ribbon applications. Data triangulation entails gathering data through different sources of information (Guion, 2002). The researcher used principal interviews, the OLA report, and the Blue Ribbon applications of the schools. Although triangulation is not necessarily needed in a descriptive design, the different sources of data provided added validity.

Ethical Considerations

This research has minimal risk to both the participants and the organizations in which they work. The researcher did not collect data without IRB approval (Appendix F). The researcher also informed organizations and participants in detail about the research and the OLA findings. Participants' information was stored on password-protected hard drives or servers. The OLA instrument provided protection to participants as well. The OLA instantly and anonymously recorded feedback entered by survey respondents. Participants received an informed consent embedded in the survey to ensure they volunteered to take the survey on their own free will. Although the data used for the study were provided through anonymous sources, it is impossible to keep hidden that Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools were used in the surveys. An online search will reveal which schools achieved Blue Ribbon status during the time the research took place. A

simple cross reference of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools with who was working at the school at the time of the survey could show possible participants. For this reason, the samples of the study are volunteers. Individual responses were confidential and the researcher did not attach names of the schools to the individual findings.

Only Oklahoma schools awarded the Blue Ribbon in the 2012-2013 school year were included in this study, which limited the sample size. To safeguard data and to ensure the protection of participants, the researcher took several steps. Before participation, the researcher provided information regarding what the research entailed to all potential participants. The ability to freely decline without fear of punishment is a guaranteed right of the potential participants. The OLA instrument tracked who had taken the survey; however, it did not allow individual's answers to be seen. The information of who had taken the survey was stored on the OLA group servers. This should insure the anonymity of participants in the study as dictated by the Belmont Report (HHS.Gov, 1979). This research should not harm participants in any way. Each employee of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools was treated fairly and without prejudice.

The researcher obtained permission (Appendices G, H, I, & J) for this study from the superintendent or designee of each school before making any contact with staff members. Staff members may have wanted to make their leadership sound as favorable as possible and therefore, may have tried to answer the survey in a way that would reflect their perception of good leadership. To minimize this factor and other similar factors that might skew participant's answers, the researcher assured participants of the anonymity of the study. The researcher assigned each Blue Ribbon school a designated letter: A, B, C, or D. The same letter was used to designate all principals of that school. In this way, there

is a clear understanding of which school connects to each principal while ensuring anonymity of the names of the schools and participants.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are uncontrollable limitations present in this study that potentially affect the validity. This study relied on the survey developed by Laub (2012), interviews from principals in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools, and the Blue Ribbon applications of four schools. It is possible that the people who participated in this study were those with either very strong positive or very strong negative opinions. Only six Oklahoma schools were selected as Blue Ribbon Award winners in 2012-2013 but only four of the six schools granted permission for the researcher to conduct the study. This limited the number of participants who were eligible to participate in the study. With qualitative research, the sample size must be big enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are likely to be heard (DePaulo, 2000). Using five principals from four of the six schools fulfilled DePaulo's (2000) recommendation for sample sizes in qualitative studies but still created the limitation of a small sample size.

Limitations are unavoidable for this research. The researcher requested teachers of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools to participate in an OLA survey to measure their perceptions and provide a measurement of servant leadership behaviors of their schools' leadership. Unfortunately, a low number of responses to the survey created a limitation for the study results. The researcher emailed the OLA survey link to the teachers of the Blue Ribbon Schools multiple times over five months. It is unknown why many teachers did not wish to take the OLA survey. Once the researcher concluded that teachers were provided ample time to respond to the survey, he requested the evaluation report from the

OLA group. The data from the OLA Report is presented in the results with detailed information concerning the percentage of the sample size to provide an understanding that the sample size limits the validity of the results of the OLA.

Because the information from the OLA Report is limited by the sample size, the researcher chose to rely more heavily on the principal interviews and the Blue Ribbon applications. The principals were contacted by phone to establish a convenient time to conduct the interviews. The principals agreed to allow the researcher to record the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The researcher conducted the interviews, transcribed the answers into Microsoft Word, and emailed the Word document to the respective principal for verification. Once all the principals verified their answers, the Word documents were imported into ATLAS.ti (2014) software to aid in the data analysis.

Another limitation is that qualitative descriptive studies are arguably the least theoretical of the spectrum of qualitative approaches (Sandelowski, 2000). The categories for this study were selected before the data analysis, which could limit the researcher's ability to identify uncategorized information. Ultimately, the researcher determined the best way to answer the research questions outlined in this study was to employ a descriptive approach. Sandelowski (2000) stated no method is absolutely weak nor strong, but rather more or less useful or appropriate in relation to certain purposes.

There is one delimitation to the study. The list of Blue Ribbon Schools is public information found on the state Department of Education website. Therefore, determining the names of possible participants in this study would require little effort. A simple cross

reference of the Blue Ribbon Schools with who was working at the school at the time of the survey could reveal possible participants.

Summary

The questions driving this study were how the leadership behaviors of principals contributed to the achievement of the Blue Ribbon Award in schools. Using a qualitative methodology was the best approach to answer this question as the situation is complex and cannot be answered using quantitative data alone (Szyjka, 2012). To determine necessary data, four of the six Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools that won the award in the 2012-2013 school year took the OLA developed by Laub (2012). Since the researcher sought to determine the relationship between Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools and servant leadership, the sample must come from schools awarded the honor of Blue Ribbon.

The researcher contacted the Blue Ribbon Schools in Oklahoma and obtained a signed letter from each of the superintendents or designees that approved the use of a survey to measure servant leadership and to interview principals (Appendices G, H, I, & J). For the measurement of servant leadership in these schools, it was necessary to ascertain as large a number of school employees as possible. For the interview portion, only the building principals of the schools were asked to participate. The interviews were recorded transcripts of the interviews were kept on a device stored under lock and key to ensure protection of the participants and data.

There are uncontrollable limitations present in this study that potentially affected its validity. It is possible that the people who participate in the survey were those who either had very strong positive or strong negative opinions about their school. Another limitation is that there were only six schools chosen for the Blue Ribbon Award in the

2012-2013 school year, which limited the number of sites that could have been selected for this study.

This chapter contains an outline of how this research was conducted and why the researcher chose the methodology for this particular study. The performance of the OLA instrument has shown to be an appropriate and valid way of determining the presence of servant leadership in organizations (Irving, 2008) and qualitative inquiry can provide insights to complex social situations (Szyjka, 2012). The information presented in this chapter helps clarify the data collection and analysis that Chapter 4 will present. Chapter 4 contains a detailed description of the data analysis, an explanation of how the raw data relates to the research questions, and how the data findings are organized.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The Blue Ribbon program requires a standard of excellence for schools striving for the highest level of student achievement. The program started in 1982 in an effort to recognize schools that pursue student achievement and maintain high academic goals (U.S Department of Education, 2011). Researchers have used Blue Ribbon schools in a variety of studies (Brown & Green, 2014; Griffing, 2010; Maslyk, 2012). Many studies have also been published about servant leadership (Crippen, 2010; Hays, 2008; Liden et al., 2008; Waterman, 2011). Over time, servant leadership has been linked to many attributes related to effective schools (Barnabas et al., 2010; Black, 2010). Researchers have also shown parallels between servant leadership and school climate (Black, 2010), organizational commitment (Hoveida et al., 2011), and employee trust (Del & Akbarpour, 2011). Previous researchers focused on the association of servant leadership with a variety of elements that could potentially lead to organizational success (Black, 2010; Del & Akbarpour, 2011; Hoveida et al., 2011). Due to the past research of servant leadership and the rigor involved in selecting Blue Ribbon schools that the researcher used these phenomena in this study.

The study may be important to education because there is a need to understand how effective schools use leadership to accomplish the difficult task of educating students (Houchens & Keedy, 2009). The United States was ranked 17th in an assessment of 50 countries in school effectiveness in terms of student achievement (Gayathri, 2012). Gayathri (2012) combined international test results and data such as literacy rates and graduation rates between 2006 and 2010 to determine the rank order list of countries.

School leaders could use the results found in this study to duplicate some or all of the methods that the four Blue Ribbon School principals used to leverage success.

It was not known how the leadership behaviors and servant leadership characteristics of principals contributed to earning the Blue Ribbon Award in Oklahoma schools during the 2012-2013 school year. Black (2010) found that servant leadership helped create a positive climate and improved student achievement. Tate (2003) discussed the benefits for schools and programs that utilized servant leadership. Waters and Cameron (2007) demonstrated through a meta-analysis study that the type of school leadership affected student achievement on norm-referenced tests. Students attending Blue Ribbon schools demonstrated consistent, high achievement on norm-referenced tests lending to the notion that the leadership within these schools had at least a partial effect on the schools' success and receiving the award.

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals whose Oklahoma schools earned the Blue Ribbon designation during the 2012-2013 school year. The following research questions guided this study:

R1: How do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools?

R2: How do principals perceive accountability requirements influence leading, instruction, and learning in their school?

R3: How do principals perceive their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon schools?

R4: How do principals from Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing the school's mission, instructional program, and creating a positive school climate?

R5: How do principals perceive their collaborative and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation?

R6: What recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?

A qualitative, descriptive design was employed to answer the questions driving this study. A descriptive study offers a comprehensive summary of an event in common terms. When utilizing a descriptive design, the researcher uses a combination of sampling, and data collection analysis (Sandelowski, 2000). The collection of data for this qualitative study came from school systems awarded the Blue Ribbon. The researcher utilized an OLA survey in an attempt to ascertain a measurement of servant leadership within each organization. However, most of the data for this study originated with interviews of the Blue Ribbon principals. The schools' Blue Ribbon applications were also used to provide the variety of sources to help with the validity of the results.

Researchers use qualitative methods to understand social phenomena through the perspectives of the individuals involved. This allows for an in-depth understanding of a situation that is not possible with quantitative methods (Szyjka, 2012). The researcher interviewed principals and analyzed the schools' Blue Ribbon applications in an attempt to determine the answers to the research questions. Qualitative research is conducted through an intense contact with a situation within the natural setting (Amaratunga et al.,

2002). It is important for researchers to avoid imposing their perceptions of the phenomenon in the interpretation of the participants' view (Arghode, 2012).

Chapter 4 contains the descriptive data and analysis procedures used to answer the research questions driving this study. The results of this study are presented in this chapter with a goal that the information provides school leaders with effective strategies for student success. Chapter 4 also includes a discussion concerning how four Oklahoma schools accomplished student success and earned the Blue Ribbon Award. It also provides recommendations for other schools to leverage similar success.

Descriptive Data

During the 2012-2013 school year, six Oklahoma schools received the Blue Ribbon Award. The school principals were contacted by phone to determine if they would allow a study to be conducted using their teachers and principals as a sample. The goal was to acquire permission from at least four of the six schools. In qualitative research, the sample size must be big enough to ensure that most or all the perceptions that are important to the study are likely heard (DePaulo, 2000). Leaders of the six Blue Ribbon schools were contacted: two declined permission and four granted permission. The schools that granted permission were contacted by telephone to set up a time for the interview to take place. The principal of School D noted that two school leaders acted in the role of principal during the year the Blue Ribbon Award was achieved and both agreed to be interviewed together. This brought the total number of principals interviewed to five. Having five principals committed to the study provided a sample size large enough to fulfill DePaulo's (2000) recommendation that most, if not all, of the

perceptions would likely be heard. Details of the principal interviews and teachers who participated in the OLA are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Principal Interviews and Teacher OLA Data from 2013 Blue Ribbon Schools

Blue Ribbon School	Duration of Principal Interview (in minutes)	Number of Transcribed Interview Pages 12 Font Times New Roman	Number of Teacher Participants in the OLA Survey
School A	47:37	4	6
School B	44:18	3	9
School C	50:36	4.25	2
School D	55:52	5.5	10
Total	197.43 (3.29 hours)	16.75	27

The OLA Reports contain an organizational health measurement scale. The scale ranks organizations from 1 to 6, or Org1 to Org6 (Laub, 2012). Organizations at Org6 can be described as having optimal health. The OLA Report also includes six characteristics aligned with servant leadership and are ranked from highest to lowest based off the OLA survey. These characteristics are: Display Authenticity, Value People, Develop People, Build Community, Provide Leadership, and Share Leadership.

School A had six teachers complete the OLA survey and received an Org5 for organizational health, which is considered excellent health. The OLA Report contained that the school leadership valued people the most by listening receptively, serving the needs of others first, and trusting in people. School B had nine teachers complete the OLA survey and also received a Level 5 for an excellent organizational health rating. The report showed that School B provided leadership by envisioning the future, taking initiative, and clarifying goals.

School C had two teachers complete the OLA survey and received an Org4, or moderate, health rating. The OLA Report indicated the characteristic of valuing people was the most prominent in this organization. School D had 10 teachers complete the OLA and also received an Org4 or moderate health rating. The OLA Report also signified this school's leadership ranked highest in displaying authenticity by using integrity, trust, openness, and a willingness to learn from others. Table 2 contains the rank order of leadership characteristics based on the OLA Report. The graph begins with the most predominant characteristic and works down to the least predominant characteristic.

Table 2

Blue Ribbon School Leadership Characteristics According to OLA Report

School A	School B	School C	School D
Value People	Provide Leadership	Value People	Display Authenticity
Build Community	Value People	Provide Leadership	Build Community
Share Leadership	Build Community	Display Authenticity	Provide Leadership
Provide Leadership	Share Leadership	Build Community	Value People
Display Authenticity	Display Authenticity	Develop People	Develop People
Develop People	Develop People	Share Leadership	Share Leadership

The rank order of servant leadership characteristics shows that none of the schools were exactly the same (Table 2). However, the four schools did share some characteristics. For example, respondents from Schools A and B indicated those schools ranked lowest on Developing People. That same category the second lowest ranked for Schools C and D. Developing People, as defined in the OLA Report, includes providing opportunities for learning, modeling appropriate behavior, and building up others through encouragement. Further, Valuing People was the highest in School A and School C and the second highest in School B. The OLA Report's definition of Valuing People includes

listening receptively, serving the needs of others first, and trusting in people. Despite the fact that the characteristic Developing People listed very low in the OLA Report, this does not mean that this characteristic is absent in the schools; rather, that it is the least of the six servant leadership characteristics measured by the OLA.

The data analysis section included in the OLA Report contained the measurement of servant leadership based on survey responses and provided an insight into the perceptions of teachers about the principals' leadership characteristics. The validity could have been strengthened had more of the 101 teachers in the Blue Ribbon Schools volunteered to participate. Nevertheless, only 27 teachers completed the OLA survey. The researcher provided the data obtained from the OLA Report, however, decided to rely more heavily on the principal interviews and the schools' Blue Ribbon applications to answer the research questions to ensure that the results of the study were valid. Yin (2011) stated that a researcher should reflect the presence of similar events at multiple sites but, with diverse social and economic conditions, the confidence can be greater than if only a single site had been studied; any conditions could increase or decrease the support for the study's main contentions. Having four different sites with diverse social and economic conditions also fulfills Yin's (2011) recommendations for qualitative studies, as well.

The data for this study came from interviews with five principals, the OLA Report generated from 27 teacher surveys, and the Blue Ribbon applications of each Oklahoma school included in this study. The OLA survey contains a measurement for servant leadership in the organizations and provides descriptive information concerning the organizational health of the schools included in this study. Unfortunately, a low number

of responses to the survey created a limitation for the study. The OLA survey link was emailed to 101 teachers of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools multiple times over a 5-month period. The researcher concluded that teachers were provided many opportunities and ample time to respond to the survey. Upon request, the OLA group created the evaluation report with the limited number of respondents and emailed the reports concerning the four schools to the researcher to determine the perspectives of the teachers of the Blue Ribbon schools in regards to the presence of servant leadership in their schools.

The results section of this chapter contains the data from the OLA and includes detailed information concerning the percentage of the sample size to provide an understanding that the sample size limits the validity of the results of the OLA. The researcher downloaded the Blue Ribbon applications from the U.S. Department of Education website and used the documents to cross-reference programs, leadership philosophies, and the schools' mission/vision statements mentioned in principal interviews. The Blue Ribbon application became a resource necessary to help validate information from the principal interviews. The Blue Ribbon application also contained detailed demographic data about each school including the number of students in the district and per-pupil expenditures (Table 3). The participating schools were not designated in order to preserve the confidentiality of the schools.

Table 3

Demographic Data from 2013 Blue Ribbon Schools

Blue Ribbon School	Per-pupil Expenditure	School Location	School Type	Classroom teachers
School	\$6,889	Rural	Public	11
School	\$5,757	Urban	Charter	30
School	\$6,268	Suburban	Public	48
School	\$6,611	Rural	Public	12

The demographics of the student body may also provide insight into the schools' success or ability to overcome obstacles, as there is an academic achievement gap in the United States (McKown, 2013). Thus, the influence of schools being able to educate the entire student body has great importance. The racial demographics of the four Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools included in this study are presented in Table 4. This information is included in this study to help illustrate the differences and similarities of the Blue Ribbon Schools included in this study. However, as before, to protect confidentiality, the Blue Ribbon schools are not identified by any designation and in no particular order.

Table 4

Racial Demographics for Blue Ribbon Schools

School	Native American	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races	Free and Reduced Lunch	ELL
School	17%	2%	6%	7%	0%	68%	0%	38%	2%
School	9%	0%	1%	4%	0%	81%	5%	44%	0%
School	4%	1%	2%	3%	0%	90%	0%	22%	1%
School	3%	4%	31%	17%	2%	42%	1%	48%	3%

The Blue Ribbon award means the school is in an exclusive group of 6,000 schools acknowledged over 28 years. These schools are urban and suburban, large and small, traditional and innovative. They serve children from every economic, social, and ethnic background found in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). For public schools, the Chief State School Officers (CSSO) of each state determines the criteria by which a school is deemed high performing. However, one standard criterion is that a school's students must outperform most other students in the state on state assessment tests. For non-public schools, high performing means the achievement of the school's students in the most recent year tested places the school among the highest performing schools in the nation in reading/language arts and mathematics as measured by a nationally normed test or as measured by a state test (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Data Analysis Procedures

The following research questions guided this study:

R1: How do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors and is it present in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools?

R2: How do principals perceive accountability requirements influence leading, instruction, and learning in their school?

R3: How do principals perceive their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon schools?

R4: How do principals from Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing the school's mission, instructional program, and creating a positive school climate?

R5: How do principals perceive their collaborative and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation?

R6: What recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?

Principal interviews, the Blue Ribbon applications, and the OLA teacher survey generated data (Table 1). The researcher used the research questions to create categories to code the different sources of data. The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals in Oklahoma schools that earned the Blue Ribbon designation during the 2012-2013 school year.

The researcher ensured validity and reliability of the data by utilizing an audit trail and triangulation (Kirk & Miller, 1986). An audit trail is a detailed and accurate record of everything the researcher did and the data collected. The audit trail contains evidence concerning how the data was collected; thus, giving the researcher the ability to reference this information as the study progresses. The researcher used the OLA survey to measure servant leadership in each school, principal interviews, and each school's Blue Ribbon application. Yin (2011) stated that, in research, the principle pertains to the goal of seeking at least three ways of verifying or corroborating a particular event, description, or fact reported by the study.

Qualitative research includes a naturalistic approach to understanding a phenomenon in a specific setting in which the researcher does not manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2011). According to Yin (2011), construct, internal and external validity, and reliability are the prerequisites for conducting qualitative research.

Qualitative research reliability is the assurance that, if other researchers conducted the same study using the same data set, they would obtain the same conclusion (Ali & Yusof, 2011).

Preparation of data. To maintain anonymity of the schools and principals included in the study, the researcher designated each school with the letters A, B, C, and D. The principals were labeled with the same letter corresponding to their school. For example, Principal A is the principal of School A. The investigator interviewed one principal from each school with the exception of School D. During the phone call to School D to schedule the interview, the principal informed the researcher that the leadership role in this Blue Ribbon school site was shared with two individuals and requested that they be interviewed together. To aid in separating the remarks of school leaders, the researcher designated the two individuals as Principal D1 and Principal D2. The interviews consisted of 13 open-ended questions (Appendix C) to provide data to answer the six research questions.

To answer the research questions, teachers of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools were asked to participate in the OLA online survey designed to measure servant leadership in an organization. The OLA contains strong psychometric properties and may be trusted to measure the characteristics of servant leadership by instantly and anonymously recording feedback entered by survey respondents. Additionally, the OLA has become a standard in servant leadership research (Irving, 2008). The Blue Ribbon application from each school also provided important data for this study.

OLA. The researcher asked the principals to deliver the questionnaire, the OLA instructions, and a link to the online survey to their respective teachers through an email.

The researcher monitored the OLA teacher feedback with a login name and password and checked email daily for responses to the questionnaire. When low numbers of teachers responded to the OLA and no one responded to the questionnaire, the researcher contacted the principals multiple times over several months by phone and email to help generate a larger response to the OLA survey and questionnaire. The principals assured the researcher that the link was sent out to the teachers, and they were encouraged to participate.

The researcher left the OLA survey open for 5 months in an attempt to generate a higher number of responses; however, there were few responses. The exact percentage of participants that completed the OLA survey is discussed later in this chapter. The information that was acquired from the OLA Reports was included in the study; however, it should be understood that the low number of participants created a significant limitation to this portion of the study.

Interviews. The next step was to analyze the principals' responses to the interview questions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed into Microsoft Word, and emailed back to the participants for verification. After the participants verified their answers to the questions, the researcher imported the Word documents into ATLAS.ti (2014) software to aid in the data analysis process. The ATLAS.ti (2014) software enables comprehensive overview of documents for rapid search, retrieval, and browsing (ATLAS.ti Qualitative Data Analysis, 2014). The researcher used typological coding to condense the extensive and varied raw data into a summary format to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings (Hatch, 2002).

Blue Ribbon application. The investigator also uploaded the Blue Ribbon applications into ATLAS.ti (2014) software to aid in the data analysis process using the same categories as the interview responses. The Blue Ribbon applications contained the schools' demographic data, indicators of academic success, and sections concerning curriculum, reading, mathematics, instructional methods, professional development, and school leadership. The researcher used the Blue Ribbon applications to triangulate the answers to the primary research question driving this study.

Typological coding. From an analytic viewpoint, codes help to capture meaning in data and serve as handles for specific occurrences (ATLAS.ti, 2014). The researcher utilized ATLAS.ti software to aid in the process of data analysis. In the ATLAS.ti (2014) software, coding involves the procedure of associating code words with selections of data. Additionally, the researcher employed a typological coding strategy (Hatch, 2002). Several steps are involved in this data analysis strategy. First, the researcher identifies the categories, or typologies, that he or she will analyze. Then, the researcher reads through the data sources and makes notes, or categorizes words, phrases and passages according to these predetermined typologies. Next, the researcher looks for relationships between the typologies, followed by a search of the data for non-examples of these typologies. Finally, the research records one-sentence summaries of each typology and selects data summaries to support these summaries. The researcher used the following typologies for coding: legislation requirements, leadership practices, shared leadership, servant leadership, school mission/vision, school climate, and recommendations.

The typologies for coding were generated from the researcher's analysis of the Research Questions. For example, Research Question 1 is, how do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools? The researcher created the categorical code servant leadership and then proceeded through the transcribed interviews, Blue Ribbon application, and OLA report. When any of these sources contained information pertaining to servant leadership, the researcher used the ATLAS.ti (2014) software to highlight the information under the servant leadership code.

Typological coding takes a deductive approach to the research process. A deductive approach could be helpful under certain circumstances and is an efficient process (Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2011). The deductive approach could save the researcher from uncertainty because he or she started with relevant concepts rather than waiting for themes to emerge (Yin, 2011). However, this also provides a limitation with the risk of not finding fresh insights into the events under study (Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2011). What follows is the research question and the category used to code the data sources used in this study.

Research Question 1: Servant leadership. How do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors in Blue Ribbon Schools? The steps to answer this question were to analyze the Blue Ribbon principals' responses to two interview questions, the Blue Ribbon applications, and the OLA Report. Interview Question 12 asked principals to describe their perception of servant leadership and how it might be used to oversee their school. Through an examination of the interview transcripts, Blue Ribbon application, and the OLA Report, the researcher was able to ascertain the principals' perception concerning this research question.

The first step was to load the transcripts of the four interviews into ATLAS.ti (2014) software. The researcher used the term “servant leadership” to code the principal’s responses for this research question. The second and third step in the process was the analysis of the four Blue Ribbon applications and the OLA Reports. The investigator uploaded the applications and OLA Reports into ATLAS.ti (2014) software, and the same coding technique was used to aid the researcher in the analysis process. The ATLAS.ti (2014) software allowed the researcher to examine four documents side by side, which coincided with the number of schools included in the study. The researcher used this comparison feature in two ways: to compare the interview questions, Blue Ribbon applications, and the OLA Report from the same school to determine if common themes emerged and to compare the principals’ interview transcripts, the Blue Ribbon applications, and OLA Reports side by side to determine if common themes emerged from the answers.

Research Question 2: Accountability requirements. The second research question was: How do principals perceive accountability requirements influence leading, instruction, and learning in their school? To answer the second research question, the Blue Ribbon principals were asked to describe how legislation requirements such as the NCLB Act, A- F School Report Card Grade, Race to the Top, Common Core Standards, and the dismissal of Common Core standards has influenced instruction and learning in their schools. The first interview question was “Describe how legislation requirements such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and the adoption of Common Core standards have influenced instruction and learning in your school” and provided data to address this question. Additionally, the Blue Ribbon application and a review of the

literature about legislation requirements aided in the triangulation of this question and is presented in the findings section of this chapter.

The researcher used the ATLAS.ti (2014) software to answer this question by coding the principals' interview transcripts and Blue Ribbon application with the keywords "legislation requirements." The researcher first analyzed the above documents in an attempt to uncover any themes. The OLA Report did not contain information regarding accountability requirements and was not used to answer this question. To create triangulation, the researcher used information contained in the interviews and Blue Ribbon applications to search for empirical evidence. For example, Principal B stated that legislation led to professional development for teachers, which led to student-centered instruction that produced positive changes in students' academic success. Table 5 includes a matrix of the typologies and data sources, including interview questions that were used to address those questions.

Table 5

Matrix of Codes and Data Sources

	Interview Question Number	OLA	Blue Ribbon Application
Servant Leadership	12	X	
Accountability	1		X
General Leadership	2,3		X
Organizational Health	4,6	X	X
Shared Leadership	7,8		X
Instructional Leadership	12		X
Recommendations	9,10		X

Research Question 3: Leadership practices. Research Question 3 was: How do principals perceive their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon schools? To answer the third research question, the researcher used responses to three interview questions along with each school's Blue Ribbon application and current literature concerning leadership and programs uncovered in the interviews. Interview Question 2 was, "can you describe how your leadership role and practices contributed to the overall success of your school?" Interview Question 3 was, "how do you think your specific leadership style and practice impacted your school getting designated as a Blue Ribbon School?" The last interview question used to answer the research question was, Interview Question 5, "can you describe what you feel were some of the best practices you implemented that helped you win the Blue Ribbon Award?"

The researcher had previously uploaded the principals' interviews and Blue Ribbon applications into the ATLAS.ti (2014) software. The software allowed the researcher to compare the principals' responses to the interview questions to the answers on the Blue Ribbon application. The term leadership practices was used to code the texts in the ATLAS.ti (2014) software. The researcher then used the information contained in the documents to research current literature regarding any servant leadership characteristics the principals displayed. The researcher also found studies containing the benefits of providing professional development for teachers because the principals often gave this response in the interviews.

Research Question 4: School mission/vision. The fourth research question was: How do principals from Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing

the school's mission and instructional program and creating a positive school climate?

The researcher developed a response to the fourth research question by using two interview answers, the Blue Ribbon application, the OLA Report, and additional literature over school climate. Interview Question 4 was "please describe your school's mission and how it guides your work as a leader." Interview Question 6 was also used to collect data for this question, and asked the principals to describe the overall "health" or climate of their school and some strategies they use to maintain that health.

The principals' interview transcripts, Blue Ribbon applications, and OLA Report aided the researcher in analyzing the documents. To help answer this research question, the terms "school mission/vision" and "school climate" were used to code the text. Using ATLAS.ti (2014) software, the researcher compared the documents to determine if any themes emerged and noted findings in the results portion of this chapter.

Research Question 5: Shared leadership. Research Question 5 was: How do principals perceive their collaborative and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation? The investigator developed a response to the fifth research question by using answers to two interview questions, the Blue Ribbon application, and literature about collaboration and shared leadership in schools. Interview Question 7 addressed this question: How do you share leadership efforts and practices with the teachers and staff at your school? Can you describe the role they have in setting goals? The second question, Interview Question 8 was, Can you describe how the teachers and staff contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation? This question provided insight into how the principals perceive their teachers.

The researcher used the terms “shared leadership” and “collaboration in education” to identify articles in EBSCO host. The investigator once again used the ATLAS.ti (2014) software to uncover any themes that might have emerged from the principals’ interview transcripts and the Blue Ribbon applications. The term “shared leadership” was used to code the different texts in the interview transcripts and Blue Ribbon applications.

Research Question 6: Recommendations. The sixth research question was: What recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success? The last research question used in the study is very important for other school leaders wishing to glean advice from successful principals. The researcher answered this question by using the Blue Ribbon application and the answers to two principals’ interview questions. Interview Question 9, “What programs have you implemented that may have contributed to your school’s success,” allows leaders to understand specific programs the principal oversaw that helped the school be successful. Additionally, Interview Question 13 aligned exactly with the research question and asked, “What recommendations do you have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?”

The researcher used analysis of these two interview questions, the Blue Ribbon application, and descriptions of the programs the principals provided in the interviews to answer the final research question. The Blue Ribbon applications and principal interview transcripts were coded using the term “recommendations” in the ATLAS.ti (2014) software. The researcher noted any themes or specific recommendations that emerged and used EBSCOhost to search for the principals’ recommendations to provide additional

information about programs brought out in the interviews and contained in the Blue Ribbon applications.

Additional typologies. An additional question addressed the instructional leadership style of principals. This was in the interview guide and worded as, Interview Question 5: “Can you describe your role as an instructional leader in your school?” Additionally, the principals were asked to describe what things their schools did that were unique and different, which helped attain Blue Ribbon Status. This was worded as Interview Question 10: What do you feel you do differently from other schools that helped you receive the award? Interviews responses were used to address these categories.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals in Oklahoma schools that earned the Blue Ribbon designation during the 2012-2013 school year. This purpose led to the creation of the above six research questions that could potentially help school administration determine if servant leadership is worthy of implementing into their school district. Assumptions and limitations were present at the proposal stages of the dissertation and included in Chapter 1. However, during the data collection process, the researcher encountered additional limitations that affected the validity of the study. The researcher received very few responses to the OLA survey despite several attempts to acquire and encourage participation. However, the principals’ responses to the research questions were obtained through interviews, and the researcher was able to use information contained in the Blue Ribbon application to cross-reference the answers

received in the interviews. In addition, the OLA Report was used. However, due to the low responses from the teachers, the researcher chose not to rely heavily on the data.

All the principals who participated in the study had different perceptions of servant leadership, accountability requirements, their roles and practices, the school's mission, shared leadership, and recommendations for other schools. Typologies were verified with the aid of ATLAS.ti (2014) software during the data analysis procedures. For example, most of the principals used the accountability requirements enforced by state and federal mandates to leverage success in their schools. How the principals individually accomplished this task differed, but the theme was present.

Results

The data analysis validated several findings concerning the perceptions of Blue Ribbon principals regarding servant leadership, accountability requirements, leadership practices, the school's mission, and collaboration among the staff. Through this study, the principals provided recommendations for ways other schools could use leadership to leverage similar success. The following paragraphs provide the results to each research question.

Research Question 1: Servant leadership. How do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors and are they present in Blue Ribbon Schools? The answer to this question would allow school leaders interested in becoming a Blue Ribbon School or wishing to achieve high levels of student achievement to have insight into the perceptions of schools that have accomplished this feat. The OLA and Interview Question 12 were used to address this question. Through the analysis of data, the researcher was able to

verify typologies or codes present in the participants' interview questions, OLA responses and Blue Ribbon application.

School A. Six teachers in School A completed the OLA survey, which is a 12.5% response. The findings of the OLA Report showed that the six teachers who completed the OLA felt School A was in excellent health, at an Org Level 5. According to Laub (2012) a Level 5 organization is servant-oriented, with leaders focused on valuing and developing employees. In Level 5 schools, teachers feel trusted and are motivated to put the interests of others before their own. The principal and teachers work together as partners in the education process. The number of respondents and the sample size when compared to the number of people within the organization is too low to rely on this data alone to answer the question. Although the sample size limited the results from the OLA, the findings are extremely favorable that servant leadership behaviors are present in this Blue Ribbon School.

Principal A desired high levels of collaboration and generated this collaboration by using data teams comprised of his or her staff. He or she felt that empowering teachers, developing trust, and making sure that the climate of the school was positive were also very important to student learning. When asked about his perceptions of servant leadership and how it is used to oversee his school, Principal A stated:

I kind of live by this. I have read Greenleaf and know this leadership style very well. I am not going to ask anyone to do anything that I am not willing to do. It is not uncommon for me to pick up trash or a broom and go to sweeping. We need to be a support person for our teachers and kids. I think that leaders should be willing to get into the trenches with everyone else.

As a result of this interview, the researcher concluded that the principal perceived himself or herself to be a servant leader relying on trust, teacher empowerment, collaboration, and mutual support to create a positive school climate as factors in the school's success. The Blue Ribbon application for School A contained information that the school includes all stakeholders in decision-making and encourages all team members to develop a consensus and shared leadership roles. These concepts allow all participants to be empowered in creating a positive learning environment. The application includes a description of the principal as being an instructional leader and a good listener. While the quality, being a good listener, is not the only quality a servant leader needs, it is certainly an important attribute of one (Beazley et al., 2003).

School B. School B had the highest response to the OLA survey; however, the response rate was still low, with nine teachers participating. Like School A, these nine teachers rated their school's organizational health at a Level 5, with excellent health. Thus, the OLA findings for School B contain evidence that servant leadership behaviors are present.

Principal B described that he or she was looking constantly at research and making decisions based on what the teachers would prefer. Principal B emails essential information to the teachers. The principal recognized the importance of providing support for the teachers. In addition, the principal stated:

I believe that a servant leader includes input from all stakeholders. A servant leader has strong beliefs and values but thrives by focusing on the enrichment of the community and the growing of leaders from within the community. I am constantly pushing my teachers to be leaders. Many of my teachers provide

professional development workshops for other teachers in our district. I believe in finding their strengths and utilizing them.

This comment is related to the servant leadership characteristic of building community and commitment to the growth of people (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). The servant leader is deeply committed to the growth of every individual within the institution. The servant leader recognizes the great responsibility to do everything to cultivate the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees (Reed et al., 2011). This could include concrete actions such as making funds available for personal and professional development, taking a personal interest in the ideas of and the suggestions from everyone, and participating in shared decision-making (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

School B's Blue Ribbon application contained information that the principal maintained an open door policy and allowed teachers the freedom to modify teaching styles to meet the needs of students. The principal believed in fostering relationships beyond the normal school day. Principal B demonstrated the servant leadership characteristic of a commitment to the growth of people in his or her remarks in the interview. The Blue Ribbon application included evidence that the principal fostered a relationship beyond the school day. A servant leader has a strong commitment to the growth of others (Spears, 2010). This applies to both the professional and personal lives of the followers. Servant leaders should want their followers to grow as human beings and do whatever is necessary to aid in that process (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). A commitment to the growth of the followers will have an intrinsic value that goes beyond their contributions as workers (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

School C. School C's OLA Report was considered highly unreliable with only a 6% completion of the surveys used to generate the report. The OLA Report contained information the workers rated School C as having an organizational health level of Org 4, indicating moderate health. Level 4 is characterized by being parent-led, meaning that like a parent has with a child, and there is some level of trust, accompanied by some fear and uncertainty. In the school setting, teachers would be encouraged to take risks as long as the status quo is not violated. Goals are clear, but the direction of the school might not reflect those goals. With such a low response to the survey, the principal interviews and Blue Ribbon Application become very important in determining an answer for the research question. Principal C stated:

I think, for me, that servant leadership is the only kind of leadership there is. It needs to be in everything we do, 24 hours a day. You have to be willing to stay later than anyone else. You have to be able to help people even when you are tired. You have to show people that you care about what they are doing. People want to follow someone who is working hard and who cares about them. I just don't know any other way to do it.

Based on information contained in School C's Blue Ribbon application, the school's focus appears to be on people, not programs. The leadership works in tandem with faculty members to develop the school's objectives. Within the school, leaders emphasized developing a culture that allows students to feel safe and significant. One way the administration accomplishes this is to greet students as they entered and left the building each day.

School D. School D's OLA Report was generated from only two responses to the OLA survey. Data collected from the OLA Report included evidence that the organization was operating at an Org level 4, of moderate to good organizational health in terms of its workers, leadership, and organizational culture. The report contained evidence that the teachers are listened to, however, evidence from the report indicated that leaders listen to followers when the followers' values and priorities align with the leaders'. Respondents feel leaders often seek and employ teacher-generated ideas; however, important decisions remain with top-level leaders. Though relationships benefit organizational goals, leaders prioritize tasks over relationships.

School D's principals identified in interviews that the leadership promotes autonomy with the teaching staff, and there is a high expectation for teacher success. The teacher was described as a professional and, as such, was expected to have standards and expectations. The leaders of School D believed in an open door policy so that the teachers could come to discuss ideas or concerns. The leadership felt that servant leadership was utilized by the school and permeated throughout the school. One leader commented,

I do think that servant leadership is what is utilized here. I really do serve and do whatever I can to pitch in. I think servant leadership is communicated in our example and permeates throughout the school. Our students giving back to the community and parents giving back to the school suggest this as well. In my opinion, serving others is probably the most fulfilling thing you can do.

The other stated,

We will not ask anyone to do anything we would not do ourselves. If there is something we can do ourselves, we do it. I think it's great when students see

administrators doing physical work around the school. It sets a good example for them and that we are servants of the school.

School D's Blue Ribbon application contained evidence that it was common for administrators to carry out janitorial duties to resolve issues such as cleaning and maintenance. As with the interviews, the Blue Ribbon application showed there was a high expectation for success in the school. The application also noted that instructional leadership was vital to the school's success. Nevertheless, servant leadership characteristics were not included in the Blue Ribbon application.

Research Question 1 results. The results indicate that all the principals perceived themselves as servant leaders. The researcher found the OLA Report contained that high levels of servant leadership were present in Schools A and B and moderate levels were present in Schools C and D. Noting that Schools A and B received an excellent organizational health grade on the OLA Reports and were the schools where, according to the Blue Ribbon application and principal interviews, servant leadership was the most pronounced is important. Another important note is that Principal A received an excellent on the OLA Report, had read Greenleaf, and was very knowledgeable about the servant leadership model. The perceptions of the Blue Ribbon principals within this school appear to be favorable in regards to servant leadership. From the Blue Ribbon applications and interviews, three servant leadership characteristics emerged including, being a good listener, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Listening. Listening helps the leader meet the needs of others. Crippen (2010) noted that this was the first thing a servant leader does before responding to an issue. To listen means paying close attention to not only what is being said by the follower but also

to facial expressions, body language, gestures, and the tone of the person's voice (Crippen, 2010). The importance of listening was contained throughout the interviews and Blue Ribbon applications with concepts of encouraging shared leadership, including all stakeholders in decision-making, and an open door policy. School A's Blue Ribbon application contained information that the school included all stakeholders in decision-making. Principal B proffered in his or her interview that a servant leader includes input from all stakeholders. Leaders of School D believed in an open door policy so that teachers could discuss ideas or concerns. This evidence demonstrates an importance the principals placed on listening to their teachers and community.

Commitment to the growth of people. Servant leaders desire their followers to grow as people and do whatever is necessary to help the followers in that process. By processing a commitment to the growth of people, the followers will have an intrinsic value that goes beyond their contributions as workers (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Principal A desired to empower teachers and create a positive school climate. Principal B recognized the importance of supporting teachers. Principal C wanted the followers to know that he or she cared about what they were doing. Principals of school D felt they promoted autonomy with the teaching staff and had high expectations for teacher success. All the principals valued providing effective professional development to the teachers thus demonstrating a commitment to the growth of their followers.

Building community. Building community also emerged as a significant characteristic of the Blue Ribbon principals included in this study. One of a servant leader's greatest tasks is to shape and sustain the community's focus and unity (Hays, 2008). Principal A felt that empowering teachers, developing trust, and making sure that

the climate of the school was positive were important to student learning. The servant leader should see that the employees interact with each other in positive ways. This interaction allows the followers to learn from each other and support each other, thus becoming more effective (Hays, 2008). Principal B stated, “A servant leader has strong beliefs and values but thrives by focusing on the enrichment of the community and the growing of leaders from within the community.” School C’s Blue Ribbon application contained that leaders emphasized developing a culture that allows students to feel safe and significant. The principals demonstrated this characteristic by desiring high levels of collaboration and creating a sustainable positive school climate.

Servant leadership. The premise of why servant leadership is optimal is that by meeting the needs of the followers, those followers may reach optimal performance (Ebener & O’Connell, 2010). The environment servant leaders create will often reflect the shared concerns of the followers and supporters thereby providing inspiration and momentum to the delivery of the organization’s objectives (Waterman, 2011). Principal A demonstrated a willingness to support the followers by not asking them to do anything that he or she was unwilling to do including picking up trash or sweeping. Principal A desired to be a support person for the teachers and students. Principal B noted that he or she thought a servant leader includes input from all stakeholders and pushes the teachers to be leaders themselves. Principal C felt that he or she was a servant leader and as such, should demonstrate servant leadership characteristics continually. Principal C desired the followers to see that he or she cared about what they were doing.

Crippen (2005) suggested that servant leadership is a promising model for educational leaders to practice, yet noted that the model required further research in the

school setting. Additionally, Black (2010) recommended more research in the field of servant leadership in the educational setting to enhance the understanding and implications of servant leadership within education. This study contains an answer to those calls for further research in the educational setting. From this study, three servant leadership characteristics emerged including listening, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Research Question 2: Accountability requirements. How do principals perceive accountability requirements influence leading, instruction, and learning in their school? To answer this question, principals of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools were asked to describe how legislation, such as the NCLB Act, Race to the Top, and the adoption and later repeal of Common Core standards have influenced instruction and learning in his or her school. The researcher used the Blue Ribbon applications and current literature to triangulate the second research question as the data contained in the OLA Report did not provide information concerning accountability requirements. The answer to this question could potentially help other school leaders understand the attitude of highly successful principals towards legislation and accountability requirements.

School A. Principal A felt that legislation had forced common education to examine individual students far more than it had in the past. During the interview, Principal A stated:

It has forced common education to look at individual students far more than we ever did before. A school was noted for being high achieving or a good school if they had a high population of their students scoring successfully on their state assessments. Now, with NCLB and what we do with ACE in the State of

Oklahoma and, most recently, the school's A-F report card, we are forced to look closer at our subgroups. We look at our special education groups, free and reduced lunch students, minorities groups that are basically groups that have been underserved in the past. Now, there is more accountability that obviously goes with these factors. I think that, in the 20 years I have been in education, it's the first time that we have been responsible for the education of every kid. I think the level of accountability is far higher since NCLB.

School A's Blue Ribbon application included details that an analysis of subgroups over the last 5 years showed positive trends. This trend appears to validate Principal A's comments about examining subgroups more closely and even provides a time period the subgroups had been analyzed that was not mentioned in the interview. Principal A expressed a reluctance to change but felt a need to because of new legislation. This legislation led to professional development for the teachers, which led to changes in instruction. Principal A stated, "I see a lot more student-centered activities. I see students creating and analyzing more. I really think this made us more aware of student application in real world settings."

School B. Principal B stated that change has turned out to be a positive force for this school. Principal B noted,

... we began gathering information and attending trainings for Common Core as soon as Race to the Top started. I believe the education we have received and the changes we made were very positive. I see a lot more student centered activities. I see students creating and analyzing more. I really think this made us more aware of student application in real world settings.

The Blue Ribbon application for this school included the importance of a hands-on approach to student-centered projects as a key component of the students' success, which corroborated the interview answers. Researchers also seem to support both the Blue Ribbon application and the principals' interview answers in regards to student centered instruction (Bishop, Caston, & King, 2014; Çubukçu, 2012). The learner-centered environment differs from the traditional classroom in which the students' responsibilities are taking notes, listening to the teacher, and passing exams. The learner-centered classroom allows the students to take control of their educational experience and encourages students to make important choices about what and how they learn the objectives of the course (Bishop et al., 2014). Çubukçu (2012) stated that teachers should allow time for activities that increase the student-centered learning. In-service training for teachers could improve their skills and knowledge about student-centered learning with respect to their teaching areas.

School C. Principal C formed committees to create rigorous curriculum to meet guidelines and expectations. Principal C stated:

The first thing we did for the Common Core standards was to form committees. We took our curriculum and determined what we were teaching and what we were going to teach in order to make sure we were covering everything. We had to do it far ahead of time so that the transition for the students was in place. We took a lot of our curriculum and made it more difficult, more rigorous over the last two years so that we could make sure students were meeting guidelines and expectations. In reference to the A-F report card, we started at the beginning of that process and looked at each item of the evaluation instrument. Then we

gathered ideas in our building of how to accomplish the tasks from the A-F report card. When you put that together, you have better teaching and students learning on a higher level. We created common goals from the start, and everyone worked toward these goals. I also think that the TLE helped our teachers. They would say I am doing several of these things but not this one. Then they would try and do it as well. I felt this was positive.

Ultimately, Principal C felt that legislation created positive change in the school. The school's Blue Ribbon application contained evidence of the importance the school placed on legislative requirements in that the school had 100% of the faculty as highly qualified according to NCLB Act. The first comment Principal C made about the legislation requirements concerning Common Core Standards concerned the formation of committees. Greenleaf (1970) noted the importance of building community. One of the greatest tasks of a servant leader is to shape and sustain the community focus and unity (Hays, 2008). The servant leader should encourage employees to interact with each other in positive ways. This interaction allows the followers to collaborate and encourage one another to be more effective (Hays, 2008). The response from Principal C contained elements of Greenleaf's servant leadership characteristic of building community.

School D. Principal D1 chose not to address specific legislative requirements, but did opine that the State of Oklahoma should not have repealed the Common Core standards. Principal D1 stated,

...Our school looks more to what Advance Placement (AP) curriculum needs us to accomplish and what College Board wants us to do. In the summer, our teachers attend the AP conference if they are teaching an AP courses.

Upon examining the school's Blue Ribbon application, the researcher found nothing to validate or dispute this claim. However, the Blue Ribbon application included the use of the Advanced Placement curriculum as its reason for success. The application also contained evidence that the school employees utilized data-driven decision making in teaching, assessment, leadership, and organizational effectiveness. According to the application, the leadership is strongly committed to high achievement for all students and administrators work with teachers to actively analyze and interpret assessment results for school improvement. As with School C, the servant leadership characteristic builds community appears to be present.

With the exception of School D, the Blue Ribbon principals included in this study discussed their use of legislative requirements to leverage success in their schools, albeit in different ways. Principal A stated he or she started looking at individual students and subgroups of students more closely to uncover ways to improve its success. School B implemented professional development that targeted student-centered classrooms and activities. Principal C claimed the school used committees to uncover ways to accomplish legislation requirements. The Blue Ribbon principals' perceptions predominately showed that legislation requirements had a positive influence on instruction and learning and the principals used teacher input to solicit recommendations to accomplish the goals set forth by legislation.

Research Question 2 results. A common theme in regards to this research question was that principals solicited teacher input to help meet the legislation requirements. Servant leaders are often thought to make the organization more effective by utilizing and developing the unique talents of employees (Shekari & Nikooparvar,

2012). Principal B noted that teachers used more student-centered activities due to new legislation requirements. Principal C proffered that one of the first things they did was to form teacher committees to look at Common Core. These committees were tasked with determining if the teachers were covering everything in regards to the curriculum. This evidence provides additional confirmation that servant leadership can be used to leverage success in schools.

Research Question 3: Leadership practices. How do principals perceive their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon school? To answer this question, the researcher triangulated the Blue Ribbon application with three interview questions. Interview Question 2 was, Can you describe how your leadership role and practices contributed to the overall success of your school? Interview Question 3 focused on how the principal's specific leadership style and practice impacted the school getting designated as a Blue Ribbon School.

School A. Principal A, a certified trainer in Great Expectations, Data Teams, and College Board, perceived that, by focusing on a few initiatives instead of having a broad focus, the school was able to be more effective. Principal A stated:

..We don't have a whole lot of initiatives. We don't have a broad focus of several areas. What we do is focus on a few. At our level, it is what we do with great expectations, with climate, and culture. We also look at what we do with data teams. We track all of our students closely and then we make changes on the data. We also are very involved in College Board training. ... We ask that all our teachers attend College Board training at least once every three years. My role in this is that I am a trainer in most of these areas. I have spoken on behalf of Great

Expectations conferences. An example of this is this summer I presented at Vision 2020 over Great Expectations. If I am going to expect our people to be versed in it, then I have to be versed in it as well. We not only ask teachers to employ these strategies in the classroom but I model them as well. Data teams, I am a data teams trainer, is something that every teacher is trained in and I am part of the team that trains them in data dissemination process. It is also something that I closely monitor. I am an active member of several of our data teams. If I am not a part of them, then my assistant principal is. It goes towards if it's important, then it's important to the administrators. If it's not important we are not willing to spend our time on it. It shows our teachers, students, and community what is important. My leadership role is that I am interested in what we are doing, that I monitor, and make sure to show a level of excitement about it.

When asked specifically about the leadership style that facilitated the school being designated as Blue Ribbon, Principal A stated,

I am extremely involved in all decisions that we make in our building. That doesn't mean I am making all the decisions, we do have a democratic way in our building but I do like being part of the process. Ultimately, the buck stops with me. Although I am very involved, I also trust my assistant principals, counselors, and teacher leaders and we decide collectively what portion of whatever we are undertaking and then I trust these people to implement it. Since I am trusting them, I also have to make sure I take their feedback and take their recommendations. I try to empower them through my leadership so that we have a team mentality. You can't accomplish what we have been able to accomplish in a

school our size without buy-in. We don't get everyone all the time but we do get the masses. We are also very strategic on how to implement change. We try to be very careful on how we present these things. We also all need to keep in mind that accountability is here to stay.

The school's Blue Ribbon application contained information on the programs Great Expectations, Data Teams, and College Boards helped the school achieve student success. The servant leader recognizes the responsibility to do everything within his or her power to cultivate the growth of the employees (Reed et al., 2011). This included actions such as making funds available for professional development (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Principal A demonstrated the servant leadership characteristic of the commitment to the growth of people by providing professional development in Great Expectations and College Boards. The researcher provides a description of Great Expectations and College Boards later in this chapter.

School B. Principal B contributed weekly grade level meetings to the school's success. These meetings allowed him or her to listen to the teachers' concerns about their classrooms and discover their needs. The principal described himself or herself as the team leader who solicits input from the teachers, stating that if two heads are better than one, than 20 or more heads also have to be better than one. Principal B stated,

I think our weekly grade level meetings really allow me to sit down and listen to their concerns in their classroom and allows me to address the teachers' needs. I look at myself as the team leader. I need the input of all team members. I believe this makes us successful. If two heads are better than one then 20 plus heads has to be better than one.

This same principal felt the “team” approach to leadership facilitated the school’s ability to attain Blue Ribbon status: “We are a team. We look at student data together and we are always helping each other to become better. I think this approach has really helped us to be successful in many areas including as a Blue Ribbon School.” The Blue Ribbon application stated that the principal holds weekly grade level meeting to disseminate information to the teachers as well as help maintain focus on the objectives that students need to master. This statement in the application helped to validate responses to interview questions.

School C. School C principal focuses on gathering data to identify teacher needs and preferences. Principal C stated:

My leadership style is to facilitate learning among the teachers. I do a lot of surveys. An example of this is what I did with the A-F report card. I created a survey for the teachers and asked in what area they needed the most work. It was then my responsibility to cover these items in depth. I also made sure to preserve class time. One of the things I tried to do for teachers is to ease their anxiety and to make sure they understood that we were all in this together. I made sure to give them enough opportunities for professional development but, at the same time, not take away from class time. I also tried very hard to keep everyone focused.

With regard to leadership that helped gain Blue Ribbon, Principal C also took a servant leadership stance, by giving others credit:

I think that just having focus. It was my job to keep everyone focused on the same goal. I’m not the person who gave us the Blue Ribbon designation. The teachers were the ones who made this happen and the students of course. It was my job to

make sure we were all traveling down the same path in the same direction. I also made sure that they had the professional development to allow this to happen. I had a very small piece in all of this.

The Blue Ribbon application noted that faculty members attend state and national conferences focused on best practices in content areas. The application also noted that faculty members work side-by-side with administrators to develop a clear focus and objective for the year. These statements included in the Blue Ribbon application helped to validate the principal's responses to the interview questions.

School D. Principals in Blue Ribbon School D perceived that the leader serves the school in ways that are probably unseen in traditional schools. Cleaning, plumbing, and maintenance work are a routine occurrence in the daily work of school leaders. Scheduling, which is often the responsibility of the school's counselor, is also a role that the principal undertakes at this school. If the school has a need, the response is not to delegate but to see what the leaders can do to resolve the situation. The principals wanted the teachers to know that they are willing to accomplish whatever necessary to make the school successful. One school leader stated,

My perception is that the administration is the backbone of the school.

Principals here have more duties than the typical traditional school. For example, you probably wouldn't see a principal unplugging a toilet, mopping the floor, or fixing leaky pipes. You probably wouldn't see the principal doing all or most of the scheduling either. My wife is a counselor at a middle school and scheduling is one of her responsibilities not the principal's. If there is a need, my

response is what can I do? It does not matter that I am the principal. I want to help whatever the need may be.

The other leader provided an additional thought:

I just got through hanging two white boards for teachers. Now I have two more teachers that would like white boards so I am going to hang those as well and I am in the superintendent's role. It is a collaborative effort where everyone helps out. We give our teachers a voice and this helps with buy-in to whatever it is we are doing. I make sure to meet with the department chairs once a week to give them that direct line to me. Another important thing that we do is professional development activities. We like for our teachers to volunteer to present information they have gleamed from professional development they have went to. We have two or three teachers that are going to be reviewing data with their peers that they received this summer. It comes down to we are all in the same boat. This is one concept we try to stress. We also like them to know that we will get in the trenches with them. If they have a spill in their room, we will be there to help clean it up.

The leadership at this school also stresses professional development. Every year the school leaders send teachers to professional development opportunities. Those teachers come back to the school and present their findings to the rest of the staff. The Blue Ribbon application noted that it was common for administrators to carry a broom, mop, or tools to resolve situations or issues that arose. The application also included the importance of professional development for the faculty in the school. Thus, the answers to the interview questions and the Blue Ribbon application align.

Research Question 3 results. Each principals' perception of their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon schools differed from school to school, but two common themes emerged. Providing professional development opportunities for their teachers and soliciting input from teachers seemed to be important to the success of these schools. Principal A became a certified trainer in Great Expectations, Data Teams, and College Board to provide help to his or her teachers. Phrases such as "having a democratic way" and "acquiring teacher input" were present throughout the interviews. The Blue Ribbon application contained information that seemed to validate the principals' response to the interview questions on these two points.

Waters and Cameron (2007) completed multiple meta-analytic studies on the practices of effective schools, teachers, and principals. These studies provide a guide for school leaders and teachers to increase student achievement. Although a plethora of information regarding student achievement is contained in the McREL study, two key points gleaned from the Waters and Cameron (2007) meta-analysis coincides with the results of this study. According to Waters and Cameron (2007), school leaders should ensure that teachers have necessary staff development opportunities that directly enhance teaching and provide an opportunity for input on important decisions.

Professional development. Teachers' ability to increase student achievement is linked to their preparedness; yet, regularly teachers arrive at school unprepared (Bayar, 2014). Professional development could be a solution to correct this problem. Bayar (2014) noted that teachers define professional development activity as effective when it is organized based on the teachers' needs. The Blue Ribbon principals included in this study

not only felt that professional development was important for their teachers but also listened and accepted input from their teachers. By practicing servant leadership, principals may be able to understand the needs of their teachers better. This would allow the educational leader to understand what the professional development needs are and thus provide them to the faculty. Again, this comes from principals utilizing listening skills to promote success in their schools.

Research Question 4: School mission and vision. How do principals from Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing the school's mission, instructional program, and creating a positive school climate? The answer to this question could allow other administrators a view into how successful Blue Ribbon principals have used their school's mission and the creation of a positive school climate to the advantage of their school. To answer this question, the researcher used the schools' Blue Ribbon applications, and the principals' responses to two interview questions. Interview Question 4 asked principals to describe their school's mission and how it guides their work as a leader, and Interview Question 6 asked principals to describe the overall "health" or climate of the school and strategies used to maintain that health. The Blue Ribbon application did not have a heading specifically for the school's mission/vision statement, but the summary portion of all four Blue Ribbon applications included the school's mission statement.

School A. Principal A stated this in reference to describing the school's mission and how it guides the leader:

We will challenge and prepare students for a lifetime of success through academics, leadership, and citizenship. When you talk about these things, we are

known for our academics. For leadership, we try to get our students to take on responsibilities. We turn over assemblies and this sort of thing to the students with the goal that they take on a leadership role. In regards to citizenship, we use Great Expectations to help make sure our students are good people. Mutual respect for the teachers, mutual respect of their peers, and that they are just good all-around citizens.

The Blue Ribbon application contained the school's mission statement that the principal said in his or her interview. Clearly, the school's mission statement is important to the principal. In regards to the climate of the school, Principal A stated:

At times, there have been ebbs and flows. Often times, this depends on the time of the year. It will depend on the push and pull of the whole process of student learning. I relate it to having a barometer that we use to check the temperature. It is the leader's job to constantly get the temperature back to a comfortable level. The teachers here tend to put a lot of stress on themselves, so we have to look and see if this is happening and do our best to be cheerleaders and that their needs are being met. I try to get to know their personal situations so that I can ask about their kids or how their mom or dad is doing. I want them to know that their principal will support them. One way to do that is by just having conversations with them. One of the things that I stress to the teachers is to keep an eye on each other and look out for each other. Our first concern should be our students, but the second one should be each other.

School B. Principal B stated:

The mission of the school is to provide for the educational needs and the equitable educational opportunities for all students and to encourage a lifelong desire to learn that will follow them their entire life and prepare students physically, mentally, and socially as productive, responsible citizens in their community. I think this mission statement says it all. We strive to show our students we care first and to educate them secondly. It is our desire that they feel safe in our school and want to be the best that they can be every day. It guides everything we do.

School B's Blue Ribbon application contained the statement that striving for excellence with integrity and community values is the mission statement. Both the principal's statement and the statement from the Blue Ribbon application reflect values and community. The principal described the atmosphere at the school to be excellent. One way he or she felt this was accomplished is by being very free with praise. Principal B stated:

We have an excellent, healthy atmosphere. I praise, praise, praise my teachers. No one has teachers that are more dedicated or care more or work harder than I do. I love to leave them notes of encouragement, candy, even a Sonic drink for lunch.

Therefore, the principal used notes of encouragements, candy, and even soft drinks to staff members to generate a positive school climate.

School C. When asked about the school's mission statement, Principal C answered, without hesitation,

Our school mission is very succinct and everyone knows it. It is to have students strive toward personal excellence while growing in mind, body, and spirit.

Whenever you break this down into its basic parts; that's what we try to do.

Everything we do we first look at our mission statement and ask if it is going to help us achieve this. If it's not, then it's not worth doing. Our mission statements leads our entire school system not just my district. It is very easy to know, very easy to learn but it also makes things very simple when it comes to making decisions about the school. It really drives everything in our school. This mission statement has been at the school for many years, but in the last ten, it has really come alive.

It seemed from the interview that this principal thought the mission statement was an important component to the school's success and was necessary for making decisions about the school, noting that it drives everything in the school. The Blue Ribbon application contained verbatim what the principal said in the interview in reference to the school's mission.

When asked about the overall health of the school, Principal C stated:

In education in Oklahoma in 2012-2013, the overall health of any school was stress because of everything that was happening. It goes back to trying to preserve the time they have. Not having meetings for the sake of meetings. Making sure teachers understand that this process is in place to make it easier for them. That they will get information far ahead of time, so they are not spinning their wheels. It's building a culture and hiring people who have the same common outlook on things like school. Hiring people who have a passion for what they are doing and

think it's a calling. When you do this and get those people in place, it is a lot easier for your culture and climate to be positive.

School D. Principal D1 related that the school's mission was to prepare students for success at the college level. Principal D1 stated:

Our mission is to take and prepare all students for success at a four-year university. One of the ways we try and do that is to drive home the importance of college. The first thing you are asked when you enroll here is, what college or university are you going to attend? Students are told from the start that the goal is for them to go to college and complete their education. If college is not for you, this school may or may not be for you. One assignment is that by their senior year they have applied to at least three colleges. The latest statistic we have received is 94% of last year's graduates put their foot in the door of a college. The preparation comes from our curriculum, which is the AP curriculum.

From the start, the principal and staff goal is for the students to complete their college education. An assignment that seniors have that drives the school's mission is to apply to at least three colleges before graduation. The school's mission, as stated in the Blue Ribbon application, was much the same as the principal's answer to the interview question: to develop seniors into students who are ready for the challenges of college begins as freshmen.

Principals D1 and D2 had similar, but different answers to the interview question on school climate. Principal D1 felt the school had a family atmosphere and was very comfortable. If teachers become negative, the principals quickly address the reason for the negativity. Teachers are expected to stay positive. Principal D1 stated:

I think that one of the huge benefits of HCP is the chemistry of the school. Mr.. talked about the clear mission of HCP. We expect our staff to buy-in or you have to go somewhere else. If the teachers are not fully bought in to the mission of the school, it is easier to get rid of them here as opposed to a traditional school so, we do have a positive climate here. We have a functional family atmosphere here. It is very comfortable. If it becomes negative, it is addressed. We expect our teachers to stay positive. If they are not willing to, sometimes that is the time we part ways.

Principal D2 proffered the school climate starts before teachers are even hired in the interviews. Principal D2 stated:

The school climate starts with the interviews we have with new hires. Our teachers know right from the start that discipline, as far as the principal's office is concern, is the teacher's responsibility and should take care of it there. If the problem is bad enough, then they send the student to us. We are going to handle it, and probably stricter than most schools would. We hold a firm line with both teachers and the students. We have clear and concise expectations in regards to responsibilities and duties. If the students are out of control, you are not going to have a good employee climate or student climate. Nothing is taken lightly here. Thus, Principal D2 proffered the school climate starts before teachers are even hired in the interviews. Teachers know from the start that student discipline is their responsibility and should implement discipline in the classroom. If teachers feel the discipline problem is too severe to resolve in class, they should send the student to the principals' office.

Principal D2 felt that clear and concise expectations in regards to responsibilities and duties were needed for a good overall school climate.

School climate. Chapter 2 of this dissertation includes a review of the literature that demonstrated the importance of a school's climate. The school climate is a psychological concept that dominates the school's atmosphere with a consistent and constant characteristic that affects the behaviors of individuals (Gülşen & Gülenay, 2014). The effect of changing the school climate in a positive direction can increase students' chances for academic success (Okaya et al., 2013). According to Okaya et al. (2013), environmental factors have a profound influence on academic performance. A positive school climate erases outside pressures so that students can focus on academic achievement.

School climate and servant leadership. Studies contain data that links servant leadership and positive school climate. Walumbwa et al. (2010) found that servant leadership enhances positive employee attitudes as well as climates that yield important behaviors that directly benefit individuals and the work group. Black's (2010) study concerning the correlation between servant leadership and school climate found a significant positive relationship between the perceptions of servant leadership practices and student achievement due to school climate, which resembles this proposed study.

Research Question 4 results. How do principals from Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing the school mission, establishing instructional programs, and creating a positive school climate? The four Blue Ribbon Schools had different school missions, but a sense of their importance is evident based on the answers from the principals and the Blue Ribbon application. The instructions

included in the Blue Ribbon application do not specifically contain a section for the schools to address their school mission statement, yet all four Blue Ribbon applications included the school's mission statement.

In regards to the school climate, principals described their school as having a very healthy, excellent, or family-oriented atmosphere. Principals A and C felt there was a high level of stress for teachers. Principals C and D felt that hiring staff members was very important to the overall climate of the school. Protecting teachers' time, praise, hiring staff members, and expectations are all themes the principals expressed in regards to the school climate and to the schools' success. The research also contains the importance of schools focusing on the school's climate.

Hiring staff. This researcher did not address the hiring methods of Blue Ribbon Principals in the researcher questions. However, as a result of this study, hiring staff members emerged as an important component concerning school climate. Hynes, Sullivan, and Yeager (2011) found that certain personality characteristics appeared to be important in hiring staff members. A willingness to work in a team and maintain a positive attitude were valued over the content knowledge of a candidate (Hynes et al., 2011). The characteristics of a positive attitude and willingness to work as a team appear to be more conducive to a positive climate than qualifications or content knowledge.

Research Question 5: Shared leadership. How do principals perceive their collaborative and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation? To triangulate an answer for this research question, the researcher used two different principal interview questions, the Blue Ribbon application, and literature addressing shared leadership. Two interview questions were used to address

the data for RQ5. Interview Question 7 asked principals, How do you share leadership efforts and practices with the teachers and staff at your school, and Can you describe the role they have in setting goals? Interview Question 8 asked principals to describe how the teachers and staff contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation.

School A. The answer to this research question could help educational leaders understand the importance of collaboration and shared leadership practices in regards to student achievement. Principal A related that the leadership team is comprised of department chairs who conduct a monthly leadership meeting. According to Principal A, the most important topic of this meeting is, “how are our kids doing?” To answer the question, they ask each other what is working, what is not working, and where the students are academically. Specifically, Principal A noted,

We have a leadership hierarchy in our building composed of department chairs. We do a monthly leadership meeting and the biggest thing we talk about is how our kids are doing from an instructional viewpoint. We try to answer the questions, what is working? What is not working? Where are kids at? This does two things; one is that it keeps our focus on student learning and two it shows people that this is a monthly deal and it is important. We also talk about building wide issues. When we started doing this years ago, I really was emphatic that it was process about learning and not a gripe session. I think if you’re not careful, meetings like this can become that. In these meetings, there is a good mix of people who are not afraid to throw me a curve ball from time to time. I don’t hand pick these teachers who are the department chairs and are thought highly of from their peers and are instructionally sound. The counselors are also a big part of it

and help make decisions. Anything that we do we put a lot of emphasis on making decisions as a group. We also make sure that we don't do things that make life better for adults first, but the students.

According to the principal, this line of questioning keeps the focus on student learning. The principal also felt it was important to make sure the meetings did not devolve into unproductive complaining.

The principal stated that the school could not have achieved the Blue Ribbon Award without good teachers. He or she felt that an environment in which decisions are only made at the highest level was not a good situation for schools. Principal A stated,

If you don't have good teachers you will not be in consideration for something like this. We are very fortunate that we have some really outstanding teachers. We have an outstanding staff. We also have good teacher leaders in the building. The bulk of the staff development we do comes from the teachers. There are things that I need to get up and do from time to time but the major staff development we did at the start of this year was led by teachers and counselors. If it is the administrators always doing these kind of things it creates a top down situation which is not good.

The Blue Ribbon application for School A included the concept that stakeholders share in the decision-making and their input is valued. The teamwork concept allows participants to be empowered, thus increasing student achievement.

School B. Principal B stated,

We have a school-wide Professional Learning Community (PLC) and a school-wide Technology PLC. I think both of these committees have been instrumental

in giving our teachers a stronger voice. We have about eight people on our PLC, and each person is responsible for about four other staff members. We discuss goals and give them time to meet with their small groups before setting those goals.

With regard to staff contributions to achieving the Blue Ribbon designation, Principal B stated,

when I received the Blue Ribbon application I gave each of my teachers the questions on the application and asked them to answer them. I took all of their answers and created the answers for the final application. The teachers teach the students; therefore, they know what works.

School C. Principal C stated that teachers and leaders collaborate throughout the year, but they always start the year by meeting to compare the previous year's performance against the school's goals. Based on that review, they work together to set goals for the new year. The second thing accomplished in regards to collaboration was through the year the principal implemented an advisory committee that was open to anyone who could attend. Principal C attributed the following to shared leadership at the school:

Two things. One, at the beginning of the school year, either at a full day retreat or full day of professional development in years that we did not have a lot of new members, we would sit down and analyze the goals from the last year and analyze where we were at as a building. Sometimes this was done through surveys, other times through conversations in small groups, but as a faculty, teachers and administrators, made the goals for the year. From these goals we determined the

things that we wanted to see happen that follow along with those goals. Then, through the year, I had a principal advisory committee that was an open group that anybody could attend. The meetings would be announced. This really seemed to help keep negative comments.

With regard to staff contributions to Blue Ribbon school designation, Principal C gave them all the credit:

They were the most important component of the whole thing. When we were chosen to be a BR school, it wasn't like we made this a goal and worked towards it. When we were asked by the State Department to apply for this designation we had to fill out paper work but it was things we had already been doing. The work had been done ahead of time. We didn't look at each question and determine what to do to accomplish it we looked at the question and determined what we had done to accomplish it. All of these things the teachers had come up over the last eight years. Without them doing what they do, we wouldn't have had anything to put down on those questions. They are the reason. They instituted all the things to raise our test scores.

The principal felt the teachers were the most important component for receiving the Blue Ribbon designation. Further, the principal avowed the teachers' ideas and efforts, not the administration were the most important component of the school's success. Certainly, teacher input could not have occurred in an environment that did not encourage and value input from the teachers. The Blue Ribbon application contained information that faculty meetings occurred and included open communication concerning success, student, and

upcoming challenges, which restates some of the answers the principal had in the interview.

School D. Principals D1 and D2 felt the department chairs had a direct line to administration through the open door policy. Teachers were encouraged to give their opinions freely, and many changes had been implemented through this process. Principal D1 stated:

Once a week I have lunch with the department chairs and this gives them a direct line to me. We have a great open door policy here at Harding. New teachers come in the day before the rest of the staff, but almost all of our teachers come in before they are required anyway. One advantage is that the school is only in its 12th year. We are not fighting that status quo that older schools have to. I would say it's hard to come from the public side of education to a somewhat unknown charter school and because of this, everyone who comes here tends to have innovative minds. I think that we are not against having any conversation in the hallways. We encourage our teachers to give their opinions. Many changes have been created in this way.

Principal D1 stated the Blue Ribbon designation was a collaborative experience with teacher input from all subject areas. Principal D1 stated:

It was a collaborative experience. There was input from all subject areas and all teachers. As a matter of fact, I can't think of any stakeholders that were not included in the Blue Ribbon application process as far as input and editing.

Principal D2 added:

I think that we all know as administrators that we didn't receive the award because we wrote a great application or because we are great administrators. It is the teachers in the trenches. We are fortunate enough to have great teachers here. Our English department, I would say, is one of the strongest in the state. I would say in regards to the questions, that we were included in the conversation of applying for the Blue Ribbon Award because of what our teachers are doing in the classrooms every day.

In sum, Principal 1 could not think of one stakeholder who was not included in the Blue Ribbon application process. Principal D2 stated the administrators knew they did not receive the award based on a great application or because of great administrators; they received the award because of the school's teachers. He or she felt fortunate to have great teachers.

School D's Blue Ribbon application contained information that administrators work with teachers to analyze and interpret assessment results for school improvement. Decisions are made by asking, "how is this going to positively affect student learning?" Teachers collaborate in vertical subject teams to focus on improved student learning. Based on the principal interviews and Blue Ribbon application, collaboration between staff and leadership is important to everyone.

Shared leadership. Organizations can no longer rely on single individuals to possess all the abilities and skills needed to lead organizations (Kocolowski, 2010). Shared leadership is gaining prominence in organizations as team-based structures replace hierarchical structures (Kocolowski, 2010). Shared leadership is the process of teachers, staff, parents, students, and principals collaborating to solve problems. Working

together can potentially create an engaging school climate that creates successful student learning (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013).

Research Question 5 results. Based on the interviews and Blue Ribbon applications, the principals perceived that collaboration and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed greatly to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation. Common themes that led to the school's winning the Blue Ribbon Award were

- Open communication between leadership and staff members,
- Faculty meetings,
- Teacher input,
- Empowerment,
- High quality teachers in the classroom.

Table 6 contains verbiage from the Blue Ribbon Applications that illustrates the above-mentioned themes in reference to collaboration and shared leadership. To protect the identity of the schools, designations have not been assigned. An important note is that some of the quotes are interchangeable which adds a degree of validity to the above-mentioned themes.

Table 6

Collaboration and Shared Leadership of Blue Ribbon Schools

Teacher Input	Open Communication	Faculty Meetings	Empowerment	High Quality Teachers in the Classroom
_____educators have the freedom to attend conferences of their choice in areas, dealing with subject where they seek improvement.	The principal listens to possible solutions to issues before they become bigger challenges	The principal holds lunch- time departmental chairperson meetings weekly	The empowered vertical and horizontal teacher led bi-monthly meetings set and attain goals for improving student learning.	Teachers understand the reading and writing culture of the school, and thus their classes are more than just mathematical equations and theorems.
Teachers are given autonomy in their classes and in decision making to create their own dynamic, individual environments	The faculty and staff have used a variety of techniques and programs to increase communication.	Faculty meetings occur each week where open communication concerning successes, students, and upcoming challenges are discussed.	Throughout the entire school year, the faculty is meeting in small groups to discuss, collaborate, and generate new teaching ideas based on their individual needs.	One hundred percent of _____ School faculty is highly qualified according to NCLB.
She maintains visibility throughout each and every day, and makes herself always available to her staff and students by maintaining an open door policy.	We work hard throughout the year to communicate and collaborate with teachers, parents, and students as well as community members.	We developed a PLC team that meets once each month to discuss issues pertaining to the school.	The principal allows teachers the freedom to modify their teaching styles to the needs of the students.	We want to ensure that our teachers have the most up to date information on important topics for teacher growth and student achievement.
We realize their input is a valuable tool to ensure school growth and academic success	We include stakeholders in the decision-making.	The Data Team process includes collaborative plans with weekly meetings with teachers.	We encourage all team members to develop a consensus and a shared leadership role.	Our goal is to train teachers to be leaders and implement the best researched-based practices

Once again, themes emerged that included open communication, teacher input, and teacher empowerment. This continues to drive the importance of leaders using the

servant leadership characteristic of listening to achieve success. Without an open line of communication, it would be difficult for the principal to have the opportunity to listen to his or her staff. Furthermore, by seeking teacher input, the leaders in this study demonstrated a willingness to listen and encouraged opportunities for teachers to voice opinions. Organizing faculty meetings, empowering teachers, and placing an importance on high quality teachers in the classroom are linked to the servant leadership characteristic of having a commitment to the growth of the followers. The results of this research question provide a better understanding of the importance of servant leadership in effective schools.

Research Question 6: Recommendations. What recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success? To triangulate an answer for this research question, the researcher used answers to two different principal interview questions and the Blue Ribbon application, discussed in the interviews. The researcher asked two questions. Interview Question 9 asked, what programs have you implemented that may have contributed to your school's success? Interview Question 13 asked, What recommendations do you have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?

School A. Principal A attributed the school's success to the Great Expectations, Data Teams, and College Board Training programs. The continuous Great Expectations training that teachers receive helps with instructional practices, and the College Board Training helps with high-order thinking skills. The data teams process and track student achievement and help with collaboration. Instead of teachers going into their classrooms and shutting the door, they are given time to collaborate. As almost an afterthought, the

principal also stated that Literacy First was another significant program they used in School A. The principal went on to say if you cannot be a successful reader, you are at risk of dropping out of school. Principal A summed up the programs:

The big three are Great Expectations, which is a model that we really lean on with instructional practices. College Board training. ... all of our teachers receive continuous College Board training in which helps with high order thinking. The last thing is data teams process where we track where students are. This helps with collaborations where instead of getting in our classrooms and shutting the door we are getting together to see what each other is doing. Literacy First is another big thing that we do. If you can't be a successful reader you will probably end up dropping out and we try to prevent this.

Principal A recommended the following:

Be tactical and planned out. A lot of people will go to a conference and see something that looks good and try and put something in place without planning it out. You have to get your people on board with anything that you do. If they can't see why we are doing something, they are going to see it as a top down edict. Sometimes a leader must put a sense of urgency to something that the school needs to implement. A leader also needs to create buy-in from the teachers or it will never get done. Basically, it comes down to approaching things from a tactical stance with a plan.

The Blue Ribbon application for School A contained information on Data Teams, PLCs, Great Expectations, and Literacy for Life. The Blue Ribbon application and the principal interview answers align and thus add validity to the response from the

interview. Principal A believed the data analysis of practice tests developed by Alpha Plus helped the school to identify strengths and weaknesses and then provided tutoring in the specific objectives the students needed to be successful.

School B. Principal B recommended obtaining input from the teachers. The principal also felt the teachers should be trusted to help lead the school. Principal B stated,

I believe the practices of test data analysis that we learned from the Alpha Plus program really helped us learn to analyze test data and to look for strengths and weaknesses. Tutoring in the specific objective has really helped students to be successful.

Principal B recommended the following to others who strive to achieve the coveted Blue Ribbon status:

Get your teachers' input. Make sure they know you value their input even though you may not always do things the way they want. If you trust them to teach tomorrow's leaders then trust them to help you lead today.

The Blue Ribbon application contained information concerning the Alpha Plus Benchmark test as a contributor to the school's success along with information regarding the programs of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Renaissance Learning STAR for assessment data. The Blue Ribbon application included the shared philosophy that every student can learn and attain optimal levels of academic achievement and citizenship.

School C. Principal C credited several remedial programs for students who did not pass the state test. Principal C stated,

We implemented several remedial programs for students that did not pass State test. We instituted a Flex Friday. This made students aware of how important these test are. Those who did not pass their End of Instruction exams would recognize that they had to stay an extra 45 minutes instead of going home for remedial purposes. Those who passed all the exams could leave early on Fridays. This kind of demonstrated the importance of trying hard and doing well. It also showed the students that we are not going to give up on them. This is something they have to do but we are also going to help them. Not only did this improve our overall test scores, it helped students understand that they had to retake these test in the summer and that they wanted to pass them to get out of remediation. It also helped these students get off the D and F list in their classes. We also instituted a program called Pride. This was for anyone who had A,B, and Cs on their report card, fewer than four absences, and no discipline referrals, and no more than one tardy they got to go on a pride trip. This would be a fun day. It gave them incentive and was attainable to everyone. This helped in all aspects. These are only some of the things we have done. When we caught people doing something good the teachers would give them a Pride-a-Gram. This went to me and I would call these students in the office and give them like a gift certificate to Taco Bell and call their parents right then to brag on that kid in front of them. All of that helped to create a positive culture. If I had a rough day, I would pick up these Pride-a-Grams and do one. It helped to keep me positive too.

Thus, the principal felt programs such as Flex Friday contributed to teacher morale and student learning. Students who did not score at least proficient on the state exams stayed

an extra 45 minutes on Friday for instructional purposes. In the principal's opinion, giving students the extra time demonstrated the importance of doing well on the test and, at the same time, sent the message to the students that the school was not going to give up on them. The school also instituted a PRIDE program. All students who had an A, B, or C on their report card, fewer than four absences, and no discipline referrals were treated to a PRIDE trip. The goal of the trip was to have a fun day. It was a way to provide an attainable incentive. Principal C recommended the following:

I think you have to believe in what you are doing. You can say you are a leader and that you have the power, but that's not going to get you anywhere. I would say find good books on educational leadership that goes with your leadership style. You have to set goals and not think that you have to do what other people are doing. You also have to surround yourself with people that believe in your leadership style. It takes a number of years to determine what kind of leader you are. It also takes time to communicate it to the people you are leading. Some may choose not to be a part of it. It has to be real and who you are. It has to be servant driven. It can't be out of the power the position holds. It can't be just a job.

The Blue Ribbon application contained information regarding the PRIDE program within the school. The application noted that administrators support the school mission by treating all stakeholders with respect and dignity. Based on the interviews and Blue ribbon application, the PRIDE program appears to be an important program of the school.

School D. Principal D2 identified the number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses the school policy requires every student to take to ensure the school's success. He or she recommended stakeholders maintain open lines of communication. He stated:

We have 16 AP courses. I would like to note that we are an open access school, which means we don't get to select our students. We have a lottery process that does not lend itself at all to cherry picking. We have about 60% free and reduced, so we are a Title 1 school. Demographically we are a majority minority school too. A lot of people that come into our school think because we have the high notoriety we have different demographics than we do but that's not the case. We do get the higher-level kids and our mission and charter school lends itself to those kids a little bit. We do also get average and low level students as well and we have to come up with strategies and methodologies to support those students. You walk in to HCP and you take AP classes. We don't have a resource room. Students on IEPs take AP classes just like everyone else.

Principal D1 suggested:

We don't worry about status quo or what's been done before. We are concerned about what works. Prove to me that it works and let's try it. If it doesn't, scrap it. Another great thing is that we have a lot less bureaucratic interference. I get to make a lot of decisions and can go to my board directly. There are a lot fewer channels that we have to go through. Another big component is that we take in teacher input.

The two principals also offered recommendations. Principal D2 stated:

My recommendation would be to have an open line of communications with all stakeholders. No matter if you think that their ideas are of value or not. They need to know they have a voice, which is important to them. I also feel that we need to establish trust and respect with all stakeholders. Sometimes educators get the idea that we went to school for this and no one has anything really to add to that but it's the exact opposite of that. Everyone has their own way of thinking of things. There has been many times that students have come in with ideas about scheduling and found success with their ideas.

Principal D1 suggested:

I would suggest that school leaders and people involved in schools get outside of the status quo. You need to adopt the mindset that strategic effort creates ability. A common thing I say is to not view organizations or kids with the glass ceiling. Effort can really make you better.

The Blue Ribbon application contained information on the importance the school placed on the AP courses and data-driven decision-making in teaching, assessment, leadership, and organizational effectiveness. The application also included evidence supporting leadership's strong commitment to high achievement for all students, and leaders work with teachers to analyze and interpret assessment results for student improvement. The recommendations from the four principals differed from one another, but a common element emerged.

Research Question 6 results. Principal A and Principal D1 contributed being strategic or having a plan as recommendations for success. Input from teachers or having an open line of communications also seemed an important component to the schools' success and radiated throughout the interviews. Programs suggested by these successful principals included Friday FLEX, PRIDE, AP courses, College Board, Great Expectations, DIBELS, STAR, ALPHA Plus, Data Teams, PLCs, and Literacy for Life, . To give a better understanding of these programs a brief explanation of each one follows.

Friday FLEX. Friday FLEX was developed by School C for any student who failed a state exam or class, English Language Learners (ELL), or any student who needs additional assistance on an assignment, project, or test. For 40 minutes each Friday, students attend FLEX time to receive the additional help needed. In addition to FLEX, students in National Honor Society (NHS) provided one-on-one tutoring to any student who desired tutoring.

PRIDE. The PRIDE program is an incentive program developed by school C. Students who earn the grades of A, B, or C on their report card, have fewer than four absences, and have no discipline referrals were treated to a PRIDE trip. The goal of the trip was to reward study achievement, commitment to coming to school, and displaying proper behavior. The trip is designed for the students to have a fun day.

AP and College Board. AP courses and College Board are linked. College Board is a mission-driven non-profit organization that connects students to college success and opportunity. College Board was founded in 1900 to expand access to higher education (College Board, 2014). The College Board's AP courses are college-level classes in a wide variety of subjects that students can take while still in high school. These classes

offer challenging course work and prepare students for college level work (College Board, 2014).

Great Expectations. The Great Expectations program is designed to motivate, inspire, and challenge individuals to achieve excellence in learning and living. Six Great Expectations tenets guide the program. The tenets include teachers should have high expectations of their students, project a positive attitude, espouse that all children can learn, build self-esteem, have mutual respect, and possess knowledge and skills in learning theory and teaching methods (Great Expectations, 2014).

DIBELS, STAR, and Alpha Plus. DIBELS are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills ranging from kindergarten through the sixth grade. They are designed to measure fluency quickly. The program is designed to indicate phonemic awareness, alphabetic principles, accuracy, fluency with connected text, reading comprehension, and vocabulary (Good & Kaminski, 2014). STAR is an assessment program used to provide schools with valid, reliable, actionable data. The assessments usually last 20 minutes and allow educators to individualize instruction to accelerate learning for students (Renaissance Learning, 2014). Like DIBELS and STAR, Alpha Plus offers assessment tools. Alpha Plus, however, offers practice tests and curriculum resources aligned with Oklahoma state standards (Alpha Plus, 2014).

Data teams. Data Teams are designed to process and track student achievement. The teams are comprised of teachers and school leaders with the purpose to examine student formative assessment data. The teams monitor data, analyze strengths and obstacles, establish learning goals, select common instructional strategies, and develop result indicators to measure and monitor learning (Pijanowski, 2015).

Professional Learning Communities (PLC). DeFour (2015) defined PLC as a group of people working interdependently toward the same goal. Within the PLC, a team of educators establishes a concise set of essential curricular standards and teaches them on a common schedule. The team meets regularly, analyzes teaching methods, and determines the effectiveness of the educational plan determined by the learning community (DeFour, 2015).

The results and answers to the six research questions presented in this study can provide a guide for other schools. The researcher investigated the experiences of highly successful principals to glean insights into how they perceived their ability to earn the Blue Ribbon Award. Although no principal perceived the answers to the interview questions in the same way, school leaders might use the suggestions presented in this section to help leverage similar success. The answers to the research questions also provide school leaders with the option to select from a variety of programs and methods of successful schools that earned the Blue Ribbon Award.

Additional typologies. Two additional categories were added as a result of data collection. First, as instructional leadership is key to the success of any school, and the Blue Ribbon schools are noted for quality education programs, the principals were asked to describe the role of instructional leadership. Secondly, principals were asked to identify any unique qualities their school possessed that highlighted differentiated them from other campuses.

With regard to instructional leadership, Principal A stated:

I have to be the barometer of the building. The temperature will change depending on leader. I want a very high level of collaboration and through data teams we

have been able to achieve this. I constantly have to be asking tough questions. I have to be constantly looking at what needs to be done, what impacts the classroom. As leaders, we have to facilitate what happens in the school. We have to empower our teachers. That they feel good. They have a climate conducive to asking and answering those tough questions. Let's say you are talking about data teams process assignment and one teacher does well and another does not do well. It's hard to have that conversation unless there is a lot of trust in that we are looking at how to use this to get better not just to degrade someone. Leaders must focus on the important things, which is student learning.

Principal B noted the role of instructional leader on this campus:

As an instructional leader in my school I am constantly looking at research and checking out things I think my teachers might like. I am constantly e-mailing them things I think they might like to look at for their classrooms. I also am the support system for my teachers. They come to me with questions and concerns with their students in their classroom and we look for ways to help those students. I also strive to stay on top of the curriculum we use in each classroom. Over the past few years of relaxed textbook purchasing, many of our texts have become outdated so teachers are purchasing supplemental materials and using the web to find lessons to teach the standards. I must be very involved so I know what we are using in each classroom.

Principal C noted that instructional leadership was active from the beginning of each school day.

When I think of myself as an instructional leader, I think that it begins from the moment I arrive. Is that early? Is that late? How long do I stay? How much effort am I putting forth? How do I treat students? I think I am a role model to everyone, all of the time, and it doesn't matter if I am at school or away. Being instructional leader happens all of the time. I think it's very important that the person who is leading as the principal models and shows others several things; here is the way we talk to students; here is the way we interact with students; here is the way interact with each other. An example is that I don't allow myself to talk to teachers between classes if it is going to make them late for their class. That shows that that class is less important than having a conversation with me. This is not what I want to portray to them. I can't stand in front of them in a faculty meeting and say, "I want you in your classes when the bell rings" and then make them late for a class. I think you have to be a role model all the time.

Finally, Principals D1 and D2 discussed instructional leadership. Principal D1 stated:

We will try and promote autonomy. A lot of new teachers come in and ask, "what do you want me to teach?" "How do you want me to teach it?" We give them the objectives based on PASS or the AP objectives, and tell them you're the teacher. We are going to let you do what you want to do to a certain degree. One of the things that we have started doing is using the three principals we have in teacher

evaluations. All three principals observe the teachers and then the principals meet to discuss strengths and weakness and come up with a cumulative evaluation.

Then the three of us sit down with the teacher, and talk about those strengths and weaknesses. As far as our role as instructional leaders, it is our high expectations for teacher success. The teachers know what is expected of them.

Principal D2 added:

The teacher is a professional and has standards and expectations as such. An amazing thing at (school name) is that the teachers are professionals in the classrooms; we don't patronize them. The open door policy among the administration is one of the things that I feel gives them an informal channel to us. If they have an idea, they come in and we talk about it.

One thing most principals would want to know is the one thing they could do to differentiate their campus in such a way that it would be eligible to apply for and receive the Blue Ribbon Award. Therefore, the researcher asked the principals in this study what their schools did differently than others. Principal A said:

I think there are two things. Our focus on culture and climate has really helped. For years, our building didn't have a very good feel but through Great Expectations we have turned the corner on this. I think the building has a good feel to it now and in the last several years. I also think that the data teams process has helped us with student success. We try and remember that behind every percentage point is a child's face. We need to make sure that we treat our students as if they were our own kids.

Principal B noted several servant leadership traits, stating, “I believe I listen to my teachers and I work hard for them. In return they work hard for their students. We also have constant communication with parents. This allows us to have their support.”

Principal C noted that this question was a bit difficult, but offered:

This is hard to compare to someone else when you don’t walk into their school and when you haven’t walked into their halls and in their shoes. I can say that setting goals, being constant, being fair, and having high expectations, helping teachers, and not keeping those who don’t carry their weight. Discipline is also critical. When it is understood that no one stops another from learning or a teacher from teaching and that the teacher has support from the principal, and principal has support from the superintendent, and the superintendent has support from the school board it allows this to flow so much better.

Principals D1 and D2 also offered thoughts. Principal D2 attributed success to innovation:

I think it is innovation. We don’t worry about status quo or what’s been done before. We are concerned about what works. Prove to me that it works and let’s try it. If it doesn’t, scrap it. Another great thing is that we have a lot less bureaucratic interference. I get to make a lot of decisions and can go to my board directly. There is a lot less channels that we have to go through. Another big component is that we take in teacher input.

Principal D1 highlighted the focus on high achievement:

It pains me to say this quote but I heard that Nick Saban say that at Alabama over achievers and under achievers in any organization will never get along. We get rid

of the under achievers in order to have good chemistry. What separates us is that there is inheritance to the high culture of excellence from the teachers to the administration.

The bar is high and no wants to lower it.

While there are no definitive secrets to attaining Blue Ribbon Status, these principals offered some good points to consider.

Summary

Chapter 4 contains the descriptive data, the data analysis procedures, and the results of a qualitative study focusing on principals' perceptions from Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools on various topics concerning how they earned the Blue Ribbon designation. Although each principal's perception was different, the results of this study provide a plethora of information on the topics of servant leadership, accountability requirements, the principal's role in a school, the school's mission statement, school climate, and collaboration. The results identify the five principals' recommendations for schools to use leadership to leverage similar success.

The principals perceived that servant leadership is a favorable style to implement in schools. Three of the four school principals demonstrated in the interviews that legislation requirements were used favorably to assess and implement programs to aid their students' academic success. The principals also viewed their school's mission and climate as vital components to the overall success of the school. The recommendations the principals had for other schools ranged in their answers but often centered on specific programs they had implemented. The researcher provided brief descriptions of these programs in the chapter. The Blue Ribbon applications used to triangulate the study validated the principals' responses. The OLA Report was also used but the information is

not considered very reliable because of the low participation from the teachers in the survey that is used to generate the report. Research was also used in this study to supplement the low teacher response to the OLA and the zero participation in the teacher questionnaire.

Chapter 5 contains an introduction to the study and an outline of why Blue Ribbon schools were specifically chosen for this study and the servant leadership model. Chapter 5's main feature is to summarize the entire study. The summary is a comprehensive look and contains a recap of the essential points of the first four chapters. Chapter 5 also contains future implications and recommendations for research to drive the next generation of studies concerning servant leadership and Blue Ribbon schools.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals whose Oklahoma schools earned the Blue Ribbon designation during the 2012-2013 school year. Officials at the U.S. Department of Education created the Blue Ribbon program in 1982 to recognize public and private schools that perform at very high levels or have shown significant improvement in student academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Maslyk (2012) conducted research concerning the leadership practices of principals in Pennsylvania whose schools had attained Blue Ribbon status. Maslyk (2012) revealed that transformational leadership and developing the collective self-efficacy of teachers were important factors these principals felt contributed to their school's success; however, the researcher recommended that additional research of the leadership of principals in Blue Ribbon Schools was necessary. This researcher answered Maslyk's (2012) call for more research concerning leadership with Blue Ribbon Schools.

Servant leadership was also a very important topic for this study. The foundation of servant leadership is the theory that if leaders treat followers as ends in themselves, rather than means to an end, the followers will reach their potential and so perform optimally (Greenleaf, 1970). Blue Ribbon school employees and their students demonstrated the ability to perform optimally or they could not have met the rigor to earn the Blue Ribbon award. If servant leadership contributed to a school receiving the Blue Ribbon Award, it could help to validate the portion of the theory that servant leadership contributes to the organization performing at high levels.

Researchers have established that improved academic achievement is a result of effective school leadership practices and leaders who attend to the needs of the school organization (Black, 2010; Coddard & Miller, 2010; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Black (2010) recommended more research in the field of servant leadership and education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels to enhance understanding of the implications of servant leadership and its effect on education. Crippen (2005) posited that servant leadership is a potentially promising model for educational leaders to practice, however, it needs further research within the school setting. This study adds to the body of research on servant leadership in educational organizations but also to the practices of instructional leadership that principals implement.

The following six research questions guided this study:

R1: How do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools?

R2: How do principals perceive accountability requirements influence leading, instruction and learning in their school?

R3: How do principals perceive their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon schools?

R4: How do principals from Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing the school mission, instructional program and creating a positive school climate?

R5: How do principals perceive their collaborative and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation?

R6: What recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?

The focus of this study was to understand the principals' behaviors that contributed to a school gaining the Blue Ribbon Award. The researcher framed questions to guide the study in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics and behaviors of principals in schools that earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. The researcher accounted for the possibility that the principals of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools may not have perceived servant leadership or that these individuals might not have knowledge of the servant leadership model. The researcher concluded that even if servant leadership behaviors were not found in the Blue Ribbon schools, the answers to the above questions could potentially aid other schools wishing to increase student achievement through their school's leadership.

To answer the research questions, the researcher used a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methods are useful for understanding social phenomena through the perspectives of the individuals involved and allows for an in-depth understanding of a situation that is not possible with quantitative methods (Szyjka, 2012). The researcher explored leadership practices of principals through interviews and archival document analysis. By using a qualitative approach, the researcher was able to search for the answers to the questions outlined in the study. Instead of relying on statistical data alone, the researcher interviewed the participants, which provided a view of leadership through the lens of school leaders.

Chapter 5 contains a comprehensive summary of the study and adds to the foundation of servant leadership in the educational setting. The researcher presents information useful to school leaders wishing to view the perceptions of principals who have demonstrated the ability to improve student achievement and whose schools received the Blue Ribbon Award. This study contains evidence that added to the existing body of literature regarding leadership in highly effective schools. Chapter 5 contains the summary of findings, conclusions, and implications for this study. Chapter 5 also contains recommendations for future studies.

Summary of the Study

The researcher employed a qualitative descriptive study to answer the questions driving this study concerning the perceptions of Blue Ribbon principals. According to Sandelowski (2000), researchers who conduct qualitative studies want to collect as much data possible to allow them to capture all the elements of an event. The data for this study came from principal interviews, the OLA Report, and each school's Blue Ribbon application. The sample included five principals and 27 teachers employed during this time in four of the six schools that were awarded the Blue Ribbon for the 2012-2013 school year. The leaders of two schools declined permission for the researcher to conduct the study. Having four of the six schools fulfilled DePaulo's (2000) recommendation for sample sizes in qualitative studies. With qualitative research, the sample size must be big enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are likely to be heard (DePaulo, 2000). Although there are only four schools included in this study, there were only six Blue Ribbon Schools during the time the researcher collected data. This provides a sample size that encompasses 67% of the Blue Ribbon schools in

Oklahoma for the 2012-2013 school year and meets the recommended sample size for qualitative studies.

Yin (2011) noted that a researcher should reflect the presence of similar events at multiple sites with diverse social and economic conditions. Thus, the confidence in the results can be greater than if only a single site had been studied. The racial demographics of the four Blue Ribbon schools included in this study are presented in Table 4 and the per-pupil expenditures and whether the school is located in a suburban, rural, or urban location is presented in Table 2. Having four different sites with diverse social and economic conditions also fulfills Yin's (2011) recommendations for qualitative studies and demonstrates that the findings contained in this study are present in diverse social Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools.

The validity of qualitative research is dependent on how a study regulates and substantiates its data (Szyjka, 2012). To help with the validity of qualitative research, an intense contact with the situations is necessary (Amaratunga et al., 2002). The researcher's first step was to acquire permission to conduct the study in at least four of the most recent Blue Ribbon schools. The researcher had contact with the schools for several months and acquired the needed sample size for the results of this study to be considered valid and reliable.

The researcher asked teachers in the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools to participate in an OLA survey to measure their perceptions and provide a measurement of servant leadership behaviors of their school's leadership. The OLA is an accepted instrument that has appeared in over 30 dissertations, possesses strong psychometric properties, and can be trusted to measure the characteristics of healthy servant-minded organizations (Laub,

2012). Unfortunately, a low number of responses to the survey created a limitation for the study. The researcher emailed the OLA survey link to the teachers of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools multiple times over five months. It is unknown why many teachers did not wish to take the OLA survey. The researcher concluded that teachers were provided ample time to respond to the survey; therefore, he requested the OLA group to create the evaluation report based on the limited number of responses. The data from the OLA Report is presented in the results with detailed information concerning the percentage of the sample size compared to the population to provide an understanding that the sample size limits the validity of the results of the OLA.

Because the sample size limited the information from the OLA Report, the researcher chose to rely more heavily on the principal interviews and Blue Ribbon applications as data sources. The principals were contacted by phone to establish a convenient time to conduct the interviews. The principals agreed to allow the researcher to record the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The researcher conducted the interviews, transcribed the answers into Microsoft Word, and emailed the Word document to the respective principal for verification. Once all the principals verified their answers, the Word documents were imported into ATLAS.ti (2014) software to aid in the data analysis.

Another source of data for this study was the Blue Ribbon application of each school. This resource aided in the triangulation of information from the principal interviews. The Blue Ribbon application also provided detailed demographic data about each school. The number of students in the district, per-pupil expenditures, racial composition, student turnover or mobility rate, number of English Language Learners

(ELL), percent of eligible free/reduced priced meals, percent of students receiving special education services, and average student-teacher ratio are presented in the application and create a greater understanding of the composition of each school.

The OLA Report did not contain information in relation to some of the research questions guiding this study. Due to the low response to the OLA survey, and to help triangulate the results of this study, the researcher used current literature by searching for empirical research using EBSCOhost in the GCU Library to acquire additional information concerning topics that were not covered in the interviews and Blue Ribbon applications.

The following research questions guided this study:

R1: How do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors in Oklahoma Blue

Ribbon Schools?

R2: How do principals perceive accountability requirements influence leading, instruction, and learning in their school?

R3: How do principals perceive their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon schools?

R4: How do principals from Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing the school mission, instructional program, and creating a positive school climate?

R5: How do principals perceive their collaborative and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation?

R6: What recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?

Principal interviews, the Blue Ribbon applications, empirical articles, and the OLA teacher survey generated data. The recorded data enabled the creation of emergent thematic categories aimed at understanding the Blue Ribbon designation in regards to the principal's leadership. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the leadership characteristics and behaviors of principals in Blue Ribbon Schools in Oklahoma. Following is a summary of the findings to these questions and the implications and recommendations based on this research.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

The researcher collected data for this qualitative descriptive study over several months in an attempt to answer six research questions concerning the perceptions of principals of schools that received the Blue Ribbon award. The collected data originated from primary and secondary sources. The researcher acquired primary data through principal interviews and an OLA survey administered to teachers of the Blue Ribbon Schools. The secondary data came from the schools' Blue Ribbon applications. The OLA survey was not used to answer every research question, and the information obtained from the OLA is limited due to the small participation rate of the teachers in Blue Ribbon Schools.

The theoretical foundation of this study is servant leadership and McREL's Balanced Leadership Model. Greenleaf (1970) coined the term based on the premise that a servant leader is a servant first. The leader wants to serve and makes a conscious choice to lead with the goal of developing others as opposed to satisfying his or her own need

for power (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leadership is built upon the premise that if followers are treated as ends in themselves, rather than means to an end, they will reach their potential and therefore perform optimally (Greenleaf, 1970). Blue Ribbon school employees and their students demonstrated the ability to perform optimally or they could not have satisfied the rigor to achieve the award. Chapter 1 included the significance of this study as providing additional research concerning servant leadership and its effect on schools. This study contains information concerning the perception of Blue Ribbon Principals and servant leadership's contribution to a school receiving the award.

McREL's Balanced Leadership Model was produced from Waters and Cameron's (2007) meta-analysis of school-level leadership and its impact on student achievement. The meta-analysis of quantitative and standardized data produced two major findings. Finding 1 was that there was a statistical significance between school-level leadership and student achievement of .25, which is a one standard deviation increase in principal leadership behavior corresponding to a 10% point difference in student achievement on a norm-referenced test (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Thus, school leadership made a difference in student achievement and adds validity to this research concerning the leadership characteristics of Blue Ribbon Principals.

Maslyk (2012) studied the leadership practices of principals in Pennsylvania whose schools had attained Blue Ribbon status. The results contained evidence that those principals felt transformational leadership and developing the collective self-efficacy of teachers were important factors that contributed to their school's success. Maslyk (2012) noted that the study set the foundation for the study of other leadership styles in Blue Ribbon schools and recommended that additional research was necessary to gain a more

thorough view of the leadership of principals at award-winning and high-performing schools. The researcher built upon Maslyk's (2012) study by attempting to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals whose Oklahoma schools earned the Blue Ribbon designation during the 2012-2013 school year. Additionally, principal perceptions of the servant leadership behaviors and the self-reported instructional leadership practices were the focus of data collection.

Six schools in the 2012-2013 school year were awarded the Blue Ribbon Award. This researcher was able to obtain permission from four of these schools to conduct research using the prescribed methods of interviews and the OLA survey. Using recent Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools ensured that the effect of a school's turnover rate is minimized; the researcher sought participants who were teachers and principals employed during the time the school achieved the award. The goal was to gain insight into the leadership of Blue Ribbon principals and provide answers to six research questions.

Research Question 1: Servant leadership. How do principals perceive servant leadership behaviors and is it present in Blue Ribbon Schools? The answer to this question should be considered reliable through the process of comparing responses to interview questions, the OLA survey, and the Blue Ribbon application. Many teachers from the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools chose not to participate in the OLA survey and so limited the reliability from this source.

All the principals interviewed perceived that they were servant leaders and that the leadership model was present in their schools. The OLA Report also contained evidence that high levels of servant leadership were present in schools A and B and moderate levels in School C and D. The Blue Ribbon applications also contained

information demonstrating the principals' use of servant leadership characteristics.

Principal A stated,

I kind of live by this. I have read Greenleaf and know this leadership style very well. I am not going to ask anyone to do anything that I am not willing to do. It is not uncommon for me to pick up trash or a broom and go to sweeping.

The Blue Ribbon Application for School A contained information that stakeholders were used in decision-making, the principal was a good listener, and team members are encouraged to develop a shared leadership role. Principal B stated,

I believe that a servant leader includes input from all stakeholders. A servant leader has strong beliefs and values but thrives by focusing on the enrichment of the community and the growing of leaders from within the community. I am constantly pushing my teachers to be leaders. Many of my teachers provide professional development workshops for other teachers in our district. I believe in finding their strengths and utilizing them.

School B's Blue Ribbon Application contained that the principal allowed teachers the freedom to modify teaching styles to meet the needs of students and maintained an open door policy. Principal C proffered that servant leadership is the only kind of leadership there is. It needs to be observed in everything the principal does, 24 hours a day to show people that the leader cares about what they are doing. He or she went on to note that teachers want to follow someone who is working hard and who cares about them. Principal D1 had a similar response and stated, "I really do serve and do whatever I can to pitch in. I think servant leadership is communicated in our example and permeates throughout the school."

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals whose schools earned the Blue Ribbon Designation. The significance of the study is that it contains evidence that four highly effective principals believed they were servant leaders. Moreover, through the triangulation process, three specific characteristics of servant leadership emerged as prominent behaviors displayed by the principals'. The three servant leadership characteristics that emerged from an analysis of the interviews and Blue Ribbon application included being a good listener, committing to the growth of people, and building community. To listen effectively, a person must remain quiet and pay close attention to what is being said while at the same time searching for understanding (Greenleaf, 1970). Commitment to the growth of people refers to the leader not only wanting the followers to grow as human beings but aid in the process by doing whatever is necessary to accomplish this task (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Building community refers to the leader shaping the community focus and inspiring unity so that the followers interact with each other in positive ways (Hays, 2008).

Present and future school leaders can not only use past researcher concerning servant leadership (Black, 2010; Hays, 2008; Jones-Burbridge, 2012; Spears & Lawrence, 2002) but add this research as evidence of the validity of servant leadership. Research results have demonstrated that leadership is important to the overall effectiveness of school systems, especially in reference to student learning (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Waters & Cameron, 2007; Wilson, 2011). Furthermore, effective school leaders who attend to the needs of the school organization produce high student achievement (Black, 2010; Coddard & Miller, 2010; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Waters

& Cameron, 2007). Based on the evidence contained in this study, school leaders should consider the implementation of servant leadership and place specific focus on the characteristics of listening effectively, having a commitment to the growth of people, and building the community.

Listening. Listening means that the servant leader plays close attention when someone is communicating with him or her. The servant leader does not just listen to verbal indicators but facial expressions, gestures, and body language (Crippen 2010). Throughout the triangulation process, listening was found to be an important characteristic for the principals included in this study. The characteristic of listening was demonstrated in the interviews and contained in the Blue Ribbon applications. For example, School A's Blue Ribbon application contained that all stakeholders are included in the decision making process. Principal B noted that a servant leader includes input from stakeholders. Including stakeholders in the decision making process and soliciting input requires that the leader listens to what others have to say about the given topic.

Commitment to the growth of people. Servant leaders attempt to help the followers grow as people. By processing a commitment to the growth of people, the followers will have an intrinsic value that goes beyond their contributions as workers (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Principal A empowered his or her teachers and sought to create a positive school climate. Principal B recognized the importance of supporting teachers. Principal C wanted the followers to know that he or she cared about what they were doing. Principals of School D felt they promoted autonomy with the teaching staff and had high expectations for teacher success.

Building community. Building community refers to the leader's ability to shape and sustain the community's focus and unity (Hays, 2008). The servant leader should help the employees to interact with each other in positive ways. This interaction allows the followers to learn from each other and support each other (Hays, 2008). The principals demonstrated this characteristic by desiring high levels of collaboration and creating a sustainable positive school climate.

Servant leadership. Servant leaders often create an environment that reflects the shared concerns of the followers and thus provide inspiration to the organizational goals (Waterman, 2011). Principal A stated, "I have read Greenleaf and know this leadership style very well." Principal B proffered that the followers should understand that the leader cares about what they are doing. The leaders of the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools included in this study did not seek to win the Blue Ribbon Award. They simply wanted to increase student achievement. To accomplish this task, they listened to their teachers and were committed to the growth of their teachers. This built the community of the school into a trusting environment that accomplished the real goal, providing a good educational environment for students. Black (2010) and Crippen (2005) recommended more research regarding servant leadership in education. This study helped fill gaps concerning servant leadership in education by looking at highly successful school principals and determining their perceptions of this leadership model.

Past researchers concerning servant leadership (Beazley et al., 2003; Black, 2010; Hays, 2008; Lynch & Friedman, 2013) described the characteristics either in general terms or in the context of their study. This research contains how Oklahoma Blue Ribbon principals perceived servant leadership and how the different characteristics were used in

an effective school setting. The evidence contained in this study provides insight into servant leadership from new perspectives and presents the characteristics from a different lens adding empirical evidence to this theoretical model of leadership.

Research Question 2: Accountability requirements. How do principals perceive accountability requirements influence leading, instruction, and learning in their school? The researcher determined principals' perceptions of accountability requirements through their descriptions of the influence of legislation on instruction and learning within their site. The Blue Ribbon application and a review of the literature over legislation requirements were used to complete the triangulation of this question.

Principal A stated:

It has forced common education to look at individual students far more than we ever did before. A school was noted for being high achieving or a good school if they had a high population of their students scoring successfully on their state assessments. Now, with NCLB, what we do with ACE in the State of Oklahoma, and most recently the school's A-F report card, we are forced to look closer at our subgroups. We look at our special education groups, free and reduced lunch students, minorities groups that are basically groups that have been underserved in the past. Now there is more accountability that obviously goes with these factors. I think that in the 20 years I have been in education it's the first time that we have been responsible for the education of every kid. I think the level of accountability is far higher since NCLB.

Principal B expressed a reluctance to change, however felt a need to because of new legislation. This led to professional development for the teachers, which in turn led

to changes in instruction. Principal B stated: “I see a lot more student-centered activities. I see students creating and analyzing more. I really think this made us more aware of student application in real world settings.” Principal C indicated a variety of methods used to manage different legislative requirements such as creating committees for the Common Core standards, looking at the evaluation instrument for the A-F school report card, and the self-reflection that the TLE brought to the teachers. Principal D1 and D2 noted that because of their school status they did not have to worry about legislation requirements.

The principals of schools A, B, and C used legislation to create positive change in their schools. However all accomplished this task in different ways. Leaders of School D did not concern themselves with legislative requirements. Key themes abstracted from the interviews and Blue Ribbon applications included the creation and use of committees to solve problems, looking closely at student subgroups, and implementing quality professional development for teachers. According to the finding in this study, school leaders can potentially use this information to create positive change in schools when new education bills are passed in legislation.

The servant leaders reflected the shared concerns of the followers and supporters giving inspiration and momentum to the delivery of the organization’s objectives (Waterman, 2011). Additionally, servant leaders thrive on the opportunity to share ideas because the process of sharing creates accountability for the results that are generated from their actions (Savage-Austin & Honeycutt, 2011). According to the interviews, principals of schools A, B, and C used new legislation to create inspiration and momentum in their organizations. Principal C created committees of teachers to address

different legislative requirements thus sharing the accountability with the followers. Principal A used the word “we” and not “I” when discussing how accountability requirements influenced instruction in his or her school. School leaders should create a shared responsibility to accomplish accountability requirements that influence instruction and learning in the school environment.

The overarching purpose of this descriptive study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of successful principals. The answer to research question 2 concerning accountability requirements indicated that principals included in this study shared responsibility with their teachers. The content contained within the interviews suggested that the leaders of these Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools did not simply complain about legislation requirements. Instead, these individuals utilized shared leadership to develop a plan to accomplish a positive direction for the school. Other school leaders can analyze the results of this study and duplicate similar response to legislative requirements in the future.

Shared leadership. Organizations should not rely on a single individual to possess all the necessary skills and abilities to run an organization (Kocolowski, 2010). Team based structures are replacing hierarchical structures as shared leadership is gaining prominence in organizations (Kocolowski, 2010). This researcher found that shared leadership was used in the Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools during the time they achieved the Blue Ribbon Award. This adds additional empirical evidence concerning servant leadership in schools.

Research Question 3: Leadership practices. How do principals perceive their leadership role and practices in contributing to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon

school? To answer this question, the researcher used each school's Blue Ribbon application, principal interviews, and current literature concerning leadership characteristics and programs described in the interviews. The principals' perceptions of their leadership role and practices differed from school to school, but two common themes emerged; providing professional development opportunities for their teachers and soliciting input from teachers. The Blue Ribbon application contained information that affirmed the answers to the interview questions.

Principal A focused on professional development in the areas of Great Expectations, Data Teams, and College Board. Principal A's perception was that by focusing on a few initiatives instead of having a broad focus, the school was able to be more effective. Principal A stated:

We ask that all our teachers attend College Board training at least once every three years. My role in this is that I am a trainer in most of these areas. I have spoken on behalf of Great Expectations at conferences. An example of this is this summer I presented at Vision 2020 over Great Expectations. If I am going to expect our people to be versed in it, then I have to be versed in it as well. We not only ask teachers to employ these strategies in the classroom, but I model them as well. Data teams, I am a data teams trainer, is something that every teacher is trained in and I am part of the team that trains them in the data dissemination process. It is also something that I closely monitor. I am an active member of several of our data teams. If I am not a part of them, then my assistant principal is. It goes towards if it's important, then it's important to the administrators. If it's not important, we are not willing to spend our time on it. It shows our teachers,

students, and community what is important. My leadership role is that I am interested in what we are doing, that I monitor and make sure to show a level of excitement about it.

Principal B contributed weekly grade level meetings to the school's success. The meetings allowed for teachers to voice concerns and the principal to discover the faculty's needs. Principal C stated:

My leadership style is to facilitate learning among the teachers. I do a lot of surveys. An example of this is what I did with the A-F report card. I created a survey for the teachers and asked in what area they needed the most work. It was then my responsibility to cover these items in depth. I also made sure to preserve class time. One of the things I tried to do for teachers is to ease their anxiety and to make sure they understood that we were all in this together. I made sure to give them enough opportunities for professional development but at the same time, not take away from class time. I also tried very hard to keep everyone focused.

Leaders in School D demonstrated their willingness to help the school in any way including cleaning, plumbing, and maintenance work. Principal D1 and D2 also stressed the importance of professional development. School leaders can use the findings for this research question to focus their leadership on providing professional development for their teachers and to solicit feedback from the staff.

The Waters and Cameron (2007) McREL study used a meta-analysis methodology that provided this data. The McREL study began in 2001 with the review of more than 5,000 studies that examined the effects of principal leadership on student achievement. From the 5,000 studies, 69 were selected based on the design, reliability,

and relevance of data. The McREL study contained evidence that school leaders should ensure that teachers have necessary staff development opportunities and provide the opportunity for input on important decisions.

Chapter 1 contained in the significance of the study section that many researchers have recommended more research concerning servant leadership in a variety of areas (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Irving, 2008; Jones, 2012; Liden et al., 2008; Sendjaya et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2007) with Black (2010) and Crippen (2005) specifically recommending more research regarding servant leadership in education. The Blue Ribbon principals included in this study perceive that their leadership roles and practices that led to their school achieving the Blue Ribbon Award was to obtain input from teachers and make sure teachers are provided quality professional development. This research provides schools with empirical evidence that servant leadership is found in at least some of the highly effective schools in the State of Oklahoma. The results for question one contained three servant leadership characteristics that includes listening effectively, having a commitment to the growth of people, and building the community. Based on the evidence in this study, school leaders should focus on obtaining input from teachers and providing them growth through productive professional development.

The servant leadership characteristics listening, commitment to the growth of people, and building community that were found in the first research question of this study, again take focus in regards to this question. The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership and characteristics of principals in schools that earned the Blue Ribbon Award. The results of these findings contain evidence that highly effective school leaders in Oklahoma Blue Ribbon schools focus on listening to their

teachers, having a commitment to the growth of the followers, and work on building their community more than other characteristics associated with servant leadership.

Research Question 4: School mission and vision. How do principals from Blue Ribbon schools describe their respective roles in advancing the school mission, instructional program, and creating a positive school climate? The process to answer this question used principal interview questions and the Blue Ribbon Application. The two interview questions designed to answer this question were:

1. Please describe your school's mission and how it guides your work as a leader.
2. Describe the overall health or climate of your school and some strategies you use to maintain that health.

The Blue Ribbon application did not have a heading specifically for the school mission/vision statement but the summary portion of all four Blue Ribbon applications included the school's mission statement.

Principal A stated in reference to the first question,

We will challenge and prepare students for a lifetime of success through academics, leadership, and citizenship. When you talk about these things, we are known for our academics. For leadership, we try to get our students to take on responsibilities. We turn over assemblies and this sort of thing to the students with the goal that they take on a leadership role. In regards to citizenship, we use Great Expectations to help make sure our students are good people. Mutual respect for the teachers, mutual respect of their peers, and that they are just good all around citizens.

The Blue Ribbon Application contained the school's mission statement that the principal said in his or her interview. In regards to the climate of the school, Principal A stated:

At times, there have been ebbs and flows. Often times this depends on the time of the year. It will depend on the push and pull of the whole process of student learning. I relate it to having a barometer that we use to check the temperature. It is the leader's job to constantly get the temperature back to a comfortable level.

Principal B stated:

The mission of the school is to provide for the educational needs and the equitable educational opportunities for all students and to encourage a lifelong desire to learn that will follow them their entire life and prepare students physically, mentally, and socially as productive, responsible citizens in their community. I think this mission statement says it all. We strive to show our students we care first and to educate them secondly. It is our desire that they feel safe in our school and want to be the best that they can be every day. It guides everything we do.

School B's Blue Ribbon application contained that the mission statement is striving for excellence with integrity and community values. Both statements reflect values and community. The principal described the atmosphere at the school to be excellent. One way he or she felt this was accomplished is by being very free with praise. The principal used notes of encouragements, candy, and even soft drinks to staff members to generate a positive school climate.

Principal C was able to answer the question over the mission statement without hesitation. He or she proffered that the school's mission is very succinct and everyone

knows it, to have students strive for personal excellence while growing in mind, body, and spirit. It seemed from the interview that this principal thought the mission statement was an important component to the school's success and was necessary for making decisions about the school noting that it drives everything in the school. The Blue Ribbon Application contained word for word what the principal said in the interview.

When asked about the overall health of the school, Principal C stated:

In education in Oklahoma in 2013-2014, the overall health of any school was stress because of everything that was happening. It goes back to trying to preserve the time they have. Not having meetings for the sake of meetings. Making sure teachers understand that this process is in place to make it easier for them. That they will get information far ahead of time, so they are not spinning their wheels. It's building a culture and hiring people who have the same common outlook on like, school. Hiring people who have a passion for what they are doing and think it's a calling. When you do this and get those people in place, it is a lot easier for your culture and climate to be positive.

Principal D1 related that the school's mission was to prepare students for success at the college level. The school's mission, as stated in the Blue Ribbon application, was much the same as the principal's answer to the interview question, to develop seniors into students who are ready for the challenges of college begins as freshmen. Principal D1 and D2 had similar but different answers to the interview question on school climate.

Principal D1 noted that the school had a family atmosphere and was very comfortable. If teachers become negative, it is addressed swiftly. Teachers are expected to stay positive.

Principal D2 stated the school climate starts in the interview process before teachers are even hired.

The effect of changing the school climate in a positive direction can increase students' chances for academic success (Okaya et al., 2013). Okaya et al. (2013) noted that environmental factors have a profound influence on academic performance. Servant leadership could enhance positive employee attitudes as well as the climate that yield important behaviors that directly benefit individuals and the work group (Walumbwa et al., 2010). Black's (2010) found a significant positive relationship between the perceptions of servant leadership practices and student achievement due to school climate.

Although the four Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools contain different school missions, a sense of their importance can be extracted from the principal's answers and the Blue Ribbon Applications. In regards to the school climate, principals described their school as having a very healthy, excellent, or family oriented atmosphere. Principals A and C felt there was a high level of stress for teachers. A servant leader is supportive and not patronizing. A leader achieves this supportive attitude by having the ability to empathize with other people, which aids in the development of trust between the leader and follower (Crippen, 2010; Hays, 2008). A servant leader will take action to change a situation so that people are more positively influenced if he or she is able (Hays, 2008).

Principals C and D felt that hiring staff members was very important to the overall climate of the school. When hiring staff members, Hynes et al. (2011) found that, a willingness to work in a team and maintain a positive attitude was valued over content knowledge. Positive attitude and working in a team are attributes associated with climate

and validate Principals C and D responses. Crippen (2005) indicated that the servant leader understands not only about personal health but the institutional health as well. The servant leadership trait of healing in the educational setting provides a happy, positive school environment, where the staff, students, and parents feel welcome and there is a sense of wellness (Crippen, 2010). The above research also stresses the importance of schools focusing on the schools' climate.

Research Question 5: Shared leadership. How do principals perceive their collaborative and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation? To answer this question, the researcher used current literature, the Blue Ribbon Applications, and the principals' interviews. Based on the interviews and Blue Ribbon application, the principals perceived that collaboration and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed greatly to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation. Principal A related that the building is comprised of department chairs that conduct a monthly leadership meeting. According to Principal A, the most important topic of this meeting is how are our kids doing? To answer the question they ask each other what is working, what is not working, and where are the students academically? According to the principal, this line of questioning keeps the focus on student learning. Principal B stated the following:

We have a school wide PLC and a school wide technology PLC. I think both of these committees have been instrumental in giving our teachers a stronger voice.

We have about eight people on our PLC, and each person is responsible for about four other staff members. We discuss goals and give them time to meet with their small groups before setting those goals.

Principal C proffered in the interview that two main collaborative methods were utilized. The first happens at the beginning of the school year when the staff sits down as a group to analyze the goals from the last year and where they are at as a building. Sometimes this was achieved through surveys, other times in small groups, but together the faculty and administrators created the goals for the year. The second thing accomplished in regards to collaboration was through the year the principal implemented an advisory committee that was open to anyone who could attend. The principal felt that the teachers were the most important component for receiving the Blue Ribbon designation. What the school was doing that made them successful were the things that the teachers generated over the last eight years and not the administration. However, and an important note to keep in mind, is that teacher input could not have occurred in an environment that did not value input from the teachers. The Blue Ribbon Application contained that faculty meetings occurred and included open communication concerning success, students, and upcoming challenges, which restates some of the answers the principal had in the interview.

Principal D1 and D2 noted that the department chairs had a direct line to administration through the open door policy. Teachers were encouraged to give their opinions freely, and many changes had been created through this process. Principal D1 stated, “the Blue Ribbon designation was a collaborative experience with teacher input from all subject areas.” Principal D1 proffered that he or she could not think of one stakeholder that was not included in the Blue Ribbon Application process. Principal D2 noted that the administrators knew that they did not receive the award based on a great application or because of great administrators, but that the teachers were the reason.

Common themes that emerged from this study were open communication between leadership and staff members, some form of faculty meetings, teacher input, empowerment, and having high-quality teachers in the classroom. The following research seems to validated these findings (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013; Kocolowski, 2010).

Organizations can no longer rely on single individuals to possess all the abilities and skills necessary to lead organizations (Kocolowski, 2010). Shared leadership is gaining prominence in organizations as team-based structures replace hierarchical structures (Kocolowski, 2010).

Shared leadership is the process of teachers, staff, parents, students, and principals collaborating to solve problems. Working together could potentially create an engaging school climate that accomplishes successful student learning (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). The interviews and Blue Ribbon applications seem to contain that the principals perceived that collaboration and shared leadership efforts/practices contributed greatly to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation. Common themes that led to the school's winning the Blue Ribbon Award were:

- Open communication between leadership and staff members,
- Faculty meetings,
- Teacher input,
- Empowerment,
- High quality teachers in the classroom.

The results from this research questions adds to the body of knowledge regarding servant leadership by placing emphasis on school leaders listening to their teachers. The first three bullets above all associate with the principals demonstrating the first characteristic of servant leadership, listening. This characteristic emerged in research questions one and three as well. School leaders may want to focus more on listening to

their teachers as a result of this study. Other servant leadership experts have discussed the characteristics of servant leadership (Black, 2010; Greenleaf, 1970; Hays, 2008; Jones-Burbridge, 2012; Spears, 2010) but the significance of this study is that it emphasizes listening more than the other characteristics.

Research Question 6: Recommendations. What recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success? To answer this question, the researcher first analyzed the principals' interviews. The researcher then attempted to locate information contained in the Blue Ribbon Applications that validated the claims made in the interviews. The final aspect of the triangulation process was to research evidence presented in the interviews and Blue Ribbon Application on the practices and programs uncovered in the interviews and applications. The recommendations from the four principals differed from one another, however a common element emerged. Principal A contributed being strategic or having a plan as recommendations for success. Principal A recommended the following.

Be tactical and planned out. A lot of people will go to a conference and see something that looks good and try and put something in place without planning it out. You have to get your people on board with anything that you do. If they can't see why we are doing something they are going to see it as a top down edict. Sometimes a leader must put a sense of urgency to something that the school needs to implement. A leader also needs to create buying from the teachers or it will never get done. Basically, it comes down to approaching things from a tactical stance and plan.

Principal B contributed success more to programs used in the school. Alpha Plus helped the school faculty identify strengths and weaknesses of their students and then provide tutoring in the specific objectives the students required additional instruction. Principal B recommended obtaining input from teachers in decision making. The Blue Ribbon Application contained information concerning Alpha Plus along with the programs DIBELS and STAR for assessment data. Principal C recommended,

I think you have to believe in what you are doing. You can say you are a leader and that you have the power but that's not going to get you anywhere. I would say, find good books on educational leadership that goes with your leadership style. You have to set goals and not think that you have to do what other people are doing. You also have to surround yourself with people that believe in your leadership style. It takes a number of years to determine what kind of leader you are. It also takes time to communicate it to the people you are leading. Some may choose not to be a part of it. It has to be real and who you are. It has to be servant driven. It can't be out of the power the position holds. It can't be just a job.

The Blue Ribbon Application contained information regarding the PRIDE Program within the school, which is explained later in this section. The application contained that administrators support the school mission by treating all stakeholders with respect and dignity. Principal D2 contributed the amount of Advanced Placement (AP) courses provided by the school and the policy that every student must take these courses to the school's success. He or she recommended that there is an open line of communication with all stakeholders. The leader should establish trust and respect with all stakeholders. Principal D1 suggested,

We don't worry about status quo or what's been done before. We are concerned about what works. Prove to me that it works and let's try it. If it doesn't, scrap it. Another great thing is that we have a lot less bureaucratic interference. I get to make a lot of decisions and can go to my board directly. There is a lot less channels that we have to go through. Another big component is that we take in teacher input.

The Blue Ribbon application contained information on the importance the school placed on the AP courses and data-driven decision-making in teaching, assessment, leadership, and organizational effectiveness. The application also included language that the leadership is strongly committed to high achievement for all students and leaders work with teachers to analyze and interpret assessment results for student improvement. The recommendations from the four principals differed from one another but a common element emerged. Principal A contributed being strategic or having a plan as recommendations for success. Input from teachers or having an open line of communication also seemed an important component to the schools' success and radiated throughout the interviews. Once again the characteristic of listening emerged as a common theme of the Blue Ribbon Principals. Programs suggested by these successful principals included Friday FLEX, PRIDE, AP courses, College Board, Great Expectations, DIBELS, STAR, and ALPHA Plus.

Friday FLEX. Friday FLEX was developed by School C for any student who failed a state exam or class, English Language Learners (ELL), or any student who needs additional assistance on an assignment, project, or test. For 40 minutes each Friday, students attend FLEX time to receive the additional help needed. In addition to FLEX,

students in National Honor Society (NHS) provided one-on-one tutoring to any student who desired tutoring. School C instituted the PRIDE program, a school-wide recognition program that awards students who consistently exhibit positive behavior.

PRIDE Program. The PRIDE Program is a school-wide recognition program that awards students who consistently exhibit positive behavior. To qualify for the PRIDE Program, students must meet a certain criteria in a nine-week period. The criteria includes no grade lower than 70% overall in any class, no office referrals or detentions assigned, no more than four absences in any class, and no zeros.

AP courses and College Board. AP courses and College Board are designed to help high school students prepare for college. The College Board organization attempts to connect students with opportunities that increase the likelihood of success in college (College Board, 2014). AP courses are college-level classes designed to be administered to high school students advanced enough in their education to attempt a more challenging curriculum (College Board, 2014).

Great Expectations. Great Expectation is designed to help individuals achieve excellence in learning and living by motivating, inspiring, and challenging students. This program contains six tenets in which the teachers have high expectations for their students, project a positive attitude, advocate that all children can learn, shape self-esteem, have mutual respect, and possess knowledge and skills in learning theory. The teacher's instructional methods should project these tenets (Great Expectations, 2014).

DIBELS. DIBELS are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills ranging from kindergarten through the sixth grade. They are designed to measure fluency quickly. The program is designed to indicate

phonemic awareness, alphabetic principles, accuracy, fluency with connected text, reading comprehension, and vocabulary (Good & Kaminski, 2014).

STAR. STAR is an assessment program used to provide schools with valid, reliable, actionable data. The assessments usually last around 20 minutes and allow educators to individualize instruction to accelerate learning for students (Renaissance Learning, 2014).

ALPHA Plus. Like DIBELS and STAR, Alpha Plus offers assessment tools. Alpha Plus, however, offers practice tests and curriculum resources aligned with Oklahoma state standards (Alpha Plus, 2014).

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals in schools that have earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. Principals included in this study considered themselves servant leaders and predominately displayed the characteristics of listening, commitment to the growth of their teachers, and building community. This study contains data that added to the body of research on servant leadership in educational organizations and provided insight into the practices of instructional leadership that principals implemented in Blue Ribbon Schools as outlined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.

Many researchers have recommended more research concerning servant leadership in a variety of areas (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Irving, 2008; Jones, 2012; Liden et al., 2008; Sendjaya et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2007) with Black (2010) and Crippen (2005) specifically recommending more research regarding servant leadership in education. Maslyk (2012) recommended that additional research is necessary to gain a

more thorough view of the leadership of principals at award-winning and high-performing schools, including a view of other leadership styles. The significance of this study is that it fulfills, in part, the call for more research concerning servant leadership in the field of education. Chapter 2 contained an outline of 10 servant leadership characteristics. An unexpected outcome of this study is that the Blue Ribbon Principals utilized the first characteristic of listening the most in their leadership. Building community and a commitment to the growth of teachers appear to be more predominant than the other characteristics in the perspectives of the Blue Ribbon Principals.

Additional typologies. Two additional categories were added as a result of data collection. First, as instructional leadership is key to the success of any school, and the Blue Ribbon schools are noted for quality education programs, the principals were asked to describe the role of instructional leadership. Secondly, principals were asked to identify any unique qualities their school possessed that highlighted differentiated them from other campuses.

With regard to instructional leadership, principals highlighted the need to know what is going on in their schools on a daily basis. Further, they felt leaders should know the curriculum and should stay abreast of research findings. Most importantly, all principals focused on developing the teachers. They felt leaders should serve as a support system for teachers, serve as role models for teachers, and give teachers autonomy in their classrooms.

Principals also commented on the characteristics they felt differentiated their schools. Principal A felt culture and climate were important aspects that created conditions for success in the school. Principal B noted several servant leadership traits,

stating, “I believe I listen to my teachers and I work hard for them. In return they work hard for their students. We also have constant communication with parents. This allows us to have their support.” Principal C noted that this question was a bit difficult, but offered that setting goals, being constant, being fair, and having high expectations were important, along with discipline. Principal D2 attributed success to innovation, whereas Principal D1 highlighted the focus on high achievement. While there are no definitive secrets to attaining Blue Ribbon Status, these principals offered some good points to consider.

Implications

Leadership is one of the most comprehensively researched social influence processes in the behavioral sciences (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The demands of the public educational system have become greater with new accountability measures coming from both state and federal legislation; however, new methods of attaining student academic achievement are becoming increasingly elusive (Black, 2010). Significant research regarding the relationships between student learning and selected school leadership practices exists (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Wilson, 2011). Research results contained that leadership is important to the overall effectiveness of school systems, especially in reference to student learning (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Wilson, 2011; Waters & Cameron, 2007).

Salameh (2011) found that administrators within the educational system who are responsible for leadership training would benefit from providing training in the principles of servant leadership. A leader that bases decisions on moral, ethical, and spiritual values often characterizes servant leadership (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012). Servant leadership

enthusiasts feel that an organization can be more effective if the unique talents of the employees are recognized, utilized, and developed (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012).

Leaders play a critical role in helping employees realize their potential. Servant leadership focuses on developing employees to their fullest potential in the areas of task effectiveness, community stewardship, self-motivation, and future leadership capabilities (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012).

Crippen (2005) posited that servant leadership is a potentially promising model for educational leaders to practice that needs additional research in the school setting. The results of this study provide school leaders with empirical evidence of the perceived principal characteristics from four Blue Ribbon principals in Oklahoma. This study contains the perceptions of the Blue Ribbon principals and provides insight into their leadership style. However, a single descriptive study cannot provide a pervasive basis for the sustainability of servant leadership or the programs recommended by the principals included in this study. The strength of this study is that it expanded on Crippen (2005), Shekari and Nikooparvar (2012), Black (2010), Salameh (2011), and other educational researchers and leads to more empirical research regarding servant leadership or leadership in Blue Ribbon Schools.

Theoretical implications. The results of this study have theoretical implications for present and future school leaders. The Blue Ribbon principals provided information concerning servant leadership, accountability requirements, leadership practices, school mission/vision statements, the effect of the school's climate, and recommendations for other schools. Themes that emerged from this research are positive perceptions

concerning servant leadership, teacher collaboration and input, quality professional development, and the programs implemented in each school.

The researcher used qualitative methods in this study to understand the social phenomena of schools effective enough to achieve the Blue Ribbon award through the perspectives of the principals at those schools. Qualitative methods allowed for an in-depth understanding of a situation that is not possible with quantitative methods (Szyjka, 2012). The principals gave an account of what they perceived helped them achieve the award. The researcher was able to use the schools' Blue Ribbon applications and research to corroborate what was uncovered in the interview process.

The major weaknesses of the study came from the lack of participation of the teachers in the Blue Ribbon schools. The researcher wanted to acquire a true measurement of servant leadership using the OLA survey. The OLA tool possesses strong psychometric properties and can be trusted to measure the characteristics of servant leadership by instantly and anonymously recording feedback entered by survey respondents and has rapidly become a standard in servant leadership research (Irving, 2008). The researcher emailed a questionnaire along with a link and instructions for taking the OLA. The questionnaire was very similar to the questions asked in the interviews of the principals. Although some teachers were willing to take the OLA, none of the teachers returned questionnaires. The researcher made several attempts to attain larger response but was unsuccessful. With a better measurement of servant leadership in each of the schools and the answers to the questionnaires to compare to the principals' interview responses, the researcher could have provided a better understanding of the presence of servant leadership in Blue Ribbon Schools. The principals included in this

study all felt that they were servant leaders. However, with a reliable measurement of servant leadership from the OLA survey, the researcher could have provided quantitative evidence to help determine if the principal's perceptions matched the teacher's perceptions. There is not adequate information to make the findings generalizable in regards to this comparison. However, through the triangulation process, specific leadership characteristics emerged as more predominate than others.

The researcher found a reoccurring theme that Blue Ribbon Principals in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year emphasized the servant leadership characteristic of listening. This finding adds to the body of knowledge concerning which characteristic school leaders should implement into their leadership style. This finding could help school leaders understand the importance of developing this characteristic. On the surface, the concept of listening seems straightforward. However, there is more to it than simply not talking. To listen effectively, a person must pay close attention to what is said while searching for understanding. Part of this understanding could come from the expressions and body language of the speaker (Greenleaf, 1970).

A practiced listener assesses what the speaker is expressing by separating facts from opinions. The listener should also be aware of the speaker's feelings and attitudes. The discipline of listening may positively affect face-to-face relations and save time in communicating. The leader listening to the follower may create the potential to lift the listener and the speaker to a higher level of communication. Listening alone does not make a person a servant leader; however, it is an important attribute of the servant leader (Beazley et al., 2003).

For every principal to view him- or herself as a servant leader is worth noting as well. Servant leadership is an increasingly popular concept that places the leader as a servant to his or her followers (Hirschy et al., 2012; McCuddy & Cavin, 2009). Greenleaf (1970) explained that it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. After the natural feeling of wanting to serve comes an aspiration and choice to lead. Under this model of leadership, Greenleaf (1970) thought it that those served grow as people and become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and thus more likely to become servants themselves (Greenleaf, 1970). Although this study only contains the perception of four Blue Ribbon Principals, the researcher found they all believed they were servant leaders. This data lends weight to the premise of servant leadership's positive effect in schools (Black, 2010; Crippen, 2010; Waters & Cameron, 2007). School leaders wishing to emulate successful principals could use this empirical data as a source to confirm that at least some Blue Ribbon principals in Oklahoma consider that they are servant leaders and that it is an effective leadership style. This data has the potential to create additional interest concerning servant leadership in education.

This study contains evidence that listening, commitment to the growth of people, and building community were more pronounced than the other servant leadership characteristics. As a result of this study, leaders may wish to self-evaluate to determine if they focus on these specific traits. They may choose to concentrate on creating opportunities to communicate with teachers making sure to allow time for teachers to do the talking. The school leaders may also wish to focus on finding meaningful professional development for their staff and creating a pleasant working environment.

Practical implications. State leaders in Oklahoma place high levels of importance on educator performance and student learning. Recently, state lawmakers passed Oklahoma State Law 70 O.S. § 6-101.16 that established the Oklahoma TLE and focused on teacher and leadership effectiveness. The aim of the law was to encourage continuous professional growth on the part of principals and teachers with the goal of improving student achievement in Oklahoma (Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System, 2012). Through this study, the researcher provided insight into the perceptions of highly effective principals. The practical implications of this research are that other school leaders can learn and possibly benefit from the experience of these highly successful principals. The principals predominately displayed the servant leadership characteristics of being a good listener. Listening helps the leader identify the followers' needs (Keith, 2009). The leader can use suggestion boxes, informal interviews, formal interviews, surveys, focus groups, and other means to help start a discussion (Keith, 2009). When responding to an issue, the first thing a servant leader does is listen (Crippen, 2010).

A commitment to the growth of people and building community were additional servant leadership characteristics that were significant in the perception of the Blue Ribbon principals. Servant leaders are deeply committed to the growth of every individual within their institution. Servant leaders recognize the great responsibility to do everything within their power to cultivate the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees (Reed et al., 2011). This effort can include concrete actions such as making funds available for personal and professional development, taking a personal interest in

the ideas of and the suggestions from everyone, and participating in shared decision-making (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

The servant leader seeks to identify resources for building community among the followers. Servant leadership suggests that true community can be created among those who work in businesses and other institutions (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Servant leaders identify the means to build a strong community both internally and externally (Reed et al., 2011). The results contained in this study demonstrated that successful school leaders of Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools developed the characteristics of listening, building community, and committing to the growth of their teachers over the rest of the servant leadership characteristics. Many studies contain a link of servant leadership to successful organizations. However, this study adds to the body of knowledge by not simply looking at servant leadership as a whole but specifically finding the exact characteristics that Blue Ribbon principals used to achieve success.

Furthermore, a common theme that emerged from the Blue Ribbon principals and research (Waters & Cameron, 2007) was that school leaders should ensure that teachers have necessary staff development opportunities that directly enhance teaching. Through the teacher evaluation process, principals should determine the strengths and weakness of the faculty. However, this determination is only helpful information if the principals act according to their findings. Principals should locate staff development opportunities that address teachers' weaknesses and provide the opportunity for teachers to improve in those areas. The practical implications of this study are that school leaders can examine the perspective of Blue Ribbon principals to leverage similar success and possibly increase student achievement. This study contains evidence that Blue Ribbon principals

listen to their staff, are committed to their growth, and build community. By emphasizing these characteristics, school leaders may be able to fulfill the legislative requirements aimed at improving student achievement through leadership.

Future implications. The findings contained in this study may influence the image of servant leadership in public schools in America in a positive way. Greenleaf (1970) thought that the roles of servant and leader could be fused in one person. . The model contains information regarding the importance of the followers in the organization in contrast to leadership styles in which employees are viewed as expendable resources (Jaramillo et al., 2009; Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012).

This study contains findings that all of the Blue Ribbon principals included in this study believed they were servant leaders and that servant leadership was present when they won the award. Three servant leadership characteristics emerged, including being a good listener, committing to the growth of people, and building community. Other researchers have examined servant leadership from a variety of viewpoints (Black, 2010; Del & Akbarpour, 2011; Hoveida et al., 2011); however, the evidence contained in this study adds to the body of knowledge pertaining to the three specific servant leadership characteristics of being a good listener, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Future studies may help to determine if the characteristics of listening, growth of people, and building community are common practices of highly effective leaders more than the other seven characteristics of servant leadership. This may engage other researchers to examine the above mentioned characteristics more closely.

Recommendations

The findings of this study are specific to the schools in the State of Oklahoma and create the possibility of conducting a similar study using a similar methodology in other states. Black (2010) recommended more research in the field of servant leadership and education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels to enhance understanding of the implications of servant leadership and its effect on education. Crippen (2005) posited that servant leadership is a potentially promising model for educational leaders to practice but needs further research in the school setting. This study contains empirical evidence about the different perceptions of Blue Ribbon principals. Additional research is necessary to uncover a more concise pattern of Blue Ribbon principal perceptions in regards to servant leadership, legislative requirements, leadership practices, school mission, school climate, collaborative efforts, and recommendations for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success.

Recommendations for future research. Every state has the potential for schools to be awarded the Blue Ribbon in any given year.

1. The first recommendation is that the same methodology used in this study could be used in different states to determine if similar results could create a more concise pattern of the principals' perceptions. This effort would provide additional evidence concerning servant leadership in highly effective schools in other states as well as potentially aid in creating a better understanding of how highly effective principals across the United States view servant leadership.
2. The second recommendation for future research is a study focusing strictly on how effective leaders use servant leadership in connection to legislative or accountability requirements. Accountability requirements from legislation such as the NCLB Act have changed the ways school leaders are managing schools (Maslyk, 2012). Research concerning how servant leaders implement accountability requirements could provide insight into precise methods for turning accountability into student achievement. A more in-depth understanding concerning this topic could provide valuable knowledge in this area.

3. The third recommendation for future research is to discover how servant leaders address hiring teachers. Principals C, D1, and D2 felt that hiring staff members was very important to the overall climate of the school. Research concerning how servant leaders hire their teachers could provide empirical data for other school leaders to use when filling teaching positions that are available in their school district. School leaders could also use this information when attempting to recruit teachers to their school.
4. The fourth recommendation for future research is to determine the effect of a servant leader's implementation of the school's mission and vision statements to improve the students' academic success potential. Research question four of this study contained a small insight into the mission statements of four Oklahoma Blue Ribbon Schools and found that the principals knew their school's mission statement, verbatim in some cases, and it was included in each school's Blue Ribbon application. A more in-depth understanding of servant leaders' implementation of mission/vision statements could provide valuable insight into the importance of constructing a mission statement and ways to use it to leverage success in the school setting.

Chapter 1 contained the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study, which was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals in schools that have earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. During this process, the identified recommendations were discovered. School leaders could potentially benefit from this same study conducted in other states in different school years to identify how servant leaders address legislation requirements, their methods of hiring staff, and how they utilize a school's mission/vision statement. Future researchers could provide empirical data that fill these gaps in the knowledge generated from this study.

Recommendations for practice. The researcher found that principals of highly effective schools understood the concepts of servant leadership and viewed it as an effective way to lead a school. The researcher wanted a better understanding of the perception of Blue Ribbon principals on the topics of accountability, leadership practices, school climate, and collaboration. The researcher also wanted to provide

recommendations from highly effective Blue Ribbon principals that other school leaders could use to leverage similar success in their schools.

1. The first recommendation is that school leaders educate themselves in the concepts and characteristics of servant leadership with a focus on listening, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. The researcher predicted in Chapter 1 that the results from this study would provide a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of principals whose schools earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year. Every principal interviewed in this study perceived that servant leadership was present in his or her schools. Further, Principal A had read Greenleaf (1970) and was very knowledgeable about servant leadership. Principal C stated, "I think, for me, that servant leadership is the only kind of leadership there is." At least four of the six school principals in Oklahoma that were awarded the Blue Ribbon Award thought that servant leadership was a good leadership model to implement in schools.
2. The second recommendation is for school leaders to use legislative and accountability requirements to create positive change. The researcher observed that many of the school leaders in Oklahoma do not like new legislation concerning accountability requirements for schools. The researcher visits with principals and superintendents at many different functions like basketball games, leadership conferences, and professional development in Oklahoma. During these visits, the researcher determined the discussion is seldom, if ever, positive when concerning accountability requirements, yet Principals A, B, and C all used legislation requirements to leverage success in their schools. Despite a reluctance to change because of new legislation, Principal B admitted that the regulations led to professional development, which created a more student-centered environment. This environment led to more effective student achievement. The Blue Ribbon Principals used accountability and legislation requirements as a change agent instead of a topic to criticize.
3. The third recommendation from this study comes from the answers principals gave to the interview and research question, "what recommendations do principals have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?" Their answers included that school leaders should be strategic and create a plan for success. Input from teachers and having an open line of communication seemed to be an important component to the schools' success and radiated throughout the interviews. The successful principals recommended the following programs: Friday FLEX, PRIDE, AP courses, College Board, Great Expectations, DIBELS, STAR, and ALPHA Plus. Flex Friday provides remediation and the PRIDE Program recognizes student success and behavior. AP courses and College Board are linked. College Board is a mission-driven non-profit organization that connects students to college success and opportunity (College Board, 2014). AP courses are

college-level classes in a wide variety of subjects that students can take while still in high school. These classes offer challenging course work and prepare students for college level work (College Board, 2014). The Great Expectations program is designed to motivate, inspire, and challenge individuals to achieve excellence in learning and living. DIBELS, STAR, and ALPHA Plus are assessment programs.

Principals wanting to leverage success can use open lines of communication with their teachers to develop their own plan for success and decide if any or all of the mentioned programs might be beneficial for their school. These programs do not in any way guarantee success, and many variables such as the implementation process could affect the outcome of using them in the school setting. However, this empirical evidence does provide greater understanding of the leadership behaviors and characteristics of Oklahoma principals in schools that have earned the Blue Ribbon Designation.

This researcher examined the leadership characteristics of Blue Ribbon Principals in Oklahoma. Based on the findings, certain recommendations to educational leaders who wish to increase student achievement emerged. Principals should be servant leaders, focusing on the characteristics of listening, growth of people, and building community. When faced with new accountability requirements, educational leaders should use them to create a sense of urgency within their school for improvement. Principals should create a positive climate, provide meaningful professional development, institute programs aimed at increasing student achievement, and hire quality teachers. The above-mentioned recommendations emerged as a result of studying highly effective principals in Blue Ribbon schools in Oklahoma. The results contained in this dissertation not only help the understanding of servant leadership in schools, but provide leaders with information on how to leverage success in their schools.

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Appendix A

Email with OLA Instructions

_____ School, Please help out a fellow educator receive his doctorate degree!

Dear Co-Workers,

We desire to know what you think about Blue Ribbon Award winning _____ School organization and leadership. To get your honest and candid feedback, we need you to complete the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) on-line. It will **only take 15 minutes of your time** but will provide us all with valuable insights that will help us to improve how we work together. Please know that the answers you provide are **completely confidential and anonymous**. We will only be receiving back the averaged responses of the total group taking the assessment. Thank you for completing this as quickly and thoroughly as possible.

TO TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

1. Go to: <http://www.olagroup.com/Display.asp?Page=OlaLogin> and click "Take the OLA" on the upper right of the screen.
2. Type in _____ as the organizational code
3. Type in _____ as the pin
4. Choose the education version of the OLA that pertains to our organization
5. Choose the language option you are most comfortable with
6. Click "Start"
7. Read the brief Introduction
8. Select your Present Role/Position in the organization
9. Click "Take the OLA"

Informed Consent Form for a Qualitative Research Project

Title of study: An Exploration of the Servant Leadership Practices of Principals of Blue Ribbon Schools

Principal investigator: Scott Van Worth

Institute: Grand Canyon University 3300 West Camelback Road / Phoenix, AZ 85017 · 602-639-7804

Introduction:

I am Scotty Van Worth from Grand Canyon University. I am doing research to discover if servant leadership contributed to a school's achievement of the Blue Ribbon award in the State of Oklahoma.

Background information:

Servant leadership, established in 1970 by Greenleaf, emphasizes personal integrity and serving others. The premise of this leadership model is to bring out the best in followers by relying on one-on-one communications. The Blue Ribbon award is a federally funded program that identifies schools that provide and maintain high academic goals, including

those that are able to succeed despite high numbers of at-risk students. Servant leadership has been correlated to many attributes that are tied to effective schools however, this could further knowledge about servant leadership and if it contributed to the school gaining the Blue Ribbon award

Purpose of this research study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics of principals in schools that have earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year.

Procedures

Employees of Blue Ribbon Schools will need to participate in an online survey that measures servant leadership followed by an open-ended interview with the school's principal. The Blue Ribbon application will also be analysed.

Possible risks or benefits

There is no risk involved in this study except the valuable time of the individuals mentioned above. There is no direct benefit to you or your school. However, the results of this study may help teachers and administration determine ways to more effectively educate children in the state of Oklahoma.

Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal

You are free to choose to participate in the study. You may refuse to participate without any loss of benefit, which you are otherwise entitled to. You may refuse to answer some or all the questions if you do not feel comfortable with those questions.

Confidentiality

The information provided by you will remain confidential. No one, except the principal investigator, will have an access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time. However, the data may be seen by an Ethical review committee and may be published in journals and elsewhere without giving your name or disclosing your identity.

Available Sources of Information

If you have any further questions, you may contact the principal investigator (Scotty Van Worth), on the following phone number [REDACTED] or Grand Canyon University at (602)-639-7804.

AUTHORIZATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Title of study: A Blue Ribbon School and Servant Leadership

Principal investigator: Scott Van Worth

Institute: Grand Canyon University 3300 West Camelback Road / Phoenix, AZ 85017 · 602-639-7804

Introduction:

I am Scotty Van Worth from Grand Canyon University. I am doing research to ascertain if servant leadership contributed to a school's achievement of the Blue Ribbon award in the State of Oklahoma.

Background information:

Servant leadership, established in 1970 by Greenleaf, emphasizes personal integrity and serving others. The premise of this leadership model is to bring out the best in followers by relying on one-on-one communications. The Blue Ribbon award is a federally funded program that identifies schools that provide and maintain high academic goals, including those that are able to succeed despite high numbers of at-risk students. Servant leadership has been correlated to many attributes that are tied to effective schools however, this could further knowledge about servant leadership and if it contributed to the school gaining the Blue Ribbon award .

Purpose of this research study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to gain a greater understanding of the leadership characteristics of principals in schools that have earned the Blue Ribbon designation in Oklahoma during the 2012-2013 school year.

Procedures

Employees of Blue Ribbon Schools will need to participate in an online survey that measures servant leadership followed by an open-ended interview with the school's principal. The school's Blue Ribbon application will also be analyzed.

Possible risks or benefits

There is no risk involved in this study except the valuable time of the individuals mentioned above. There is no direct benefit to you or your school. However, the results of this study may help teachers and administration determine ways to more effectively educate children in the state of Oklahoma.

Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal

You are free to choose to participate in the study. You may refuse to participate without any loss of benefit, which you are otherwise entitled to. You may refuse to answer some or all the questions if you do not feel comfortable with those questions.

Confidentiality

The information provided by you will remain confidential. No one, except the principal investigator, will have an access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time. However, the data may be seen by an Ethical review committee and may be published in journals and elsewhere without giving your name or disclosing your identity.

Available Sources of Information

If you have any further questions, you may contact the principal investigator (Scotty Van Worth), Doctoral Department, Grand Canyon University, on the following phone number 580-579-9470 or Grand Canyon University 602-639-7804

AUTHORIZATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Participant's Name (Printed or Typed):

Date:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Principal Investigator's Signature:

Date:

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:

Date:

Appendix C

Interview Questions Modified from Maslk's Study

1. Describe how legislation requirements such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top and the adoption of Common Core standards have influenced instruction and learning in your school?
2. Can you describe how your leadership role and practices contributed to the overall success of your school?
3. How do you think your specific leadership style and practice impacted your school getting designated as a Blue Ribbon School?
4. Please describe your school mission and how it guides your work as a leader.
5. Can you describe your role as an instructional leader in your school?
6. Describe the overall “health” or climate of your school and some strategies you use to maintain that health?
7. How do you share leadership efforts and practices with the teachers and staff at your school? Can you describe the role they have in setting goals?
8. Can you describe how the teachers and staff contributed to the school earning the Blue Ribbon designation?
9. What programs have you implemented that may have contributed to your school's success?
10. What do you feel you do differently from other schools that helped you receive the award?

11. Can you describe what you feel some of the best practices you implement that helped you win the Blue Ribbon Award?
12. Can you describe your perception of servant leadership and how you might use this style of leadership to oversee your school.
13. What recommendations do you have for other schools to use leadership to leverage similar success?

Appendix D

OLA Survey



Organizational Leadership Assessment

General Instructions

4243 North Sherry Drive
Marion, IN 46952
OLA@OLAgroup.com
(765) 664-0174

The purpose of this instrument is to allow organizations to discover how their leadership practices and beliefs impact the different ways people function within the organization. This instrument is designed to be taken by people at

all levels of the organization including workers, managers and top leadership. As you respond to the different statements, please answer as to what you believe is generally true about your organization or work unit. Please respond with your own personal feelings and beliefs and not those of others, or those that others would want you to have. Respond as to how things *are* ... not as they could be, or should be.

Feel free to use the full spectrum of answers (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). You will find that some of the statements will be easy to respond to while others may require more thought. If you are uncertain, you may want to answer with your first, intuitive response. Please be honest and candid. The response we seek is the one that most closely represents your feelings or beliefs about the statement that is being considered. There are three different sections to this instrument. Carefully read the brief instructions that are given prior to each section. Your involvement in this assessment is anonymous and confidential.

Before completing the assessment it is important to fill in the name of the organization or organizational unit being assessed. If you are assessing an organizational unit (department, team or work unit) rather than the entire organization you will respond to all of the statements in light of that work unit.

IMPORTANT please complete the following

Write in the name of the organization or organizational unit (department, team or work unit) you are assessing with this instrument.

Organization (or Organizational Unit) Name: _____

Indicate **your present role/position** in the organization or work unit. Please **circle one**.

- 1 = Top Leadership (top level of leadership)
- 2 = Management (supervisor, manager)
- 3 = Workforce (staff, member, worker)

Please provide your response to each statement by placing an **X** in one of the five boxes

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

Section 1

In this section, please respond to each statement as you believe it applies to **the entire organization** (or organizational unit) including workers, managers/supervisors and top leadership.

In general, people within this organization

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Trust each other					
2 Are clear on the key goals of the organization					
3 Are non-judgmental – they keep an open mind					
4 Respect each other					
5 Know where this organization is headed in the future					
6 Maintain high ethical standards					
7 Work well together in teams					
8 Value differences in culture, race & ethnicity					
9 Are caring & compassionate towards each other					
10 Demonstrate high integrity & honesty					
11 Are trustworthy					
12 Relate well to each other					
13 Attempt to work with others more than working on their own					
14 Are held accountable for reaching work goals					
15 Are aware of the needs of others					
16 Allow for individuality of style and expression					
17 Are encouraged by supervisors to share in making <i>important</i> decisions					
18 Work to maintain positive working relationships					
19 Accept people as they are					
20 View conflict as an opportunity to learn & grow					
21 Know how to get along with people					

Please provide your response to each statement by placing an **X** in one of the five boxes

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

Section 2

In this next section, please respond to each statement as you believe it applies to the **leadership** of the organization (or organizational unit) including managers/supervisors and top leadership

Managers/Supervisors and Top Leadership in this Organization		1	2	3	4	5
22	Communicate a clear vision of the future of the organization					
23	Are open to learning from those who are <i>below</i> them in the organization					
24	Allow workers to help determine where this organization is headed					
25	Work alongside the workers instead of separate from them					
26	Use persuasion to influence others instead of coercion or force					
27	Don't hesitate to provide the leadership that is needed					
28	Promote open communication and sharing of information					
29	Give workers the power to make <i>important</i> decisions					
30	Provide the support and resources needed to help workers meet their goals					
31	Create an environment that encourages learning					
32	Are open to receiving criticism & challenge from others					
33	Say what they mean, and mean what they say					
34	Encourage each person to exercise leadership					
35	Admit personal limitations & mistakes					
36	Encourage people to take risks even if they may fail					
37	Practice the same behavior they expect from others					
38	Facilitate the building of community & team					
39	Do not demand special recognition for being leaders					
40	Lead by example by modeling appropriate behavior					
41	Seek to influence others from a positive relationship rather than from the authority of their position					
42	Provide opportunities for all workers to develop to their full potential					
43	Honestly evaluate themselves before seeking to evaluate others					
44	Use their power and authority to benefit the workers					
45	Take appropriate action when it is needed					

Please provide your response to each statement by placing an **X** in one of the five boxes

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

Managers/Supervisors and Top Leadership in this Organization		1	2	3	4	5
46	Build people up through encouragement and affirmation					
47	Encourage workers to work <i>together</i> rather than competing against each other					
48	Are humble – they do not promote themselves					
49	Communicate clear plans & goals for the organization					
50	Provide mentor relationships in order to help people grow professionally					
51	Are accountable & responsible to others					
52	Are receptive listeners					
53	Do not seek after special status or the “perks” of leadership					
54	Put the needs of the workers ahead of their own					

Section 3

In this next section, please respond to each statement as you believe it is true about **you personally** and **your role** in the organization (or organizational unit).

In viewing my own role ...		1	2	3	4	5
55	I feel appreciated by my supervisor for what I contribute					
56	I am working at a high level of productivity					
57	I am listened to by those <i>above</i> me in the organization					
58	I feel good about my contribution to the organization					
59	I receive encouragement and affirmation from those <i>above</i> me in the organization					
60	My job is important to the success of this organization					
61	I trust the leadership of this organization					
62	I enjoy working in this organization					
63	I am respected by those <i>above</i> me in the organization					
64	I am able to be creative in my job					
65	In this organization, a person's <i>work</i> is valued more than their <i>title</i>					
66	I am able to use my best gifts and abilities in my job					

Appendix E

Maslk's Permission Letter

Scotty Van Worth

From: Jacie <jacie.maslyk@carlynton.k12.pa.us>
Sent: Monday, May 19, 2014 3:16 PM
To: Scott
Subject: Re: Dissertation Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Scott,

Sorry, I have been out on maternity leave and have not been accessing email as regularly as when I'm working.

It's nice to know that someone else actually read my dissertation! You can certainly use my questions or an adapted version as long as I am cited. Also, it would be great if you could share a copy of your study with me when it is done.

Good luck!

Jacie

Sent from my iPhone

Appendix F

IRB Approval



**GRAND CANYON
UNIVERSITY™**

3300 West Camelback Road, Phoenix Arizona 85017 602.639.7500 Toll Free 800.800.9776 www.gcu.edu

DATE: May 27, 2014

TO: Scotty Van Worth

FROM: Grand Canyon University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [585923-1] Perceptions of Teachers in an Effective School: Does Servant Leadership get a Blue Ribbon

IRB REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: May 27, 2014

EXPIRATION DATE: May 27, 2015

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7.6/7.7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. Grand Canyon University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Cynthia Bainbridge at 602-639-6884 or cynthia.bainbridge@gsu.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Appendix G
School A Approval Letter

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

April 10, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

Please be advised that Mr. Scotty Van Worth has been granted permission by [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Public Schools to conduct his research within established, appropriate procedures within the [REDACTED] School system. Mr. Van Worth's topic, Servant Leadership in Blue Ribbon schools in Oklahoma, is of interest to [REDACTED] School and we ask that all findings, conclusions, and recommendations that emerge from his research be shared.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office if you should have any questions.

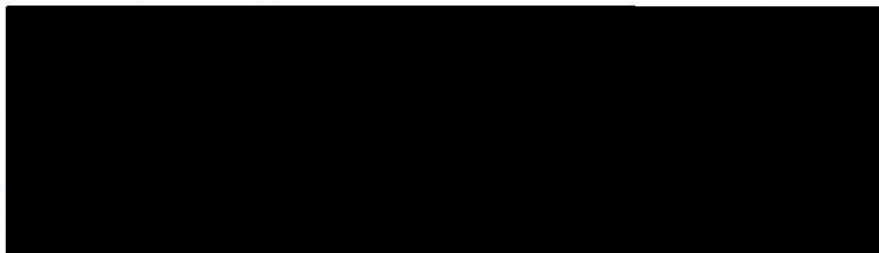
Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

"Striving for Excellence with Integrity and Community Values"

Appendix H

School B Approval Letter



February 5, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

Please be advised that Mr. Scotty Van Worth has been granted permission by [REDACTED] High School to conduct his research within established, appropriate procedures within the [REDACTED] Public School system. Mr. Van Worth's topic, *Servant Leadership in Blue Ribbon schools in Oklahoma*, is of interest to [REDACTED] High School and we ask the findings, conclusions, and recommendations that emerge from his research be shared with the [REDACTED] faculty.

Please do not hesitate to contact me [REDACTED] if you should have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature and name of the sender.

A black rectangular box redacting the bottom portion of the document, likely containing a footer or contact information.

Appendix I

School C Permission Letter

p.1

April 10, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

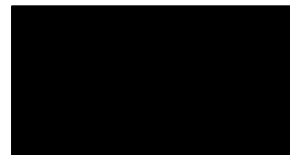
Please be advised that Mr. Scotty Van Worth has been granted permission by [REDACTED] School to conduct his research within established, appropriate procedures within the [REDACTED] Preparatory High School system. Mr. Van Worth's topic, Servant Leadership in Blue Ribbon schools in Oklahoma, is of interest to [REDACTED] High School and we ask that all findings, conclusions, and recommendations that emerge from his research be shared.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office if you should have any questions.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix J**School D Permission Letter**

April 21, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

Please be advised that Mr. Scotty Van Worth has been granted permission by [REDACTED] to conduct his research within established, appropriate procedures within the [REDACTED] system. Mr. Van Worth's topic, Servant Leadership in Blue Ribbon schools in Oklahoma, is of interest to [REDACTED] Mid-High School and we ask that all findings, conclusions, and recommendations that emerge from his research be shared.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office if you should have any questions.



Sincerely,



Principal

