

# Setting the Direction: The Role of the Principal in Developing an Effective, Inclusive School

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- Many schools are currently faced with the difficult task of including increasing numbers of students with disabilities and improving academic outcomes for these and other students who struggle to learn academic content.
- Recent research has shown that the principal is the key to ensuring that a school meets both of these goals and is both inclusive and effective.
- A case study was conducted of a highly effective, inclusive school that examined the role of the principal in ensuring the success of the school.
- The principal ensured that this school was successful by collaborating with teachers to set the direction for the school; redesigning the organization; improving working conditions; providing high-quality instruction in all settings; and using data to drive all decision making.

## Introduction

Schools in the United States are currently accountable for both improving achievement outcomes for all students and educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms for much of the school day (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004; No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2001). These demands are sometimes competing, because they have put pressure on schools to be both equitable and excellent and meet the needs of all students (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Although evidence indicates that many schools have made progress toward including students with disabilities in general education classrooms for much of the school day (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, in press), few schools have been successful in attaining high achievement outcomes for all students in highly inclusive settings (Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Ushomirsky & Hall, 2010).

If schools are to become both inclusive and effective for all students, significant changes in school structure and practice must occur (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Available evidence suggests that principals play a key role in school improvement and improving student achievement outcomes (Fullan, 2007; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). For example, a review of research evidence by Leithwood and colleagues revealed that principals engage in a range of activities that improve teacher practice and student outcomes. These activities include building vision and setting direction, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program.

Principals also play a key role in more general school-improvement activities as schools are restructured and teacher practices are improved (Fullan, 2007). This includes strong support from the principal as schools 1) develop a school culture that is supportive of teachers; 2) provide opportunities to develop teachers as leaders within the school; 3) develop a collaborative learning community that is supportive of teacher learning; and 4) provide teachers with opportunities for high-quality professional development (Billingsley, in press; Fullan; McLeskey, 2011; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010; Webster-Wright, 2009).

Evidence is also beginning to emerge regarding the important role that the principal can play in the

development of inclusive schools (e.g., Billingsley, in press; Hoppey & McLeskey, in press). For example, a review of research by Billingsley revealed that principals play a significant role in supporting the implementation of inclusive programs, as well as ensuring that these programs are institutionalized and sustained. Furthermore, evidence from several studies (Furney et al., 2005; Hoppey & McLeskey, in press; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002) has revealed that strong principal leadership is needed to support inclusive schools in activities such as developing a shared vision, using data-based decision making, developing and supporting leadership roles for teachers, and actively promoting the development of learning communities.

Although emerging evidence provides some insight into the principal's role in developing inclusive schools, little detailed information is available regarding how principals support schools as they become both effective and inclusive. This investigation was designed to address this need by using qualitative methods to examine the role of the principal in an elementary school that has been highly successful at including students with disabilities for much of the school day in general education classrooms while significantly improving educational outcomes for these and other students who struggle to learn. The research question that guided this study was "What is the role of the principal in developing and sustaining a highly effective, inclusive school?"

## Method

### Selecting the School

It is important to note that this investigation was part of a larger case study of more general factors that contributed to the success of a highly effective, inclusive school (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2011). Initially, critical case sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select an elementary school that was both highly effective and inclusive. This was defined as a setting in which students were included in general education settings at a level well above the state and national average and that evidenced levels of achievement for students with disabilities and others who struggled that were well above the state average. These are criteria very few elementary schools meet (Farrell et al., 2007; McLeskey & Waldron). Based on a

review of state data on school effectiveness and inclusive practices and after conferring with colleagues regarding possible sites for this research, Creekside Elementary School (a pseudonym) was identified as meeting the selection criteria and was chosen as the site for this case study. All the names appearing in this article (schools, teachers, principals) are pseudonyms.

The principal who is the focus of this investigation, Ms. Richards, had been the principal at Creekside Elementary School (CES) for 9 years. She had thus served as principal throughout the development and implementation of the school's highly effective, inclusive school program. In our preliminary interviews with teachers, it became apparent that Ms. Richards had played a key role in the school improvement activities at CES. She thus became the focus of this case study of the principal's role in the development of a highly effective, inclusive school.

Creekside Elementary School has an enrollment of 480 students in grades K-4, and serves a small community and surrounding rural area of about 4500 residents. The majority of the students (68%) in CES are White, whereas 32% are African American, Hispanic, multiracial, or from other ethnic groups. Just over 50% of the students are from high-poverty backgrounds, and the school serves students with a full range of disabilities, representing 16% of the student population.

Student accountability data from CES reveal that this school has been highly successful at including students with disabilities and improving outcome data for students with disabilities and those who struggle to meet state standards. For example, in 2006 CES had placement data for students with disabilities that were similar to the local district and state, given that 66% of students with disabilities were educated in general education settings for 80% or more of the school day. In 2008-2009, all students with disabilities were educated in general education settings for 80% or more of the school day, revealing that CES had moved toward a much more inclusive model of service delivery. This shift is notable in comparison with district (68%) and state (63%) data, reflecting that the percentage of students educated in general education settings had not changed substantially during this time.

In reference to student achievement indicators, CES met NCLB's adequate yearly progress criteria in

2008–2009. Additionally, on the state’s accountability measure for 2008–2009, a comparison of the percentage of students who reached a proficiency level in reading and math indicated levels significantly higher than district and state comparison data. These data reveal that more than double the percentage of students with disabilities reached proficiency in reading (69%), and substantially more students in math (58%), compared with both district (32% reading and 36% math) and state averages (33% reading and 38% math). Students from high-poverty backgrounds who often struggle to meet accountability standards also did substantially better at CES, with 73% of students in reading and 70% of students in math meeting state proficiency levels. This compares with district averages of 45% in reading and 47% in math and state averages of 51% in reading and 56% in math.

## Design of the Study

This investigation used a qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009) to examine the critical features of the principal’s role that contributed to the success of a highly effective, inclusive school. The case study took place over the 2009–2010 school year and involved the investigators interviewing teachers and administrators, observing in classrooms, and examining documents (e.g., school improvement plan, state and federal accountability reports) to better understand the role of the principal in relation to the educational program at CES. Researchers sought an emic (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) or insider’s perspective on these issues and thus conducted interviews with teachers and administrators regarding how the principal supported this highly effective, inclusive school.

The investigators conducted 22 individual interviews with teachers and administrators throughout the course of the school year. This included all teachers and administrators who were involved in the implementation of the inclusive program across all grade levels. Each professional was interviewed initially and then follow-up interviews were conducted with the school principal as well as eight of the teachers, including both special education teachers, who proved to be rich information sources. The median length of the individual interviews was approximately 35 minutes, with a range from 24 to 92 minutes. All interviews

were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed for use in data analysis.

The initial interviews with teachers and administrators consisted of open-ended questions regarding factors that contributed to the success of the highly effective, inclusive program at CES. Themes that emerged from the first set of interviews and from classroom observations were used to formulate questions that guided the second set of interviews. Prior to the second interview, investigators conducted observations in all of the cotaught, inclusive classrooms. These observations lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and were documented using field notes. The purpose of classroom observations was to document the organizational structure and instructional approaches that were used at CES and to provide information that would be used to formulate questions for subsequent interviews with teachers and administrators.

Data analysis proceeded as an iterative process using interview transcripts, observation notes, document analysis, and researcher field notes. All data were reviewed to identify emergent themes using a four-step process. First, one of the investigators pulled apart or bracketed the data to identify essential elements that could be used to define possible emergent themes (Patton, 2002) and discussed these themes with a second investigator. This process of analysis continued throughout the time period that interviews and observations were taking place. Following the completion of all data collection, two of the investigators reviewed the data to provide different perspectives and to develop “imaginative variation” (Patton) on the themes. Once the two investigators developed a tentative set of themes, this information was presented to a group of teachers and the school principal for feedback and a member check. The investigators then worked collaboratively to use this feedback to develop the final set of themes that emerged from this investigation.

Several methods were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the themes that emerged from this investigation (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). First, triangulation across observations and interviews was used to support the credibility of the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Second, the investigators engaged in prolonged engagement and persistent observation, spending a considerable amount of time over a school year in the setting

conducting the case study and examining specific themes as they emerged. Third, investigators worked collaboratively to examine the data and determine key themes, using a form of peer debriefing at each step of data analysis. Finally, at the end of the school year, a member check was conducted with teachers and administrators who participated in the study to provide input regarding the credibility of the final themes and conclusions.

## Critical Aspects of Principal Leadership in an Effective, Inclusive School

Analysis of data from the interviews, observations, and documents from this case study resulted in the emergence of five themes regarding the leadership of the principal in supporting the development of CES as an effective, inclusive school. These themes indicated that the principal was substantially engaged with teachers and provided leadership in 1) setting the direction for CES; 2) redesigning the school organization; 3) improving working conditions for school staff; 4) providing high-quality instruction in all settings; and 5) ensuring that data were used to drive decision making. Each of these themes is subsequently described.

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A cornerstone of support for the learning community that developed at CES was the principal's willingness to share responsibility for decision making with teachers. (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

**Setting the Direction for CES.** When Ms. Richards arrived at CES, she viewed as her primary goal developing a shared vision and moral purpose for the school that focused primarily on two areas. First, she had a goal to meet the needs of all students in her school, not just a particular group. For CES, all would truly mean ALL. "My personal goal is that we meet all kids' needs. You may look at what we need to meet the gifted kids' needs, the students with learning disabilities, but because it is an overall need, we've got to improve to meet all kid needs and all kids' achievement."

A second part of this vision was to ensure that students with disabilities were included as a natural part of this vision and were educated as much as possible with their typical peers. Teachers who were interviewed at CES shared this vision. Many teacher comments during interviews were similar to those of Ms. Wood, a special education teacher who said, "Teachers are all about student needs. We have ongoing conversations about challenging students more as the meat of the curriculum is presented to everyone."

To develop this vision, evidence from observations and interviews suggested that Ms. Richards embodied characteristics of effective principals that have been described by Leithwood and colleagues (2008). That is, although she was adamant and uncompromising about a core set of values (meet the needs of ALL students and include students with disabilities whenever possible), she was flexible about everything else. Furthermore, she worked collaboratively with faculty to determine how this vision would be enacted, shared decision-making power, and remained flexible, open-minded, and ready to learn from others. We also found that she personified other characteristics described by Leithwood and colleagues, because she was consistently optimistic while remaining resilient and persistent in moving toward enacting these core values. More information about how the direction was set at CES will become apparent as other themes that emerged regarding Ms. Richards' leadership are discussed in the following sections.

**Redesigning the Organization.** As she was collaborating with teachers to develop a shared vision for CES, Ms. Richards began the work of redesigning the organization to provide the support needed to enact this vision. As this occurred, she never seemed to take the perspective that she could do this alone or that she knew how this redesign should occur. Rather, she began working with teachers to develop a learning community that would share decision making as the organization was redesigned and recultured (Fullan, 2007).

A cornerstone of support for the learning community (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010) that developed at CES was Ms. Richards' willingness to share responsibility for decision making with teachers. For example, during interviews several teachers noted that Ms. Richards did not micromanage their classroom instruction. As Ms.

Wood, the special education teacher, said, "She manages from the top, but she manages in a way that's not intrusive in the classroom. There are expectations set, but if you're doing your job she's not going to bother you." As teachers realized that they were empowered to make real decisions about their classrooms and school, they were motivated to improve their practice and determine approaches to better meet the needs of all students.

This shared decision making provided the foundation for the development of a learning community at CES, as teachers worked together to make decisions about how their school should be redesigned. One example of this approach to redesigning the organization occurred when a team of faculty and administrators participated in a series of meetings sponsored by the school district and a local university to develop and implement a more inclusive program (McLeskey & Waldron, 2006). This systematic process of school change required that the team from CES (including eight teachers and the principal) examine the effectiveness of CES in meeting student needs, visit schools that were successfully meeting student needs as part of inclusive programs, and collaboratively develop and implement a plan for improving their own school (McLeskey & Waldron, 2000). After several months of meetings and deliberations, the team developed and implemented a plan for redesigning CES to meet all student needs.

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Comments from the principal and several teachers regarding how this program developed are revealing of the learning community that was emerging and how meeting the needs of ALL students was becoming a shared vision at CES. Ms. Richards said, "The inclusion movement came as a plan to meet all kids' needs, but in particular students with disabilities. It's not an add-on program that just meets the needs of one group of students. It became part of the whole school's plan for improving

achievement for all students. It's not about students with disabilities or gifted students—it's about how can we make every child successful."

As a result of taking this perspective, teachers and administrators at CES rarely mentioned "inclusion" during interviews. Although they spoke often of meeting the needs of certain students with disabilities, these discussions were not addressed within the context of where the students should be educated, who should teach them, or whether inclusion was a good idea. Ms. Richards went on to note, "[Inclusion has] become part of our meeting student needs, and everyone believes in it because we've seen such great results. This is what we do—it's just part of our culture."

This provides but one example of how a very strong learning community developed at CES. Although shared decision making provided the foundation for the development of this learning community, Ms. Richards also used several other strategies, such as encouraging risk taking among her teaching staff and developing teacher leaders (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2008) as important parts of these activities.

**Improving Working Conditions.** A key factor in improving working conditions at CES was the development of a learning community, as described in the previous section. This learning community built trust among teachers and ensured that they shared a common vision for CES. Ms. McGill, a first-grade teacher, succinctly described how this learning community works and improves working conditions for teachers at CES. "You have to have a community of professionals. If something is going on [in my classroom], there are several people I can go talk to who can help me work through it or who I can bounce ideas off of. If a child is having a behavior problem and I just can't get them to stop, I can go to any of our inclusion teachers and say "This is what I've done, help me!"

Ms. Richards worked to provide good working conditions for her teachers in many other ways. Many teachers mentioned that she has hired teachers and paraeducators (paras) who are a good fit for the shared vision at CES and who are highly effective professionals. As a special education teacher, Ms. Wood noted, "The paras that Ms. Richards hires are team players. They're all about kids doing the best they can and paras facilitating that. Over half of our paras should probably be teachers."

Another commonly mentioned factor related to working conditions concerned the use of resources at CES. Many teachers noted, and researchers documented during observations, that the school day was rigidly scheduled, allowing for very efficient use of resources. In addition, Ms. Richards actively sought resources for her school from the district office and many other sources (e.g., local businesses, fundraisers). This led teachers to frequently state that they almost always were provided any resources they needed to meet student needs. As Ms. Taylor, a second-grade teacher, said, "When I need extra resources for a student I talk to Ms. Richards. You just have to say 'This is not working, we need something else,' and she provides the resources."

Ms. Richards engaged in many other activities to improve the working conditions at CES. For example, she was sure to celebrate all successes and recognize all teachers who were involved. In contrast, when test scores were not desirable in a certain content area all shared responsibility, and everyone engaged in problem solving regarding possible solutions. She also buffered her teachers from external demands from the district and state, while ensuring that the school was well prepared to meet accountability demands.

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 "were not pushed, they were not exposed to  
 pacing. So I don't know that we really ever found  
 out what those children could do." (Ms. Wyman,  
 third-grade teacher)

Finally, Ms. Richards was willing to make difficult decisions about scheduling, hiring, evaluations, and so forth that benefited students and improved teacher working conditions. In relation to this issue she said, "It's much easier on the stress level to not deal with issues, much easier. I'm not afraid of dealing with problems." Teachers recognize that Ms. Richards will deal with problems as they arise and not ignore them, and this reinforces a sense of community and equity among teachers. This also reinforces the perspective that the values of CES are meaningful, and all teachers are contributing to moving toward enacting these values by improving their instruction and outcomes for all students.

**Providing High-Quality Instruction in All Settings.** In keeping with the shared vision at CES, Ms. Richards has worked with teachers in many ways to improve instruction in all settings. For example, improved instruction was a major consideration when the school developed an inclusive model of service delivery for students with disabilities. Providing high-quality instruction for all students was one of the primary motivating factors for teachers and administrators to move to a more inclusive approach. This perspective was reflected in comments by a third-grade teacher, Ms. Wyman, when she said that children in separate special education classes "were not pushed, they were not exposed to pacing. So I don't know that we really ever found out what those children could do. We locked them in and kept them held back."

Ms. Richards was more pointed in addressing the ineffective instruction that was provided in separate classes, as she noted that she "watched kids leave very effective instruction [in a general education classroom], leave a very effective reading teacher to go to a very ineffective situation [in a separate class] where they misbehaved, where they just got rote skills. And I thought, they're leaving these wonderful teachers and they're going to this very ineffective setting.... we have to figure out a way so they can be in [the general education classroom] for that effective instruction, but also have a time where they go back and meet some individual skill needs because the regular education teacher can't do all of that."

When the inclusion program was developed, these ineffective classrooms were closed, and CES moved toward a tiered model of providing highly effective instruction to all students (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). This provided general and special education teachers the opportunity to collaborate to "differentiate instruction and meet the needs of all kids" (Ms. Hopkins, a kindergarten teacher). Support for students who struggled to learn academic content might include providing center-based instruction to small groups of students in the general education classroom or providing direct instruction to a small, homogeneous group of students in the general education classroom or in a separate setting.

Another approach Ms. Richards used to improve classroom instruction was to immerse teachers in opportunities for high-quality professional development (McLeskey, 2011). Teachers noted that Ms. Richards created a sense of urgency to improve

teacher practice and used every opportunity during the school day to do this. For example, faculty meetings were not used to disseminate information or "talk at" teachers. Rather, these meetings were used to provide teachers with an opportunity to collaborate and learn from one another. As Ms. Richards noted, "Why sit through an hour-and-a-half faculty meeting when you can write a memo? When I have the whole faculty sitting there I'd much rather it be things they can use in their classrooms."

Primary themes of professional development at CES are teachers learning from one another and collective participation. Many such opportunities exist for teachers during grade-level meetings, inclusion planning meetings, book studies, and coteach chats. Common planning time is built into the school day to facilitate these activities. Furthermore, Ms. Richards provides funds for substitutes or covers classes herself so that teachers can observe in other classes or provide coaching when a teacher is learning to use a new practice.

Another approach to professional development that is used at CES is engaging a team of teachers in a common activity. This occurred when the inclusive program was developed. Ms. Richards also sends teams of teachers to conferences to collect information on new initiatives (e.g., improving math instruction), bring this information back to the school, and share it with other teachers. Ms. Richards participates with many of these teams and encourages participants to become experts in a content or practice, so that this information can be shared with other colleagues. As she said, "I believe in creating experts in your building and encouraging them to coach others."

During interviews at CES, teachers described many examples of new skills that they gained through this immersion in professional development opportunities. Observations conducted during the case study confirmed that in most settings, instruction at CES tended to be very high quality. This instruction was often teacher-centered, direct instruction that was carefully designed and scheduled to keep students engaged in learning. There were many examples of differentiation based on student needs, as instruction in many classes was delivered for a least part of the school day to small groups of students using center-based instruction.

Finally, observations documented frequent delivery of high-quality instruction (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011) to small, homogeneous groups of

students who were struggling to learn academic content. This occurred as a regular part of instruction in general education classrooms when a coteacher and/or a paraeducator were present or was provided in a separate setting by a general or special education teacher as a "double dose" of instruction.

**Using Data to Drive Decision Making.** The most important consideration for making an effective, inclusive school work is presented last. Ms. Richards and all of the teachers interviewed agreed that having a system for monitoring student progress was indispensable to making their school work. They further noted that this data system could not simply be summative tests administered for accountability by the state, but had to be data on student progress that was meaningful to teachers, directly tied to the content of classroom instruction, and useful for planning classroom instruction. School improvement was simply impossible without such a data system. As Ms. Richards said, "All of the data we use—it's all self-created. We needed real data related to what [students are] doing in the classroom."

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 "How can I have conversations with teachers about their students, how they're progressing, how well they're teaching without individual data about students? (Ms. Richards, Principal, CES)

Ms. Richards eloquently described how she began the movement at CES toward using data to guide instruction, resource use, and accountability when she arrived at the school. "When I arrived.... we started talking about and focusing staff on student data. They had not done that before. We really started looking at student data, and who is not being successful here, and why are they not being successful. It was glaringly obvious for students with disabilities when I showed them several years of FCAT [a state accountability measure] data and classroom data that they were not being successful. When we started looking at it, it was like accountability, but with accomplishment, and with praise, and with resources."

Ms. Richards also provided a succinct rationale for developing a data system and described how it is used at CES. "How can I have conversations with teachers about their students, how they're progressing, how well they're teaching without

individual data about students? So we had to come up with ways to monitor student data. We [use this data to] have good conversations about how kids are doing, how can we get them moving, what resources do you need, and all that."

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The teachers quickly bought into 'Look, we're heading in the right direction, look at these increments [improvements] we're making.' (Ms. Richards, Principal, CES)

Ms. Richards also talked extensively about the need to diplomatically and equitably handle information regarding student progress. This was especially important as the vision for CES was developed and shared with teachers, and the learning community began to develop. The use of accountability data had the potential to become a very divisive issue. Ms. Richards addressed this by placing much emphasis on what was working and celebrating the successes that the data revealed at CES, as well as ensuring that all teachers were praised for this success, not just teachers in the grade level in which an accountability test was administered.

"We use data to make change last. We [have] little celebrations to support change. If I could capture something from data we did well, we could celebrate. We would make a big deal about it. We showed it to teachers, we showed it to parents, we showed it to paras. We celebrated every little step, because I knew every teacher loves to celebrate and get that pat on the back. 'Look at what we're doing!' The teachers quickly bought into 'Look, we're heading in the right direction, look at these increments [improvements] we're making.' And that just snowballed, and it became part of the culture real quickly. 'Look at where we've come, look at how we've grown.' I started putting these huge charts up, the gains over 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, and just kept adding to it. They loved to see that, and we've just grown from there."

Eventually, as the positive uses of progress monitoring data were emphasized, the use of data became part of the fabric of the school at CES. This occurred as data were used to drive all decision making and ensure the accountability of all school personnel related to the academic progress of all students. Data are also used to make decisions

regarding how coteachers and paraeducators are distributed to classrooms, areas where additional professional development is needed, how technology resources are allocated, and so forth. In short, data drives everything at CES.

## Discussion and Implications for Administrators

The results of this investigation support previous research suggesting that the principal plays a key leadership role in supporting teachers and school-change activities as inclusive schools are developed (Billingsley, in press; Furney, Aiken, Hasazi, & Clark/Keefe, 2005; Hoppey & McLeskey, in press; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). However, this investigation moves beyond this literature in two important ways. First, detailed information is provided regarding how Ms. Richards supported CES teachers as they developed a highly effective, inclusive program. This includes information regarding how 1) the direction for the school was set, 2) the organization was redesigned, 3) working conditions were improved, 4) high-quality instruction was provided in all settings, and 5) a data system was developed to monitor the effectiveness of the program.

Second, this investigation provides information regarding the role of the principal in developing a school that is not just inclusive but also produces substantially improved achievement outcomes for students who struggle to learn. Previous research has focused largely on the development of inclusive schools, and little information has been provided regarding student outcomes (Billingsley, in press). In contrast to previous research, the current investigation provides insight into the particular activities the principal engaged in to improve achievement outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities. This includes, in particular, the provision of high-quality instruction in all settings and the use of a locally developed data system to ensure accountability and program effectiveness.

An additional noteworthy finding of this investigation is that the role of the principal at CES is very similar to the role that principals play in improving schools and student outcomes for all students. For example, in a review of the general education literature, Leithwood and colleagues (2008)



identified research-supported claims about school leadership practices that result in improved student outcomes. These authors found that principals improve schools and student achievement by

- Building vision and setting direction for their school;
- Understanding and developing people;
- Redesigning the organization;
- Managing the teaching and learning program;
- Demonstrating responsiveness to contexts in which they work;
- Improving teaching and learning through staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions;
- Distributing leadership; and
- Maintaining a core set of values while exhibiting characteristics such as open-mindedness, a willingness to learn from others, flexibility, persistence, resilience, and optimism.

As the previous sections of this article reveal, these research-based claims were supported by this case study of a highly inclusive, effective school. An important implication of this finding is that Ms. Richards did not do anything unique to develop her high-performing school. Many elementary schools likely have a vision similar to CES, strive to provide high-quality instruction for all students and improve working conditions for teachers, and make changes in the school to achieve these goals. Based on interviews and observations, three factors seem to differentiate CES from schools that are less successful in improving student outcomes.

First, the principal and school staff addressed school improvement with a tenacity and persistence that ensured their success. The school administration and staff did not simply give lip service to "putting students first," but would do *whatever was necessary* to make sure that all students in their school were successful. It has been noted elsewhere (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2011) that the administration and staff at CES seemed to take the stance of a "warm demander" (Ware, 2006) as they addressed the needs of children. This stance has been described in studies of highly effective schools that include a large number of students from diverse, high-poverty backgrounds. Warm demanders are teachers who care about their students and convey this to them, have high expectations for every student and fully expect them to learn, have a high level of instructional skill to meet the needs of all students, and create conditions in their classrooms to meet the

needs of all students (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Ware). This stance thus reflects the tenacity and persistence of the principal and school staff in insisting that student needs be met and in accepting no excuses.

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 ... the principal and school staff addressed school improvement with a tenacity and persistence that ensured their success.

A second factor that seemed to differentiate CES from other schools is that only the shared vision—high levels of achievement and inclusion for all students—was an absolute. Everything else was negotiable as a learning community was developed, and decision making was shared among administrators and teachers regarding how the shared vision would be addressed. Teachers thus made frequent comments regarding how Ms. Richards did not micromanage their classroom instruction or anything else. She focused on the core values of the school and outcomes that showed how well those values were being addressed, and she supported teachers in finding their own approaches to addressing these needs through professional development, reorganizing the school, and so forth.

A final factor that differentiates CES from other schools is the use of data to drive all decisions. As noted previously, although the state and local district collect accountability data and share this information with CES administration and faculty, these data are not very useful for monitoring student progress or planning instruction. Thus, CES developed a data system to meet their own needs, ensuring that the data was directly related to content taught, meaningful to teachers, and useful to plan instruction. This data system is at the core of the success of CES and allows for the efficient and effective use of limited resources to meet the needs of all students. Though not unique among schools, the development of this data system is certainly unusual and reflects the determination of the administration and staff at CES to make sure that they meet the needs of all students.

A final implication of this case study is that effective, inclusive programs can be developed in a typically resourced school, and this development does not require unique contributions from outside experts in school change and professional

development or inordinate levels of resources. What is required is very efficient use of resources, the use of high-quality professional development to improve teacher practice, a data system that guides decision making and determines how resources will be used to maximum effect, and a principal who is willing and sufficiently skilled to provide leadership as the school is redesigned to support and enact the shared vision.

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