

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document:

**PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS: MIDDLE  
SCHOOL LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
PRINCIPAL PRACTICES TO IMPROVE  
MIDDLE SCHOOL READING ACHIEVEMENT**

Kathleen R. Brady, Doctor of Education, 2016

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The purpose of this exploratory and descriptive study was to examine school leaders' perceptions of leadership practices that contribute to principal effectiveness in improving reading achievement in middle schools in a large public school district. The data was gathered through the use of a Web-based survey that was emailed to 97 school based leaders including 20 principals, 40 assistant principals, 17 reading department chairpersons, and 20 professional development lead teachers in middle schools with grade 6-8 and 7-8 configurations. Data were collected and analyzed in order to make inferences about principal practices at middle school. The findings of this study indicated few differences between middle school principals', assistant principals', reading department chairpersons', and professional development lead teachers' perceptions of principal leadership practices that are most important to and have the greatest impact on student reading achievement success. Furthermore, the findings indicated that participants' three top ranked resources needed to increase the effectiveness of principals in order to improve reading achievement at middle schools

include implementing a collaborative planning protocol to support literacy instruction, adding a reading coach to the middle school staff, and providing professional development activities focused on literacy instruction across the content areas. The results were used to make recommendations that may contribute to improved middle school principal effectiveness.

PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS: MIDDLE SCHOOL LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF PRINCIPAL PRACTICES TO IMPROVE MIDDLE SCHOOL READING  
ACHIEVEMENT

By

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my family. My parents, Mary Lee and Laurence N. Brady, have inspired me throughout my life to pursue my dreams, persevere in all that I do, and contribute to the future of young people through a lifelong commitment to education. My sister and brother-in-law, Susan Brady and Michael Roundy, have motivated and sustained me with an unyielding belief in the possibility of success. My nephew, David Roundy, has brought me love, laughter, and joy while reminding me why I do this work. I love and thank you all.

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## **Section 1**

### **Problem Statement**

Middle school achievement is an area of critical concern in Maryland. According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE, 2014), Maryland School Assessment (MSA) data indicates that in District K, a large public school system that educates over 125,000 students from urban, suburban, and rural communities, fifth grade students who scored proficient and advanced outperformed eighth grade students who performed proficient and advanced in reading by 15.1 percentage points, in mathematics by 19.0 percentage points, and in science by 1.1 percentage points. In addition, 2014 Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) results indicate that fifth graders who scored proficient and advanced outperformed eighth graders who scored proficient and advanced in reading by 4.3 percentage points. Furthermore, the ninth grade failure rate in high schools across District K is at 24.5% (Maryland Report Card, 2014). The students who fail ninth grade are at risk of dropping out of high school and ultimately limiting their prospects for the future (Williams & Kirst, 2010).

There can be a number of reasons for low academic performance in middle schools in District K. These may include the level of teacher effectiveness, the implementation of well-developed standards-based curricula, the effectiveness of efforts to provide developmentally appropriate learning, and the development of a school culture and learning environment that addresses the needs of the middle school learner. One additional area to consider is the leadership of the school. The middle school principal plays a significant role in supporting student learning, and according

to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school” (p. 5). Therefore, there is a need to examine school leaders’ perceptions of the importance and impact of principal leadership practices that contribute to principal effectiveness in middle schools in District K.

The middle school years are key to student success in attaining college and career readiness. “The importance of middle level education can never be overestimated. The future of individuals and, indeed, that of society is largely determined by the nature of the educational experiences of young adolescents during these formative years” (National Middle School Association, 2010, p. 43). Effective middle school principals develop a shared vision and integrate their knowledge of the early adolescent learner with curricular knowledge, instructional practices, communication, and collaboration. In addition, they align policy decisions and practices to support the school vision (National Middle School Association, 2010).

### **Educational Policy Background**

At the federal level, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, attempted to address school improvement by calling for high achievement levels for all students, increased accountability through assessments, and highly qualified teachers in classrooms (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Under principal leadership, schools were expected to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), and those that did not were sanctioned. Principals had to provide instructional leadership in addition to school management in

order to meet the requirements of the mandates and regulations (McLeod, D’Amico, & Protheroe, 2003).

Maryland State Department of Education policy supported NCLB legislation, and local education agencies followed both the federal and state legislative mandates. In 2012, Maryland applied for and was granted flexibility for implementing federal NCLB provisions. Through federal guidelines, Maryland created a flexibility plan that included elements to address three overarching principles: college and career readiness; differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for schools; and teacher and principal support (Maryland State Department of Education, 2012). The third element, teacher and leadership support, provided a revised means of evaluation including not only professional practice standards but also student achievement measures. Based on the Educational Reform Act of 2010 signed by then Governor Martin O’Malley and the Race to the Top grant awarded in 2010, work at both the state and local level focused on creating new evaluation systems that met the required criteria. By July 2011, Governor O’Malley’s appointed council had created the Maryland Instructional Practices Framework for the new evaluation systems, and during school year 2013, District K had piloted the new local evaluations.

While District K’s new principal evaluation system addressed the principal practices to meet the requirements of the State guidelines, it did not distinguish or measure middle school principal practices from those of elementary or high school principals. In fact, no District K school board policy directly addresses the low academic achievement levels of the middle schools. Principals in general must perform to the standards of the *Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework*

(2005), but policies and administrative procedures are, in general, rules and regulations that principals enact to ensure that the schools are compliant with the Code of Maryland (COMAR) regulations. The new evaluation system, which is designed to measure in part the effectiveness of principal practices, should be preceded by policies that ensure that middle school principals are engaged in practices that will lead to high levels of student achievement that result in overall school performance indices indicating school success.

District K's Human Capital Department published a principal position description that included a list of the duties and responsibilities of an elementary and secondary principal in the system (District K, 2013). This list included school vision, professional learning communities, efficient management, equity, collaboration with families and community, teacher professional development, ethical behavior, and innovative thinking. While this lengthy list just scratches the surface of the duties and responsibilities of a sitting principal, it does represent a midpoint in the New Leaders (2012) leadership effectiveness continuum that takes the form of a leadership cycle. This cycle begins with the principal preparation and pipeline, moves to the selection and school match, continues on to the evaluation stage, evolves to support through professional development, and results in retention, rewards, or dismissal before beginning the cycle again. There is no consideration given to the unique role of the middle school principal. In order to improve middle school performance, middle school principal practices should be identified and addressed through professional development prior to the evaluation stage in the leadership cycle.

## **Middle Grades Education**

Progressive educators support school reform based on trust, respect, competency, integrity, and personal regard for others and consider the middle school model an example of such reform (George, 2011). “Firmly situated in the centuries-old progressive worldview, the middle school concept has been guided for decades by a bedrock commitment to meeting the developmental needs of young adolescents. It begins with an unquestioned commitment to equal opportunity for every student” (George, p. 48).

The average American should care about the quality of middle grades education, about every child succeeding, for the same reasons middle grades educators do: as a matter of social justice and national economic self-interest. It is dangerous economically and unjust morally to educate millions of American youth poorly when we have the knowledge and the means to educate them well. If we can find the will to care about every young adolescent, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we will move closer to realizing our cherished ideals of lasting, shared prosperity with equal opportunity for all. (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 15)

The National Middle School Association (2010) asserts that middle grade education must be responsive to the needs of early adolescent learners, provide challenging curricula and hold all students to high expectations, ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills to live successfully in society, and finally to deliver educational equity by providing meaningful learning opportunities for all.

Middle grade education is vital for each student. During early adolescence, students between 10 and 15 years old go through more personal changes than at any other time in life, including infancy (National Middle School Association, 2010). The middle school model provides students with a small learning community that bridges the transition from elementary to high school. Elementary school students may have just one teacher for the school year in a self-contained classroom. The elementary school teachers get to know the students' strengths and weaknesses and are able to monitor their progress closely. High school students select classes based on their course of study requirements and depend on independent skills to work with a variety of teachers daily. Within the middle school model, students develop independent skills, explore a variety of interests through creative arts, and participate in departmentalized classes while working with a core team of teachers. Advisory classes are built into the middle school schedule to allow teachers to support students' academic and social growth. Whether delivered in a K-8, 6-8 or 7-8 configuration, middle school staffs have a short window of opportunity to identify students at risk of failure and provide them with interventions prior to transitioning to high school. Student success in core subjects such as middle school reading and mathematics are strong predictors of high school success (Williams & Kirst, 2010).

### **Educational Leadership**

Research on the impact of principal leadership in schools is extensive. This research spans major themes that include explicit study of leadership practices, the study of principal behavior and roles, and the study of leadership styles as well as types of leadership including transformational leadership, instructional leadership,

and distributed leadership. Furthermore, the studies include research focused solely on the middle school principal as well as the middle school principal as compared with elementary and /or high school principals, and elementary principals in isolation. Most include principal leadership in conjunction with another area of focus such as academic achievement, school culture, or technology implementation, or they examine a particular type of leadership such as transformational, instructional, or distributed leadership.

Researchers have identified a number of leadership styles. Two that are particularly relevant to middle school leadership are transformational leadership in conjunction with instructional leadership (Brooks, 2009; Marks & Printy, 2003; Mees, 2008).

According to The Wallace Foundation (2012), effective school leadership is characterized by five significant activities: creating a shared vision, ensuring a climate of high expectations and collaboration, developing leadership among staff, improving teaching and learning through research-based strategies, and managing resources including data, human capital, and finances. Moreover, Kearney and Herrington (2010) found that effective middle school principals identified principal longevity, stability, and staff development as key factors contributing to middle school success. According to McCabe (2011) teachers “seek the same authentic leadership that can [*sic*] inspire and guide them through tough circumstances and increasing pressures” (p. 133).

McLeod (2008) and Leech, Smith, Green, and Fulton (2003) examined leadership practices as they related to their studies. McLeod identified middle school



leadership practices and how they differed in middle schools reaching state standards in mathematics and those labeled at risk of not meeting state standards in mathematics. Leech also studied the leadership practices of middle school principals; however, he went on to identify the leadership practices of high school principals as well. McLeod (2008) based his study on Powell's theoretical framework that included six leadership domains including the vision, mission, and culture; mathematics curriculum and classroom instruction; collaboration and shared leadership; family and community involvement; collaboration and shared leadership; and effective management. Leech (2003) based his work on Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory, which identifies principal leadership practices in five dimensions including challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. While using distinct language, both theories contain overlapping language and definitions of principal leadership practice. Both studies had similar results. McLeod (2008) found that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of principals or mathematics resource teachers in the five domains. He did find that there was a statistically significant difference in the family and community relations domain in that teachers rated this higher in middle schools meeting AYP in mathematics. This study, through its mixed method design, was more rigorous and included curriculum-based information in addition to the principal practice perceptions. Leech et al. (2003) found that there were no significant differences in means between the middle and high school teachers' responses and concluded that middle and high school teachers reported very similar perceptions of principals' leadership practices.

Unlike McLeod (2008) and Leech et al. (2003), Kaplan, Owings, and Nunnery (2005) studied the relationship between principal quality and student achievement based on the six Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine and Constant (2004) examined the RAND analysis of 2001 United States Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data to determine principal perceptions of the problems in their schools. Juvonen et al. (2004) studied the roles of the principal, how principal time is allocated, and how principals prioritize their goals. Furthermore, Nolasco (2009) studied what leadership behaviors defined by Marzano's 21 leadership behaviors were useful for integrating technology at middle schools with Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) grants.

While not considered leadership practices, the 2008 ISLLC standards included vision, best practices, managing the organization, community involvement, integrity and fairness, and influencing the larger context. The SASS provided data around principals' goals including encouraging academic excellence; building basic literacy; promoting good work habits and self-discipline; promoting personal growth; promoting human relation skills; promoting multicultural awareness or understanding; promoting occupational or vocational skills; and promoting specific moral values. Among Marzano's 21 leadership behaviors, communication, visibility, situational awareness, culture, and relationships overlap principal practices described in other tools.

In the Kaplan et al. (2005) study, principal evaluators and the evaluators' immediate supervisors completed a survey of observable principal behaviors with a

rubric based on the standards. This study looked at whether lower quality principals were placed at schools with higher numbers of students who qualify for free or reduced meals. The researchers found that at the middle and high school levels there was no significant difference in achievement regardless of principal quality whereas there was significant effect on achievement based on principal quality at the elementary level. The Juvonen et al. (2004) study found that elementary, middle, and high school principals all ranked encouraging academic excellence, building basic literacy, and promoting good work habits and self-discipline as their top three ranked goals. Like the other studies that compared elementary, middle, and high school principals, there was significant similarity between the results at each school level. Juvonen et al. (2004) concluded that there is little evidence about how middle school principals put their goals into action and if they are able to prioritize it over the daily demands that need immediate attention. SASS data are available and could be used for further large-scale study; however, district level research with the actual schools and staff directly involved in the problem of practice would be more meaningful.

The Nolasco (2009) study utilized a qualitative design and included descriptive statistics and causal-comparative ex-post facto analysis based on a survey and questionnaire. The results indicate that the principals perceived that monitoring and evaluating, communicating, visibility, contingent rewards, and situation awareness along with resources were significant in integrating technology in the curriculum.

Marks and Printy (2003), Mees (2008), Brooks (2009), Hallenger and Heck (2009), and Corcoran (2012) examined transformational, instructional, and integrated

and distributed leadership in relation to achievement. Mees (2008) analyzed the impact of transformational leadership and school culture on student achievement at 79 middle schools in Missouri. This quantitative study using the Janzi and Leithwood Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) regarding transformational leadership measured six factors including vision, modeling, goal acceptance, individualized support, intellectual stimulation, and high performance expectations and was completed by middle school teachers. In addition, this study also used Gruenert's School Culture Survey (SCS) that measures six factors regarding school culture including collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership. Brooks (2009) on the other hand, examined transformational leadership when studying which leadership style was more prevalent among middle school principals in North Carolina over a three-year period. Brooks utilized a quantitative comparative and descriptive research design to investigate the leadership styles, gender, years of experience of principals and growth trends in middle schools. The survey tool used was the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), and ultimately was completed by 77 middle school principals.

Like Mees (2008) and Brooks (2009), Marks and Printy (2003) studied transformational leadership, however, they studied it as an integration model with instructional leadership. They studied 24 restructured schools after reviewing 300 nationally nominated schools undergoing reform efforts. The schools included eight elementary, eight middle, and eight high schools representing 16 states and 22 school

districts. Teachers completed the School Restructuring Survey, and core subject teachers, principals and district administrators were interviewed and observed.

The results of the Mees (2008) study indicated that there were statistically significant zero-order and partial correlations between transformational leadership factors and achievement data and school culture factors and achievement data. In addition, there were predictive linear relationships between five of the six factors of the PLQ and the SCS. While this study was rigorous, it was a part of a larger two-year statewide study of middle schools in Missouri. According to the Brooks (2009) study, the results showed that transformative leadership style was the most prevalent at 44.2% followed by transactional leadership at 23.3% and laissez-faire leadership was 24.6%. Interestingly, this study showed that principals with more experience showed a decrease in the amount of growth that students made on the end of year exams in sixth through eighth grade. Based on the results of the Marks and Printy (2003) study, which included a scatter plot analysis to cluster schools into quadrants, the researchers concluded that when there is high instructional leadership and low transformational leadership, that transformational leadership is necessary but insufficient for shared instructional leadership. If a principal does not exhibit behaviors of transformational leadership such as vision, structuring for shared decision making, building consensus, and promoting collaboration, there is little chance that there will be shared responsibility with teachers regarding instruction, curriculum, and assessment in a shared instructional leadership model.

In order to better define what good principals must know and do, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the Chief State School Officers, and the

National Policy Board for Educational Administration developed standards of practice. The National Association of Secondary School Principals identified seven areas of professional development to improve principals' competency that include making teaching and learning the focus of all school activity, participating in lifelong learning to improve student achievement, collaborating to achieve goals, planning and decision making with data, modeling teaching and learning, providing accountability related to learning outcomes, and working with peers. The Chief State School Officers and National Policy Board for Educational Administration developed the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) that defines standards for school leaders' work (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). The ISLLC standards include setting a shared vision, developing school culture that promotes student learning and staff growth, providing management that leads to safe learning environments, collaborating with all stakeholders, behaving with equity, integrity, and ethics, and working within the social, economic, and political contexts of the school community (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011). Updated in 2015, the former ISLLC standards, renamed the Professional Standards for Educational Leadership, include Standard 1, mission, vision, and core values; Standard 2, ethics and professional norms; Standard 3, equity and cultural responsiveness; Standard 4, curriculum, instruction, and assessment; Standard 5, community of care and support for students; Standard 6, professional capacity of school personnel; Standard 7, professional community for teachers and staff; Standard 8 meaningful engagement of families and community; Standard 9, operations and management; and Standard 10, school improvement (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

Furthermore, researchers have identified principal practices that contribute to school success. These principal practices include developing and articulating a shared vision, creating a positive school climate, empowering others through shared decision making, focusing on curriculum, engaging parents and the community, and managing resources effectively (Leech, Smith, Green, & Fulton, 2003; McLeod II, 2008).

Middle school context is an important component of principal leadership. According to Leithwood et al. (2004) it is important to recognize that leaders' decisions and actions are based on circumstances. School organizational context includes geographic location, school level, school size, and district size. "We need to be developing leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to chose [*sic*] from that repertoire as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of one 'ideal' set of practices" (Leithwood et al., p. 10). Curricular knowledge and direct interaction between principal and teachers may differ based on school size and level, and as a result, professional development for instructional leaders should be individualized to meet their specific school context needs. "Being the principal of a large secondary school, for example, really does require quite different capacities than being the principal of a small elementary school" (Leithwood et al., p. 10).

Importantly, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) have made the statistical connection between effective school leadership and improved student achievement. They have defined 21 interrelated leadership responsibilities that reflect categories of principal leadership behavior and have sorted them into two general groups. The first group reflects the day-to-day management of a school and includes the following

extensive list of leadership responsibilities: monitoring and evaluating, culture, ideals/beliefs, knowledge of curriculum/assessment/instruction, involvement in curriculum/assessment/instruction, focus, order, affirmation, intellectual stimulation, communication, input, relationships, optimizer, flexibility, resources, contingent rewards, situational awareness, outreach, visibility, discipline, and change agent. The second group of principal leadership responsibilities contains only seven of the leadership responsibilities and reflects the long-term work to implement change or reform. These responsibilities include knowledge of curricula/instruction/assessment, optimizer, intellectual stimulation, change agent, monitoring/evaluating, flexibility, and ideals/beliefs (Marzano et al., 2005).

Due to the extensive list of principal responsibilities in today's middle schools, principals share duties among other administrators and teachers in the schools. Chenoweth and Theokas (2011) point out that distributed leadership has emerged to address the demands of the principalship including meeting the goal that all students are college and career ready. "The idea of distributed leadership is partly an answer to the suggestion that only superheroes could actually do the job and a rejection of the flawed idea that just working harder or more will achieve the desired ends" (Chenoweth & Theokas, p. 45). Spiro (2016) compares the school leader to an orchestra conductor. The principal, like a conductor, cannot do everything. The principal is essential to overall school success but must delegate in order to achieve the end result. Furthermore, Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) notes that the exceptional instructional leader transfers responsibilities for non-instructional tasks to others and makes instructional improvement their priority.



## **Prior Attempts to Address Problem**

While there is extensive research on principal practices, there is significantly less research on middle school principal practices as compared with elementary and secondary school research that often lumps middle school principals with high school principals. Most of the studies have examined principal leadership through perceptions of the principals and/ or teachers. Only one study included students and parents in the sample, and only one study included principals' supervisors' perceptions. More importantly, there has not been a study to examine school leaders' perceptions of leadership practices to improve middle school reading achievement of principals of middle schools in District K.

In order to address the concerns over middle school performance, District K developed the Middle School Reform initiative and provided policies and professional development to enhance the skills of middle school principals. During the 2011 school year, the District formed the Middle School Project Committee and solicited input from middle school principals in order to address the concerns about the achievement gap (Associate Superintendent of District K, personal communication, August 15, 2010).

As part of the work that year, middle school principals attended the National Association of Middle School Principals Conference in Baltimore, Maryland held November 4-6, 2010. Middle school principals were also invited to attend the Middle School Leadership Institute, a series of three leadership seminars in Baltimore and Annapolis, Maryland from September through November 2010 (Deputy Superintendent of District K, personal communication, August 14, 2010). Middle

school principals studied *This We Believe* and focused on improving middle schools by understanding and programming for the early adolescent student. In addition, policy decisions included adding advisory periods to all middle schools, adopting the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program in all middle schools, and participating in systematic transition activities from elementary schools to high schools.

During the 2012 school year, middle school reform focused on scheduling, use of instructional time, and the transition to student based budgeting. Professional development was provided through Dr. Michael Rettig, School Scheduling Associates, to improve schedules through more efficient use of time. Moreover, District K instituted intervention and enrichment classes at all middle schools (Fiscal Officer of District K, personal communication, August 26, 2011). Support also continued for advisory periods. Middle school principals contributed to the District K Middle School Concept Map, a framework that addressed the needs at middle schools with emphasis on Common Core Standards implementation. The concept map reflected the Common Core Standards, instructional best practices, Webb's Depth of Knowledge, learner needs, early adolescent behavior and development, community participation, and the infrastructure to support success. Furthermore, middle school principals created student-based budgets for the first time. They received training throughout the school year and determined their schools' staffing and discretionary budgets per the weighted dollar values for poverty, performance, and English language learner levels.

During the 2013 school year, middle school reform continued to address middle school needs through coordinated efforts with the Student Based Budget Team, Scheduling Team, and Curriculum and Instruction Department. In addition to learning walks at selected high-performing middle schools, the middle school principals attended the National Secondary Schools Conference in February 2013 at Fort Washington, Maryland. Moreover, principal professional development focused specifically on the transition to the Common Core Standards and the implications for teaching and learning.

In addition to the specific work with middle schools during 2013, District K (July 2015) implemented the revised principal evaluation system developed to measure school leaders' work around professional practice standards and student achievement growth. District K adopted eight professional leadership standards including that the principal (a) sets high expectations for achievement, (b) sets standards for ensuring school-wide instructional and achievement goals are met, (c) monitors effective instructional practices through observation and evaluation, (d) builds a shared vision, fosters shared goals, and communicates high performance expectations, (e) demonstrates a commitment to excellence, equity, and innovation, (f) demonstrates human resource and managerial leadership, (g) demonstrates strong external leadership, and (h) demonstrates commitment to technology and data. As shown in Table 1, District K's Leadership Standards are aligned to significant research in the field of principal practice.

Table 1

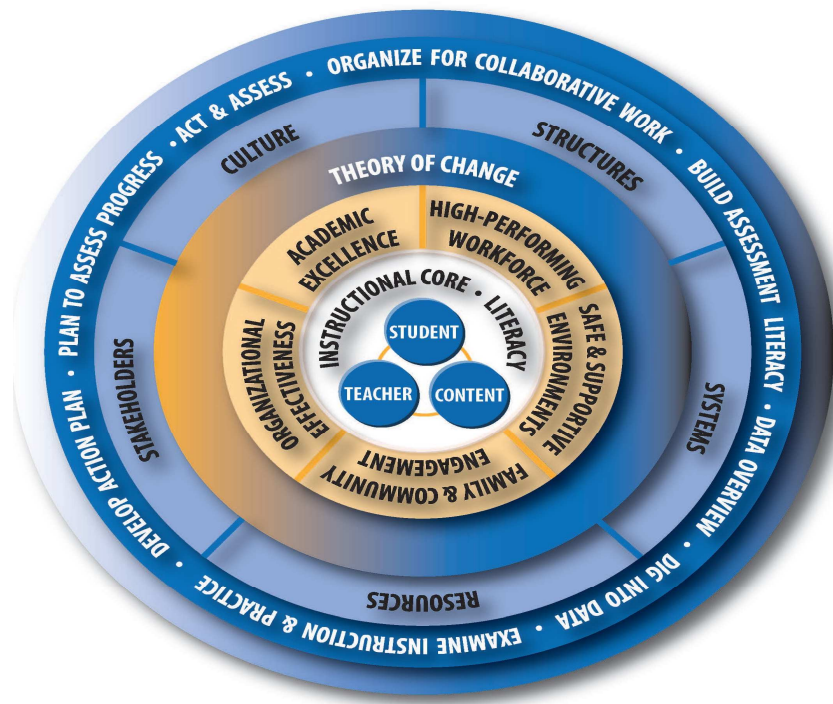
*Alignment Matrix of District K Leadership Standards with Research Documents*

District K Leadership Standards	Wallace Foundation Principal Practices 2013	Professional Standards for Educational Leadership 2115	Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework 2005	Val Ed Framework 2011	Marzano Principal Responsibilities 2005
The principal sets high expectations for achievement based upon individualized tailoring of instruction, rigorous data analysis and evaluation of the effective instructional practices.	X	X	X	X	X
The principal sets standards for ensuring school-wide instructional and achievement goals are met.	X	X	X	X	X
The principal monitors effective instructional practices through observation and evaluation.	X	X	X	X	X
The principal builds a shared vision, fosters shared goals, and communicates high performance expectations.	X	X	X	X	X
The principal demonstrates a commitment to excellence, equity, and innovation.	X	X	X	X	X
The principal demonstrates human resource and managerial leadership.	X	X	X	X	X
The principal demonstrates strong external leadership.		X	X	X	X
The principal demonstrates commitment to technology and data.	X	X	X	X	

*Note.* Each document has distinct language.

Furthermore, the District K evaluation includes the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (Val-Ed), a 360-degree evaluation tool completed by the principal, teachers, and principal supervisor. Val-Ed (2011) measures principal work on a framework that includes core components and key processes. The core components include high standards for student learning, rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, culture of learning and professional behavior, connections to external communities, and performance accountability. The key processes include planning, implementing, supporting, advocating, communicating, and monitoring.

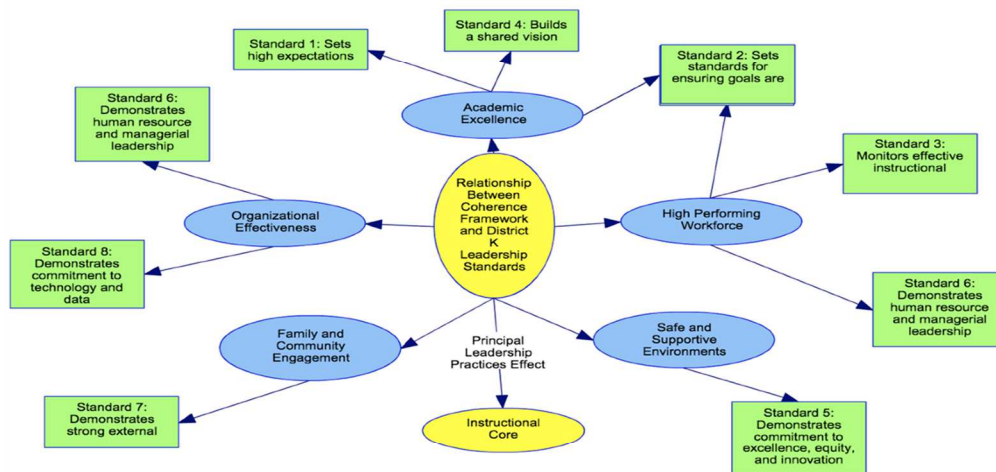
During the 2014-2015 school year, District K adopted the SY2016-2020 Strategic Plan, the foundation of the district's work (District K, March 2015). This plan outlines the goals developed to ensure that by school year 2019-2020, all graduates will be college and career ready. Goals include meeting or exceeding the state averages on ACT and SAT, 90% of students graduating on time, and 100% of students meeting requirements to enter college, technical school, the military, or a licensed career. Furthermore, it highlights the Coherence Framework (see Figure 1), a graphic display of how the work of all aspects of the organization contribute to the outstanding achievement expected for all students.



*Figure 1. District K Coherence Framework*

At the center of the Coherence Framework lies the Instructional Core that consists of the interaction between the content, teachers, and students through a literacy lens. The elements closest to the Instructional Core support the work of teaching and learning directly and include a high performing workforce, safe and supportive school environments, family and community engagement, organizational effectiveness, and academic excellence (see Figure 2). The Theory of Change defines the focus for the work to achieve outstanding academic success for all students. The Theory of Change states “If we focus on culture, data, and performance- with a lens on literacy, then we will have outstanding academic achievement for all students.” The Theory of Change is supported by the work of central office departments that contribute to school success. The outer layer that

includes the steps in the Data Wise Process (2013) is the systematic improvement process adopted by District K. Through its ongoing use, all schools and departments analyze strengths and weaknesses based on data and evidence, identify problems based on the evidence, and create action plans to address their needs.



*Figure 2.* Concept Map. Relationship between the Coherence Framework and the District K Leadership Standards.

The middle school principals have participated in professional learning opportunities to develop a deep understanding of the goals of the Strategic Plan, the elements of the Coherence Framework, and the underlying Theory of Change in order to improve student achievement in the District. Emphasis has been placed on improving literacy instruction across content areas to improve reading achievement overall. The systematic literacy plan, Emphasize Rigorous Literacy Instruction, was introduced in August 2015 (District K, September 2015). The middle school principals participated in monthly literacy focused professional development activities designed to meet the needs of middle school grades six through eight. These professional development workshops included a deep review of the Emphasize Rigorous Literacy Instruction document, the Literacy Plan Website, and monthly systematic literacy tasks that included analytic reading and writing across content areas.

### **Investigation**

The study examined the perceptions of the principals, the assistant principals, the reading department chairpersons, and the professional development lead teachers as to the importance of leadership practices that contribute to principal effectiveness in improving reading achievement in middle schools using the eight leadership standards defined by District K. The researcher provided data analysis that supports middle school principal performance improvement in order to improve overall middle school reading achievement performance through principal leadership effectiveness.

The participants of the study included the principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers of



middle schools in District K. Schools selected for participation have grade 6-8 and 7-8 configurations. The two principals, four assistant principals, two reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers of the two middle schools under the supervision of the researcher were excluded to ensure that no undue influence to participate was exerted.

A request to conduct the study was made to District K, and confidentiality and ethical protection for participants was guaranteed. An informed consent form that described the scope of the research study, measures of participant protection, and the intended use of the data was placed as the first question of the electronic survey. Participants were identified by role only, and participant names and school names remained confidential. There were no obvious risks to participants.

Quantitative data were collected using a Web-based survey. The survey included 12 questions that asked participants' perceptions of the most and least important leadership practices regarding literacy achievement, the leadership practices that have the most and least impact on literacy achievement, the rank order of resources that they perceive will improve principal effectiveness regarding literacy achievement, and general demographic information. The survey was administered to principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers at the selected middle schools. The survey tool was used to gather data and answer the three research questions through descriptive analysis.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the study was to examine the perception of the importance of the leadership practices that contribute to principal effectiveness in improving reading

achievement in middle schools in District K. The following research questions were answered through an exploratory and descriptive research design:

1. Is there a difference in the perceptions of the importance of principals' leadership practices on student reading achievement success as reported by middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers?
2. Based on the perceptions of the middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers, which of the leadership practices have the greatest impact on middle school student reading achievement?
3. Based on the perceptions of the middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers, what are the three top ranked resources needed to increase the effectiveness of principals in order to improve reading achievement at middle schools?

## **Section 2**

### **Methodology**

This exploratory and descriptive study examines the perceptions of middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers as to the importance of leadership practices that contribute to principal effectiveness in improving reading achievement in middle schools in a large public school district. This section outlines the methodology of the study. It begins with an overview of the problem of the practice and supports the need for research in middle school leadership practices. It includes the proposed research questions, study design, study participants, measurement instrument to be utilized, and description of the data collection.

### **Problem Statement**

District K's student achievement data indicate that middle school achievement rates lag behind those of elementary schools as outlined in Section One. District K's 2014 MSA data reveal that fifth grade students outperformed eighth grade students in reading by 15.1 percentage points, in mathematics by 19.0 percentage points, and in science by 1.1 percentage points (Maryland State Department of Education, 2014). In addition, 2014 SRI results indicate that fifth graders outperformed eighth graders in reading by 4.3 percentage points. Furthermore, the ninth grade failure rate in high schools across District K is at 24.5% (Maryland Report Card, 2014).

In order to achieve the goals set forth for middle schools, middle school principals must be highly qualified instructional leaders who build the capacity of the

leadership team to improve teaching and learning (Maryland Middle School Steering Committee, 2008, p. 38).

Educators and policy-makers at all levels would do well to remember that the crux of the principal's job today is not, as it was in the recent past, to sit at the apex and attend to administrative tasks, but to work collaboratively and unleash potential. (Mendels, 2012, p. 58).

After careful implementation and evaluation of the work done by principals in conjunction with the Middle School Reform initiative, the Board of Education should develop meaningful school system policy that directly relates to principal effectiveness at the middle school level to address the disconnect between student achievement levels at elementary and middle schools in District K.

The study examined the principals', the assistant principals', the reading department chairpersons', and the professional development lead teachers' perceptions of the importance of principal leadership practices in middle schools. According to the Wallace Foundation research (2013), effective principals address five distinct practices including shaping a vision of academic success for all students based on high standards, creating a climate of hospitable education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction, and managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement. By looking at leadership practices in the context of District K professional practice standards, the researcher analyzed data that supports middle school principal performance improvement in order to improve overall middle school reading achievement through principal leadership effectiveness.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

### *Research Question 1:*

Is there a difference in the perceptions of the importance of principals' leadership practices on student reading achievement success as reported by middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers?

### *Research Question 2:*

Based on the perceptions of the middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers, which of the leadership practices have the greatest impact on middle school student reading achievement?

### *Research Question 3:*

Based on the perceptions of the middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers, what are the three top ranked resources needed to increase the effectiveness of principals in order to improve reading achievement at middle schools?

## **Research Setting**

The study was conducted in District K, a large public school system that educates over 125,000 students from urban, suburban, and rural communities located in the state of Maryland. District K has 208 schools and more than 18,000 employees. Of the 208 schools, 124 are elementary schools, 24 are middle schools, six are academies, 10 are dedicated specialty program schools, five are regional

schools, 30 are high schools, and 10 are charter schools. Students in grades six through eight are educated in 46 of the aforementioned schools.

### **Design and Methods**

This exploratory and descriptive study was conducted using an online survey instrument. Exploratory research is conducted to provide a better understanding of the problem and does not define one isolated solution. Rather it explores the research questions, and the results may suggest possible further research. Descriptive research is used to describe and identify what is. It does not seek to answer why or how (Dudovskiy, 2011).

The online survey was distributed to four school-based leader groups: the principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers in 20 of the 22 selected middle schools. Research questions one and two were addressed by the Principal Leadership Survey questions two through five. The data collected from these first two research questions identified the respondents' perceptions of the importance of the specific principal leadership practices on improving student reading achievement. Furthermore, the data was used to identify the principal practices that the respondents perceived to have the most impact on student reading achievement. Research question three was addressed by the Principal Leadership Survey question six. Survey respondents rank ordered the resources perceived as most important to increase the effectiveness of principals in improving reading achievement in middle schools.

## **Participants**

The participants for the study included 97 school leaders including 20 principals, 40 assistant principals, 17 reading department chairpersons, and 20 professional development lead teachers of middle schools in District K. The 20 middle schools selected for participation have grade 6-8 and 7-8 configurations. The two principals, four assistant principals, two reading department chairpersons, and two professional development lead teachers of the two middle schools under the supervision of the researcher were excluded to ensure that no undue influence to participate was exerted. The remaining principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers of schools that educate students in grades kindergarten through eight were excluded as well to eliminate the possible achievement difference caused by the transition of students from elementary to middle schools in those schools selected. West and Schwerdt (2012) found that when students transitioned to middle schools in grade 6 or 7 from elementary schools, there were significant decreases in achievement scores.

## **Procedures**

The 46 schools that educate students in grades six through eight were identified. Those schools that did not meet the criteria of educating students in grade six through eight or seven through eight configurations were eliminated. Furthermore, the two schools that fit the criteria but fell under the supervision of the researcher were excluded in order to eliminate the perception of undue bias or influence. The names and email addresses of those identified to participate were

utilized for communication purposes only. Data were collected and results were shared in the aggregate by professional role.

The Web-based survey instrument was created based on the eight leadership standards as defined by District K, sets high expectations for achievement, sets standards for ensuring school-wide instructional and achievement goals are met, monitors effective instructional practices, builds a shared vision, demonstrates a commitment to excellence, equity, and innovation, demonstrates human resource and managerial leadership, demonstrates strong external leadership, and demonstrates commitment to technology and data. The survey was created using the Qualtrics online application and included 12 questions related to effective principal practices. Questions two through four contained 10 items from which the subjects were asked to choose the three that they perceived to be most important, to be the least important, have the most impact, and have the least impact on their effectiveness in promoting literacy in their respective schools. The fifth question contained six items, and the subjects were asked to rank order them from most to least important in improving principal practices that impact literacy achievement. There were seven items that obtained participants' background and demographic information. The survey took an average of 15 minutes to complete. Informal feedback regarding ease of understanding and the amount of time spent completing the survey was collected from the leaders of a non-participating middle school and was used to edit the survey document.

Following Institutional Review Board approval from the sponsoring university, a request to conduct the study was made to District K. Confidentiality and



ethical protection for participants was guaranteed. Provisional authorization to conduct research was granted pending principal approval at each middle school selected. Of those middle schools selected, 20 of 22 middle school principals approved the research. Once approved by the school system, the survey materials were emailed to 97 participants utilizing the Qualtrics mailer. Each participant received a Web link to the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire included the informed consent form embedded as the first question. The informed consent form described the scope of the research study, measures of participant protection, and the intended use of the data. Those leaders who received the questionnaire but chose not to participate were directed to opt out of the survey by either advancing to the end of the survey or simply turning off their Web browsers.

Participants had an 18-day window within which to respond to the survey questions. The survey was activated and links emailed to participants on February 26, 2016. Three reminder emails were sent to participants who had not completed or not started the survey encouraging them to complete the survey. The reminder emails were sent on March 3, March 7, and March 10, 2016. As participants submitted their responses, data were collected by Qualtrics. The researcher then analyzed the results using descriptive analysis.

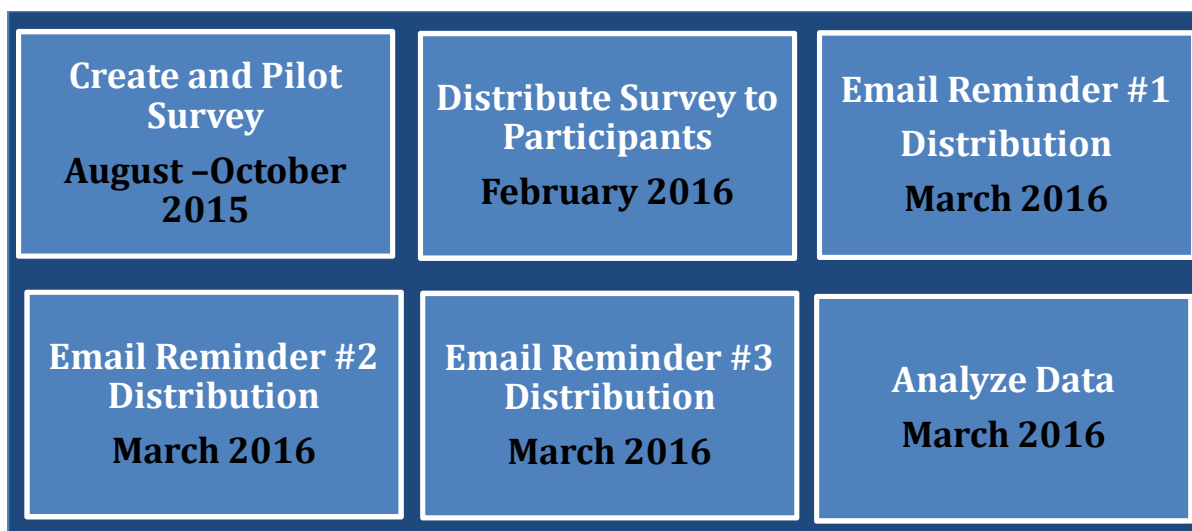
Prior to administering the survey to the study participants, the researcher collected informal feedback from the leaders of one of the excluded middle schools. They were asked to read the survey and provide feedback about its format, clarity of questions, and the time it took to complete. The researcher reviewed the survey pilot

feedback and revised the survey prior to sharing it with middle school study participants.

### **Study Timeline**

The researcher utilized the following timeline for the study (see Figure 3).

- August - October 2015 – Create survey tool in Qualtrics for study and collect informal feedback from excluded middle school leaders.
- February 26, 2016 – March 14, 2016 – Administer survey to middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers.
- March 3, 2016 - Send first email reminder to participants with incomplete or not started surveys.
- March 7, 2016 - Send second email reminder to participants with incomplete or not started surveys.
- March 10, 2016 - Send third email reminder to participants with incomplete or not started surveys.
- March 2016 – Analyze data



*Figure 3. Research Study Timeline*

### **Study Benefits**

The benefit of the study is that it will contribute to the research on educational leadership. Based on the results, it may provide areas for future educational leadership research in District K. It may provide data to support District K policy implementation regarding middle school principal practices to improve student reading achievement. Furthermore, the survey data may provide results that lead to changes in the weights of the principal practice portion of the principal evaluation tool or to the professional development provided to principals around leadership practices.

### **Study Limitations**

The study was limited to the participants at 20 of the 46 schools that have grades 6- 8. Two schools were excluded since they were under the direct supervision of the researcher, and two principals did not approve the research at their schools. Thirteen schools were excluded since they are configured as grades Pre-K to 8

schools and did not meet the study criteria of the grades 6-8 or 7- 8 configuration. The nine charter schools were excluded, as they did not meet the study criteria for District K public schools.

### **Summary**

This section outlines the research methodology that was used to investigate the perceptions of middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers regarding the effectiveness of principal leadership practices on reading achievement. It includes the study design, research instrument, and the process for collecting and analyzing the data, and the timeline for study completion. The data was used to answer the research questions, draw conclusions regarding the principal practices at middle school, and suggest recommendations.

### **Section 3**

#### **Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this exploratory and descriptive study was to examine school leaders' perceptions of principal leadership practices that contribute to principal effectiveness in improving reading achievement in middle schools in District K. Section 2 described the study methodology utilized to address the following research questions:

##### *Research Question 1:*

Is there a difference in the perception of the importance of principals' leadership practices on student reading achievement success as reported by middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers?

##### *Research Question 2:*

Based on the perceptions of the middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers, which of the leadership practices have the greatest impact on middle school student reading achievement?

##### *Research Question 3:*

Based on the perceptions of the middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers, what are the three top ranked resources needed to increase the effectiveness of principals in order to improve reading achievement at middle schools?

This section presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the study.

## **Procedure**

The Institutional Review Board of the University of Maryland College Park and the District K Department of Testing, Research, and Evaluation approved the study. Of the 22 selected District K middle school principals, 20 approved the research for completion with members of their staffs. The Principal Leadership Practices Survey (Appendix A) was constructed on Qualtrics, a Web-based survey tool, and was distributed via Qualtrics email to 97 participants. Prior to distribution, the survey was informally tested with a non-participating middle school's leadership team and revised based on their feedback regarding time required to take the survey and ease of understanding.

The 97 participants included 20 principals, 44 assistant principals, 17 reading department chairpersons, and 20 professional development lead teachers. Each participant received an email invitation (Appendix B) to participate in the study along with a link to the survey. The informed consent form was embedded as the first question in the survey. Reminder emails (Appendix B) were sent to those participants who did not complete or did not start the survey after six, 10, and 13 days. Response rates varied daily and peaked after each reminder email. By the end of the 18-day survey window, 71% of the participants had started the survey, and 61% had completed the survey. Of those who completed the survey, the response rate of principals was the highest at 95% (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Survey Respondents by Leadership Group*

	Number Surveyed	Number of Valid Surveys	Percent of Valid Returns
Principals	20	19	95%
Assistant Principals	40	16	40%
Reading Department Chairpersons	17	10	59%
Professional Development Lead Teachers	20	11	55%

The response rate of reading department chairpersons reached 59%. The professional development lead teacher response rate was 55%, and the response rate for assistant principals was lowest at just 40%.

### **Survey Results For Research Question One**

Survey question numbers two and three addressed research question number one: Is there a difference in the perception of the importance of principals' leadership practices on student reading achievement success as reported by middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers?

When asked to identify what they perceive to be the three most important principal leadership practices for student reading achievement success, 63.2% of principals indicated that creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students is one of the three most important principal leadership practices. 57.9% of principals indicated

that implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students is also one of the three most important principal leadership practices. Furthermore, 50.0% of principals indicated that developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use is one of the three most important principal leadership practices for student reading achievement success.

Assistant principals also selected the three leadership practices they perceived to be most important to student reading achievement success. 62.5% of assistant principals indicated that implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students is among the three most important leadership practices. 62.5% of assistant principals selected offering staff members professional development opportunities that support cross content literacy instruction as most important. Also, 56.3% of assistant principals indicated that providing feedback to teachers based on informal and formal observations in order to improve instruction is one of three most important leadership practices to attain student reading achievement success.

The third group of participants who indicated the three most important leadership practices for student reading achievement success was made up of reading department chairpersons. 60.0% of the reading department chairpersons selected developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use. 50.0% of reading department chairpersons indicated that implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students is among the three most important



leadership practices. Furthermore, 40.0% of reading department chairpersons selected both creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students and offering staff members professional development opportunities that support cross content literacy instruction as most important.

Data indicated that 54.6% of professional development lead teachers selected implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students as one of three most important leadership practices for student reading achievement success. 54.6% of professional development lead teachers indicated developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use is most important. Furthermore, 54.6% of professional development lead teachers selected offering staff members professional development opportunities that support cross content literacy instruction as most important to student reading achievement success (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Leadership Practices Selected as Most Important by Respondent Group*

Leadership Practice	Principals N = 19	Assistant Principals N = 16	Reading Department Chairpersons N = 10	Professional Development Lead Teachers N = 11
Creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students.	12 (63.2%)	7 (43.8%)	4 (40%)	3 (27.3%)
Implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students.	11 (57.9%)	10 (62.5%)	5 (50.0%)	6 (54.6%)
Developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use.	10 (52.6%)	6 (37.5%)	6 (60.0%)	6 (54.6%)
Supporting staff in creating and monitoring student learning objectives that are rigorous yet attainable for student learning.	6 (31.6%)	3 (18.8%)	3 (30.0%)	1 (9.1%)
Developing a student based budget that maximizes available school resources including people, materials, technology, and funding.	0 (0.0%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (20.0%)	4 (36.4%)
Collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals.	2 (10.5%)	1 (6.3%)	2 (20.0%)	1 (9.1%)
Offering staff members professional development opportunities that support cross content literacy instruction.	6 (31.6%)	10 (62.5%)	4 (40.0%)	6 (54.6)
Providing feedback to teachers based on informal and formal observations in order to improve instruction.	4 (21.1%)	9 (56.3%)	2 (20.0%)	5 (45.5%)
Utilizing a variety of data to guide decision-making.	3 (15.8%)	2 (12.5%)	6 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)

When asked to identify the three leadership practices they perceived as least important to student reading achievement success, 94.7% of the principals surveyed selected collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals. 57.9% of principals selected including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals. Furthermore, 42.1% of principals selected developing a student based budget that maximizes available school resources.

75% of the assistant principals indicated that including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals was one of the three least important leadership practices. Tied for the second and third of three least important leadership practices for student reading achievement success as perceived by 56.3% of assistant principals were supporting staff in creating and monitoring student learning objectives that are rigorous yet attainable for student learning and developing a student based budget that maximizes available school resources including people, materials, technology, and funding.

Data indicated that 60% of reading department chairpersons perceived both collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals and including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals were two of the three least important leadership practices. 40% of reading department chairpersons indicated that developing a student based budget that maximizes available school resources including people, materials, technology, and funding as one of the three least important leadership practices for student reading achievement success.

The fourth group of participants, the professional development lead teachers,

also indicated their perceptions of the three least important leadership practices for student reading achievement success. 63.6% selected collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals. 45.5% indicated developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use as least important. Furthermore, data indicated a tie for the third of three least important leadership practices from this group of survey participants. 36.4% of professional development lead teachers selected both creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students and supporting staff in creating and monitoring student learning objectives that are rigorous yet attainable for student learning as least important leadership practices for student reading achievement success (see Table 4).

There is little difference in the perception of the importance of principals' leadership practices on student reading achievement success as reported by middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers. Among those leadership practices identified as most important, implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students was selected by all four of the survey participant groups, the principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers. Developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use was selected by three of the survey participant groups, the principals, reading department chairpersons, and the professional development lead teachers.

Table 4

*Leadership Practices Selected as Least Important by Respondent Group*

Leadership Practice	Principals N = 19	Assistant Principals N = 16	Reading Department Chairpersons N = 10	Professional Development Lead Teachers N = 11
Creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students.	1 (5.2%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (10.0%)	4 (36.4)
Implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students.	0 (0.0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)
Developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use.	2 (10.5%)	1 (6.3%)	2 (20.0%)	5 (45.5%)
Supporting staff in creating and monitoring student learning objectives that are rigorous yet attainable for student learning.	6 (31.6%)	9 (56.3%)	2 (20.0%)	4 (36.4%)
Developing a student based budget that maximizes available school resources including people, materials, technology, and funding.	8 (42.1%)	9 (56.3%)	4 (40.0%)	3 (27.3%)
Collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals.	18 (94.7%)	16 (100.0%)	6 (60.0%)	7 (63.6%)
Including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals.	11 (57.9%)	12 (75.0%)	6 (60.0%)	3 (27.3%)
Offering staff members professional development opportunities that support cross content literacy instruction.	2 (10.5%)	3 (18.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (9.1%)
Providing feedback to teachers based on informal and formal observations in order to improve instruction.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (9.1%)
Utilizing a variety of data to guide decision-making.	6 (31.6%)	4 (25.0%)	2 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Three of the four survey groups, the assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and the professional development lead teachers, selected offering staff members professional development opportunities that support cross content literacy instruction. Two groups, the principals and the reading department chairpersons selected creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students. Just one group, the assistant principals, selected providing feedback to teachers based on informal and formal observations in order to improve instruction as one of three most important leadership practices on student reading achievement success.

Similarly, there is little difference in the perceptions of middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers regarding leadership practices that are least important to student reading achievement success. All four groups of participants indicated that collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals is among the three least important leadership practices. Three of the four groups of participants, the principals, assistant principals, and reading department chairpersons, indicated that both including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals and developing a student based budget that maximizes available school resources including people, materials, technology, and funding is least important. Only professional development lead teachers indicated that creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students and developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data

use were among the three least important leadership practices on student reading achievement success. In fact, only the professional development lead teachers indicated one leadership practice as both most and least important, developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use.

### **Survey Results For Research Question Two**

Survey question numbers four and five addressed research question number two: Based on the perceptions of the middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers, which of the leadership practices have the greatest impact on middle school student reading achievement?

When asked to identify what they perceived as the principal leadership practices that would have the greatest impact on middle school student reading achievement, 68.4% of principals selected ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses. 63.2% of principals surveyed indicated that both participates in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study and data analysis and monitors and analyzes formative and summative student achievement data to inform decision making have the most impact on reading achievement.

Assistant principals selected the leadership practices they perceived to have the most impact on middle school reading achievement. 87.5% of assistant principals selected participate in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study

and data analysis. 68.8% indicated that monitors and analyzes formative and summative student achievement data to inform decision-making has the most impact on reading achievement. Furthermore, 56.3% of assistant principals surveyed selected ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses as one of three leadership practices that impact reading achievement most.

Data indicated that 70.0% of reading department chairpersons surveyed selected ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses as one of three leadership practices that impact reading achievement most. 60.0% of reading department chairpersons selected participates in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study and data analysis. Furthermore, 50.0% of reading department chairpersons indicated that creates a positive school climate characterized by respectful interactions has the greatest impact on middle school student reading achievement.

Professional development lead teachers indicated their perceptions of principal leadership practices that have the greatest impact on student reading achievement as well. 54.6% of the professional development lead teachers surveyed selected ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses. 45.5% of professional development lead teachers indicated three principal leadership practices, participates in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study and data analysis, creates a positive school climate characterized



by respectful interactions, and uses the student based budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing as having the greatest impact on middle school student reading achievement (see Table 5).

In addition to indicating which principal leadership practices they perceived to have the greatest impact, the participants also indicated those principal leadership practices they perceived to have the least impact on middle school student reading achievement. 47.4 % of principals selected both uses the Framework for Teaching to conduct formal observations and provide feedback to teachers and shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners. 42.1% of principals selected both leads the school in Data Wise process to identify and address the school's problem of practice and uses the student based budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing.

Assistant principals also indicated which three leadership practices they perceived as having the least impact on student reading achievement. 75.0% selected encourages staff to become instructional leaders by distributing responsibility for achieving school goals. 68.8% selected uses the student based budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing. Furthermore, 62.6% of assistant principals selected shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners.

Table 5

*Leadership Practices Selected as Having Greatest Impact by Respondent Group*

Leadership Practice	Principals N = 19	Assistant Principals N = 16	Reading Department N = 10	Professional Development Chairpersons Lead Teachers N = 11
Uses the Framework for Teaching to conduct formal observations and provide feedback to teachers.	7 (36.8%)	6 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (9.1%)
Participates in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study and data analysis.	12 (63.2%)	14 (87.5%)	6 (60.0%)	5 (45.5%)
Leads the school in Data Wise process to identify and address the school's problem of practice.	5 (26.3%)	6 (37.5%)	2 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Creates a positive school climate characterized by respectful interactions.	3 (15.8%)	4 (25.0%)	5 (50.0%)	5 (45.5%)
Shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners.	2 (10.5%)	2 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (27.3%)
Provides professional development opportunities for staff to increase technology and data resource use.	1 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (20.0%)	2 (18.2%)
Monitors and analyzes formative and summative student achievement data to inform decision-making.	12 (63.2%)	11 (68.8%)	3 (30.0%)	2 (18.2%)
Ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses.	13 (68.4%)	9 (56.3%)	7 (70.0%)	6 (54.6%)
Encourages staff to become instructional leaders by distributing responsibility for achieving school goals.	1 (5.3%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (10.0%)	4 (36.4%)
Uses the Student Based Budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing.	1 (5.3%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (40.0%)	5 (45.5%)

Data indicate that 60.0% of reading department chairpersons selected leadership practices uses the Framework for Teaching to conduct formal observations and provide feedback to teachers and shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners as having least impact on student reading achievement. 40.0% of reading department chairpersons selected both leads the school in Data Wise process to identify and address the school's problem of practice and uses the student based budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing.

The fourth group to indicate what they perceive to be the leadership practices that have the least impact on middle school student reading achievement is professional development lead teachers. 63.6% selected shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners. 54.6% selected uses the Framework for Teaching to conduct formal observations and provide feedback to teachers. Furthermore, 54.6% indicated that leads the school in Data Wise process to identify and address the school's problem of practice has the least impact on middle school student reading achievement (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Leadership Practices Selected as Having Least Impact by Respondent Group*

Leadership Practice	Principals N = 19	Assistant Principals N = 16	Reading Department Chairpersons N = 10	Professional Development Lead Teachers N = 11
Uses the Framework for Teaching to conduct formal observations and provide feedback to teachers.	9 (47.4%)	4 (25.0%)	6 (60.0%)	6 (54.6%)
Participates in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study and data analysis.	1 (5.3%)	1 (6.3%)	2 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Leads the school in Data Wise process to identify and address the school's problem of practice.	8 (42.1%)	6 (37.5%)	4 (40.0%)	6 (54.6%)
Creates a positive school climate characterized by respectful interactions.	7 (36.8%)	3 (18.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (9.1%)
Shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners.	9 (47.4%)	10 (62.5%)	6 (60.0%)	7 (63.6%)
Provides professional development opportunities for staff to increase technology and data resource use.	5 (26.3%)	6 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (36.4%)
Monitors and analyzes formative and summative student achievement data to inform decision-making.	0 (0.0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)
Ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses.	3 (15.8%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Encourages staff to become instructional leaders by distributing responsibility for achieving school goals.	5 (26.3%)	12 (75.0%)	2 (20.0%)	2 (18.2%)
Uses the Student Based Budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing.	8 (42.1%)	11 (68.8%)	4 (40.0%)	3 (27.3%)

Participants' responses demonstrated similar perceptions of principal leadership practices that have the most impact on middle school reading achievement. All four groups of participants, principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers, selected ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses as well as participates in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study and data analysis. Both the principals and assistant principals selected monitors and analyzes formative and summative student achievement data to inform decision-making. Reading department chairpersons and professional development lead teachers both selected creates a positive school climate characterized by respectful interactions. Only professional development lead teachers selected uses the student based budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing as having the greatest impact on middle school student reading achievement.

Likewise, participants' responses regarding the principal leadership practices that they perceived as having the least impact on middle school student reading achievement demonstrate similar selections. All four groups of participants, principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers selected shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners as one of three practices with the least impact on student reading achievement. Three groups of participants, principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers selected both uses the Framework for Teaching to conduct formal

observations and provide feedback to teachers and leads the school in Data Wise process to identify and address the school's problem of practice as having the least impact. Three groups of participants, principals, assistant principals, and reading department chairpersons selected uses the student based budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing as one of the leadership practices that has the least impact on student reading achievement. Only the assistant principals selected encourages staff to become instructional leaders by distributing responsibility for achieving school goals as one of the leadership practices that has least impact on student reading achievement.

### **Survey Results For Research Question Three**

Survey question number six addressed research question number three: Based on the perceptions of the middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers, what are the three top ranked resources needed to increase the effectiveness of principals in order to improve reading achievement at middle schools?

Overall, participants ranked implementing a collaborative planning protocol to support literacy instruction, adding a reading coach to the middle school staff, and providing professional development activities focused on literacy instruction across content areas as the top three resources needed to increase the effectiveness of principals in order to improve reading achievement at middle schools (see Table 7).

Table 7

*Frequencies of Rankings of Resources by Total Sample (N=57)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Additional Discretionary Funds for Instructional Materials and Literacy Training	10 (17.5%)	6 (10.5%)	10 (17.5%)	7 (12.3%)	11 (19.3%)	12(21.1%)
Professional Development Activities Focused on Literacy Instruction Across Content Areas	11 (19.3%)	10 (17.5%)	7 (12.3%)	12 (21.1%)	9 (15.8%)	4 (7.0%)
Reading Coach Added To the Middle School Staff	11 (19.3%)	12 (21.1%)	10 (17.5%)	8 (14.0%)	10 (17.5%)	4(7.0%)
Consultant Services at Middle School to Support Literacy Instruction Strategies	4 (7.0%)	3 (5.2%)	6 (10.5%)	11 (19.3%)	6 (10.5%)	7(12.3%)
Data Review Days Built Into the School Calendar	5 (8.8%)	12 (21.1%)	15 (26.3%)	11 (19.3%)	6 (10.5%)	7(12.3%)
Collaborative Planning Protocol to Support Literacy Instruction	16 (28.1%)	13 (22.8%)	9 (15.8%)	7 (12.3%)	8 (14.0%)	4 (7.0%)

Participants ranked collaborative planning first and second with 28.1% and 23.2% respectively. Participants ranked data review days third with 26.3%.

Principals ranked collaborative planning first and second with 26.3% and 33.3% respectively. They ranked data review days third with 38.9%.

Assistant principals ranked collaborative planning first with 38.9%. They ranked professional development second with 23.6%. Furthermore, they ranked data review days third with 33.3%.

Reading department chairpersons ranked collaborative planning first and third with 33.3% and 30.0% respectively. They ranked data review days second with

30.0%.

Professional development lead teachers were the only group to rank adding a reading coach to the middle school staff and adding discretionary funds for instructional materials and literacy training first with 27.3%. They ranked data review days second with 36.5% and collaborative planning third with 36.4%.

The mean rankings of resources further demonstrate the top three ranked resources by respondents (see Table 8). The total sample with a mean score of 3.18, principals with a mean score of 3.17, assistant principals with a mean score of 3.50, and reading department chairpersons with a mean score of 3.55 ranked collaborative planning protocol to support literacy instruction first. Professional development lead teachers also ranked professional development activities focused on literacy instruction across content areas first. The second ranked resource by the total sample with a mean score of 2.89 is a reading coach position added to the middle school staff. The principals ranked both the reading coach position with a mean score of 3.11 and professional development activities focused on literacy instruction across the content areas with a mean score of 3.11 second. Furthermore, assistant principals and reading department chairpersons ranked professional development second with mean scores of 3.13 and 3.00 respectively. Professional development lead teachers ranked data review days built into the calendar second with a mean score of 2.82. The third ranked resource by the total sample is professional development with a mean score of 2.81. Principals ranked data review days third with a mean score of 2.94. Assistant principals ranked the addition of a reading coach third with a mean score of 2.75. Reading department chairpersons and professional development lead teachers ranked



additional discretionary funds for instructional materials and literacy training third with mean scores of 2.60 and 2.55 respectively. Consultant services at middle schools to support literacy instruction was the lowest ranked resource by the total sample with a mean score of 1.46, by the principals with a mean score of 0.94, by the assistant principals with a mean score of 1.67, and the reading department chairpersons with a mean score of 1.60. The professional development lead teachers ranked professional development activities focused on literacy instructional across content areas lowest with a mean score of 1.73.

Table 8

*Mean Rankings of Resources by Respondent Group*

Resources	Total Sample N = 57	Principals N = 19	Assistant Principals N = 16	Reading Department Chairpersons N = 10	Professional Development Lead Teachers N = 11
Additional Discretionary Funds for Instructional Materials and Literacy Training	2.30	2.00	2.31	2.60	2.55
Professional Development Activities Focused on Literacy Instruction Across Content Areas	2.81	3.11	3.13	3.00	1.73**
Reading Coach Added To the Middle School Staff	2.89	3.11	2.75	2.00	3.55*
Consultant Services at Middle School to Support Literacy Instruction Strategies	1.46**	0.94**	1.67**	1.60**	1.82
Data Review Days Built Into the School Calendar	2.61	2.94	2.29	2.30	2.82
Collaborative Planning Protocol to Support Literacy Instruction	3.18*	3.17*	3.50*	3.30*	2.55

Note. The means have been reverse coded. The higher mean score indicates a higher average ranking of the resource. \* Indicates resource with highest mean for respondent group. \*\* Indicates resource with the lowest mean for the respondent group.

**Conclusions**

The principal leadership practices identified by middle school principals, assistant principals, reading department chairpersons, and professional development lead teachers as having the most importance, least importance, most impact, and least impact to middle school student reading achievement success are aligned to District K Leadership Standards 1 – 8 (District K, 2015). When identifying the practices that

are the most important, the four school-based leader groups identified implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students. Three of the four groups selected developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use. These two practices align with District K Leadership Standard 1: The principal sets high expectations for achievement based upon individualized tailoring of instruction, rigorous data analysis and evaluation of the effective instructional practices. Three of the groups selected offering staff members professional development opportunities that support cross content literacy instruction. This practice aligns to District K Leadership Standard 6: The principal demonstrates human resource and managerial leadership. Two groups selected creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students. This practice is aligned to District K Leadership Standard 4: The principal builds a shared vision, fosters shared goals, and communicates high performance expectations. One group selected providing feedback to teachers based on informal and formal observations in order to improve instruction. This practice is aligned to District K Leadership Standard 3: The principal monitors effective instructional practices through observation and evaluation.

This alignment of the selected most important principal practices with District K Leadership Standards implies that school leaders perceive that the principal practices have a direct impact on the instructional core at the center of the District K Conceptual Framework. By implementing a rigorous curriculum, developing a schedule that maximizes time, and developing a vision, principals focus energy on

improving academic excellence. By providing feedback to teachers and offering staff members professional development opportunities, principals impact the high performing work force. It is clear that the leader groups identified what they perceive to be principal practices that can impact teaching and learning with immediate student literacy achievement.

Participants also identified leadership practices that they perceive to be least important to student reading achievement success and align to District K Leadership Standards. All groups selected collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals, and three groups selected including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals. These two practices align with District K Leadership Standard 7: The principal demonstrates strong external leadership. Furthermore, three groups selected developing a student based budget that maximizes available school resources including people, materials, technology, and funding that aligns with District K Leadership Standard 6: The principal demonstrates human resource and managerial leadership. One group selected creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students that align with District K Leadership Standard 4: The principal builds a shared vision, fosters shared goals, and communicates high performance expectations. That same group selected developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use which is aligned to District K Leadership Standard 1: The principal sets high expectations for achievement based upon individualized tailoring of instruction, rigorous data analysis and evaluation of the effective instructional

practices.

Unexpectedly, the leader groups unanimously identified collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals, and three groups selected including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals as least important principal practices. These practices align to District K Leadership Practice 7, demonstrates strong external leadership, which supports Family and Community Engagement in the Coherence Framework. The survey results imply that school leaders feel that family and community collaboration and participation in decision-making are unnecessary. This may be misleading given the time and effort put into activities such as parent conferencing, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, academic information nights, and business partnership pursuits. Within the limitations of this study, school leaders may perceive the leadership activities selected as least important to be those they have the least ability to control. For example, while scheduled, PTA meetings and academic information nights are not mandatory for parents. Therefore, school leaders cannot guarantee that the work they do with parents will have a direct impact on teaching and learning.

The participants selected principal leadership practices that they perceive to have the most impact on student reading achievement. All four groups selected ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses and participates in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study and data analysis. These two practices align with District K Leadership Standard 1: The principal sets high expectations for achievement based upon

individualized tailoring of instruction, rigorous data analysis and evaluation of the effective instructional practices. Two groups indicated monitors and analyzes formative and summative student achievement data to inform decision-making which aligns to District K Leadership Standard 2: The principal sets high expectations for achievement based upon individualized tailoring of instruction, rigorous data analysis and evaluation of the effective instructional practices. Two groups also selected creates a positive school climate characterized by respectful interactions that aligns with District K Leadership Standard 5: The principal demonstrates a commitment to excellence, equity, and innovation. Only one group selected uses the student based budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing which aligns to District K Leadership Standard 6: The principal demonstrates human resource and managerial leadership.

Theses results point to school leader groups' perceptions that those leadership practices that align with District K Leadership Standards 1 and 2 directly impact the instructional core. Standards 1 and 2 impact academic excellence and high achieving workforce. It may be that the participants feel able to influence student achievement by ensuring that all students receive rigorous curricula and that teachers participate in regularly scheduled collaborative planning. Furthermore, they indicated that analyzing formative and summative data impacts student reading achievement. These leadership activities may be perceived as most important because they are controllable. Principals can ensure that rigorous curricula are in place, that collaborative planning is ongoing, and that formative and summative data are analyzed for instructional decision-making. Through these practices, principals' can

affect student success.

The participants selected the leadership practices that they perceived to have the least impact on student reading achievement that are aligned to District K Leadership Standards. All four groups selected shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners. This leadership practice aligns with District K Leadership Standard 7: The principal demonstrates strong external leadership. Three groups selected uses the Framework for Teaching to conduct formal observations and provide feedback to teachers which aligns to District K Leadership Standard 3: The principal monitors effective instructional practices through observation and evaluation. Three groups also selected leads the school in Data Wise process to identify and address the school's problem of practice which aligned to District K Leadership Standards 4 and 8: The principal builds a shared vision, fosters shared goals, and communicates high performance expectation and demonstrates knowledge of the use of technology and data. Three groups selected uses the Student Based Budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing which aligns with District K Standards 6: The principal demonstrates human resource and managerial leadership. One group indicated encourages staff to become instructional leaders by distributing responsibility for achieving school goals which aligns with District K Leadership Standard 4: The principal builds a shared vision, fosters shared goals, and communicates high performance expectations.

The study results of leadership practices that were perceived to have the least impact were, like those that were perceived to be least important, unexpected. The three practices that stand out include sharing performance data with families and

communities, using the Framework for Teaching during formal observations, and leads the school in the Data Wise process. Sharing performance data with families and community members supports District K Leadership Standard 7 and aligns with Family and Community Engagement within the Coherence Framework. The survey results imply that school leaders perceive this as having little direct impact on the instructional core. This may be attributed to the limited influence principals have outside their sphere of control. Parents may attend school functions, but they may implement as much or as little as they decide is needed from what they learned at the school function within their homes. Principals, on the other hand, may feel that leadership practices that they have the ability to manage and monitor within the schoolhouse have more impact on student reading achievement. For example, a principal may recommend that parents read 30 minutes a day with their children at home. Parents have the option to complete this activity as it fits their schedules and their perception of their children's needs. Within the schoolhouse, however, a principal can collaborate with teachers to create a reading schedule within each classroom. The principal can then monitor and regulate the schedule's implementation. In this way, the principal practice has more impact on student reading achievement.

School leaders also identified use of the Framework for Teaching and Data Wise as principal practices that are perceived as having least impact on reading achievement. While the use of the Framework for Teaching is aligned to District K Leadership Standard 4 and is seen to impact the instructional core directly through teacher observation and feedback, the Data Wise process is aligned to District K



Leadership Standard 6 and is seen to support the entire Coherence Framework by serving as the outer ring of the framework. School leaders may have viewed these practices as managerial in nature and may have selected them as being operational practices rather than instructional. This is surprising given the fact that both practices support and build the capacity of a high performing workforce.

School leaders may feel that the time required to complete a formal observation utilizing the Framework for Teaching may outweigh the value of the feedback that is provided to the teacher. School leaders may also feel that the teacher cycles for formal observations are less than effective given the timelines and numbers of observations required. The requirements of the system may inadvertently result in school leaders perceiving the Framework for Teaching as a compliance driven activity rather than a meaningful instructional practice.

The Data Wise process was also identified as a practice that has the least impact on student reading achievement. As the Data Wise process is relatively new to District K, school leaders' perceptions may be based on a lack of in-depth understanding. Furthermore, school leaders may not have made the connection between the Data Wise process in which school staff develop a problem of practice about teacher work and the impact providing focused professional development to address that problem of practice ultimately can have on student achievement.

The three top ranked resources identified as needed to increase the effectiveness of principals in order to improve reading achievement at middle schools included implementing a collaborative planning protocol to support literacy instruction, adding a reading coach to the middle school staff, and providing

professional development to support literacy instruction across content areas. Each of these would support the principal leadership practices most closely associated with the Instructional Core activities including academic excellence, high performing workforce, and organizational effectiveness.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this study indicated few differences between middle school principals', assistant principals', reading department chairpersons', and professional development lead teachers' perceptions of principal leadership practices that are most important to and have the greatest impact on student reading achievement success. Furthermore, the findings indicated that participants' three top ranked resources needed to increase the effectiveness of principals in order to improve reading achievement at middle schools include implementing a collaborative planning protocol to support literacy instruction, adding a reading coach to the middle school staff, and providing professional development activities focused on literacy instruction across the content areas. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Implement a systemic collaborative planning protocol to support literacy instruction.
2. Allocate funds in the middle school student based budgets to support the addition of a reading coach to each middle school staff.
3. Provide professional development activities focused on literacy instruction across all content areas.

4. Provide professional development for school leaders in family and community engagement that emphasizes the value added by family and community contributions to decision making and student achievement.
5. Form a Framework for Teaching Task Force that includes school-based administrators to review required timelines, study on-cycle requirements, and provide professional development that emphasizes data supporting teacher improvement.
6. Provide professional development to support the Data Wise process and to demonstrate the improved student achievement gained through its implementation.

## Appendix A

### Survey Instrument



### Principal Leadership Practices Survey

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#### Informed Consent Form

**Project Title:**

Principal Effectiveness: Middle School Leaders' Perceptions of Principal Practices to Improve Middle School Reading Achievement

**Introduction:**

Your participation in the Principal Leadership Practices Survey will include a 15-minute web-based questionnaire. The survey asks questions about the importance and impact of principal leadership practices on student literacy achievement, resources that might improve principal effectiveness, and demographics. First you will be asked to select what you consider to be the three most and least important leadership practices to improve student literacy. Second you will be asked to select what you consider to be the three leadership practices that have the greatest and least impact on improving literacy achievement. Third you will be asked to rank order resources that might improve principal effectiveness in improving literacy achievement. Fourth you will be asked to supply demographic information. Survey participants' names and email addresses were obtained through public sources.

**Risks/Discomforts:**

There are no more than minimal risks known to participants. In order to prevent breach of confidentiality, I will maintain sole ownership of the data collected. Data will be reported in the aggregate by professional role. Names of participants and schools will not be shared.

**Benefits:**

There are no direct benefits for individual participants. However, it is hoped that through your participation, researchers will learn more about principal leadership practices that impact literacy at middle schools.

**Confidentiality:**

All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format by professional role. Individual responses will not be reported. All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the primary investigator listed below will have access to them. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator.

**Incentive:**

All participants who complete the survey in less than two weeks will be entered into a drawing to receive one of five \$100.00 VISA gift cards.

**Participation:**

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your employment status in the school system. If you desire to withdraw, please close your Internet browser.

**Questions about the Research:**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: Kathleen Brady at 240-694-9194 or at [kbrady12@umd.edu](mailto:kbrady12@umd.edu).

If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Margaret J. McLaughlin, Dissertation Director, at 301-405-2337, 3119 Benjamin Building, UMDCP, [mjm@umd.edu](mailto:mjm@umd.edu).

**Questions about your Rights as Research Participants:**

If you have questions about your right as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:

University of Maryland College Park  
Institutional Review Board Office  
1204 Marie Mount Hall  
College Park, Maryland, 20742  
E-mail: [irb@umd.edu](mailto:irb@umd.edu)  
Telephone: 301-405-0678

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

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I verify that I am at least 18 years of age, have read, understood, and printed a copy of the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

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Yes



No



Survey Completion



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Please indicate your perception regarding the importance of the following principal leadership practices on improving student literacy at middle school. Note that you are not being asked to evaluate the principal. You are being asked to consider carefully which leadership practices you feel are MOST IMPORTANT. Think about how principal practices relate to overall student literacy and achievement.

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Choose the three (3) leadership practices that you consider to be the MOST IMPORTANT to improving student literacy from the following:

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- ☐ Creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students.
- ☐ Implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students.
- ☐ Developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use.
- ☐ Supporting staff in creating and monitoring student learning objectives that are rigorous yet attainable for student learning.
- ☐ Developing a student based budget that maximizes available school resources including people, materials, technology, and funding.
- ☐ Collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals.
- ☐ Including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals.
- ☐ Offering staff members professional development opportunities that support cross content literacy instruction.
- ☐ Providing feedback to teachers based on informal and formal observations in order to improve instruction.
- ☐ Utilizing a variety of data to guide decision making.

0%  100%





Please indicate your perception regarding the importance of the following principal leadership practices on improving student literacy at middle school. Note that you are not being asked to evaluate the principal. You are being asked to consider carefully which leadership practices you feel are LEAST IMPORTANT. Think about how principal practices relate to overall student literacy and achievement.

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Choose the three (3) leadership practices that you consider to be the LEAST IMPORTANT to improving student literacy from the following:

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- ☐ Creating a vision for improving literacy that is aligned to academic standards in reading and reflects clear expectations for all students.
- ☐ Implementing a rigorous curriculum that provides literacy instruction across contents for all students.
- ☐ Developing a schedule that maximizes time for literacy instruction and staff collaboration for lesson development and data use.
- ☐ Supporting staff in creating and monitoring student learning objectives that are rigorous yet attainable for student learning.
- ☐ Developing a student based budget that maximizes available school resources including people, materials, technology, and funding.
- ☐ Collaborating with community partners to support school literacy goals.
- ☐ Including families in academic activities and decision-making that support school literacy goals.
- ☐ Offering staff members professional development opportunities that support cross content literacy instruction.
- ☐ Providing feedback to teachers based on informal and formal observations in order to improve instruction.
- ☐ Utilizing a variety of data to guide decision making.





Please indicate your perception regarding the impact of the following principal leadership practices on improving student literacy at middle school. Note that you are not being asked to evaluate the principal. You are being asked to consider carefully which leadership practices you feel have the **GREATEST IMPACT** on student achievement. Think about how principal practices relate to overall student literacy and achievement.

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Choose the three (3) leadership practices that you consider to have the **GREATEST IMPACT** on student literacy achievement from the following:

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- ☐ Uses the Framework for Teaching to conduct formal observations and provide feedback to teachers.
- ☐ Participates in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study and data analysis.
- ☐ Leads the school in Data Wise process to identify and address the school's problem of practice.
- ☐ Creates a positive school climate characterized by respectful interactions.
- ☐ Shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners.
- ☐ Provides professional development opportunities for staff to increase technology and data resource use.
- ☐ Monitors and analyzes formative and summative student achievement data to inform decision making.
- ☐ Ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses.
- ☐ Encourages staff to become instructional leaders by distributing responsibility for achieving school goals.
- ☐ Uses the Student Based Budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing.







Please indicate your perception regarding the impact of the following principal leadership practices on improving student literacy at middle school. Note that you are not being asked to evaluate the principal. You are being asked to consider carefully which leadership practices you feel have the LEAST IMPACT on student achievement. Think about how principal practices relate to overall student literacy and achievement.

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Choose the three (3) leadership practices that you consider to have the LEAST IMPACT on student literacy achievement from the following:

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- ☐ Uses the Framework for Teaching to conduct formal observations and provide feedback to teachers.
- ☐ Participates in weekly collaborative planning activities such as lesson study and data analysis.
- ☐ Leads the school in Data Wise process to identify and address the school's problem of practice.
- ☐ Creates a positive school climate characterized by respectful interactions.
- ☐ Shares school performance data with all stakeholders including families and community partners.
- ☐ Provides professional development opportunities for staff to increase technology and data resource use.
- ☐ Monitors and analyzes formative and summative student achievement data to inform decision making.
- ☐ Ensures that all students including those receiving special education, talented and gifted, and English as a second language services receive rigorous instruction in all courses.
- ☐ Encourages staff to become instructional leaders by distributing responsibility for achieving school goals.
- ☐ Uses the Student Based Budgeting system to reduce class size through staffing.





Please consider the following resources that could be utilized to improve the effectiveness of principal leadership practices in order to increase literacy achievement at middle schools.

Rank the following resources in order from 1 Most Important to 6 Least Important based on what you feel would be most beneficial to improve literacy at your school.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Additional discretionary funds for instructional materials and literacy training.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development activities focused on literacy instruction across content areas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading Coach added to the middle school staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Consultant services at your middle school to support literacy instruction strategies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Data Review Days built into the school calendar.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborative planning protocol to support literacy instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Survey Completion 0% 100%

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Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)



Please complete the following questions to provide background information.

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What is your professional role?

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- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Assistant Principal
- ☐ Reading Department Chairperson
- ☐ Professional Development Lead Teacher

How many years in total have you worked in education?

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- ☐ 0 – 5 years
- ☐ 6 – 10 years
- ☐ 11 – 15 years
- ☐ 16 – 20 years
- ☐ 21 or more years

How many years have you worked in middle school?

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- ☐ 0 – 5 years
- ☐ 6 – 10 years
- ☐ 11 – 15 years
- ☐ 16 – 20 years
- ☐ 21 or more years

How many years have you worked at your current middle school?

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- ☐ 0 – 5 years
- ☐ 6 – 10 years
- ☐ 11 – 15 years
- ☐ 16 – 20 years
- ☐ 21 or more years

What is your highest educational level completed?

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- ☐ BA/BS
- ☐ MA
- ☐ MA+30
- ☐ Doctorate

What was your area of initial certification?

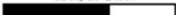
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- ☐ Early Childhood Education PreK – 3
- ☐ Elementary Education 1 – 6
- ☐ Elementary and 7 – 8
- ☐ Middle School 4 – 9
- ☐ Secondary 7 – 12
- ☐ Special Education
- ☐ Reading Specialist
- ☐ Other

Did your initial certification require literacy training?

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- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

0%  100%

>>

## Appendix B

### Participation Emails

#### Request to Conduct Research Email:

To: Principal Name  
From: Kathleen R. Brady (kbrady12@umd.edu)  
Subject: Request To Conduct Research  
Date: February 4, 2016

Good Afternoon Principal,

As a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland (UMD), I have been granted authorization to conduct research in Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) as a requirement of degree completion. Both the UMD and the PGCPS Department of Testing, Research, and Evaluation, through the Institutional Review Board (IRB), have reviewed my study and granted me authorization to conduct the study. I am requesting your permission to conduct the research at your school.

The study will investigate middle school leaders' perceptions of principal practices to improve middle school reading achievement. The study will be conducted through a 15-minute web-based questionnaire that will be emailed to select leaders in your school. The select leaders will include the principal, the assistant principals, the reading specialist, the literacy professional development lead teacher, and the instructional lead teacher. The survey asks questions about the importance and impact of principal leadership practices on student literacy achievement, resources that might improve principal effectiveness, and demographics. The select leaders will not be asked to evaluate the work of the principal, but rather they will be asked to think deeply about leadership practices. All responses will be reported in the aggregate by professional role, and names of participants and schools will not be shared.

I have attached the *Principal Permission to Conduct Research Study* document and ask that you indicate your willingness to have the study conducted at your school on the lower portion of the form. I will pick up the completed form at your school and provide you with a copy for your records. If you have questions about the study or would like to discuss the research, please call me at [240-694-9194](tel:240-694-9194) or email me at [kbrady12@umd.edu](mailto:kbrady12@umd.edu).

Thank you for considering my request to conduct my study at your school. Please note that your participation in the research study is completely voluntary. You and your school leaders have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your employment status in the school system.

## **Participant Invitation to Complete Survey Email**

To: Participant Email Addresses  
From: Kathleen R. Brady (kbrady12@umd.edu)  
Subject: Principal Leadership Practices Survey  
Date: February 26, 2016

Dear Middle School Leader:

The Prince George's County Public Schools Department of Research and Evaluation has granted me permission to conduct a study of school leaders' perceptions of the importance of principal leadership practices at the middle school level. This study is a part of my doctoral program at the University of Maryland College Park.

I invite you to participate in this research study by completing a leadership survey. You will be asked to provide your perceptions of the importance of principal leadership practices that effect student literacy achievement and resources that you perceive will improve principal effectiveness to improve literacy achievement. You will also be asked to provide information about your background and experience. Your participation will contribute to the research on educational leadership practices that contribute to effective principals.

The survey should take you no longer than 15 minutes. All participants who complete the survey before March 11, 2016 will be entered into a drawing for one of five \$100.00 VISA gift cards. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated and will be kept completely confidential. All data will be secured and available to me alone. Participants will be referenced by their positions only.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the survey consent form and survey tool and submit electronically.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me at 240-694-9194 or at [kbrady12@umd.edu](mailto:kbrady12@umd.edu). You may also contact Dr. Margaret McLaughlin, chairperson of my committee, by calling the university at 301-405-3590.

**Use this link to access the survey:**

Or copy and paste the URL below into your Internet browser:  
Thank you for your participation.

Kathleen R. Brady  
[kbrady12@umd.edu](mailto:kbrady12@umd.edu)  
240-694-9194

## **Participant Reminder Email #1**

To: Participant Email Address  
From: Kathleen R. Brady (kbrady12@umd.edu)  
Subject: Principal Leadership Practices Survey Reminder  
Date: March 3, 2016

Greetings,

I recently contacted you about completing my short 15-minute survey regarding your perceptions of the importance of principal leadership practices to literacy achievement at middle schools. Your participation will help the school district learn more about principal leadership practices that impact literacy at middle schools.

**The last day to submit the survey is March 11, 2016.**

Please take a few moments to complete the survey. Your answers will be kept entirely confidential. Participants who complete the survey before March 11, 2016 will be entered into a drawing for one of five \$100.00 VISA gift cards.

**Click here** to take the 15-minute survey.

Thanks,  
Kathleen  
kbrady12@umd.edu  
(240) 694-9194

## **Participant Reminder Email #2**

To: Participant Email Address  
From: Kathleen R. Brady (kbrady12@umd.edu)  
Subject: Principal Leadership Practices Survey Reminder  
Date: March 7, 2016

Greetings,

I recently contacted you about completing my short 15-minute survey regarding your perceptions of the importance of principal leadership practices to literacy achievement at middle schools. Your participation will help the school district learn more about principal leadership practices that impact literacy at middle schools.

**The last day to submit the survey is March 11, 2016.**

Please take a few moments to complete the survey. Your answers will be kept entirely confidential. Participants who complete the survey before March 11, 2016 will be entered into a drawing for one of five \$100.00 VISA gift cards.

**Click here** to take the 15-minute survey.

Thanks,  
Kathleen  
kbrady12@umd.edu  
(240) 694-9194



### **Participant Reminder Email #3**

To: Participant Email Address  
From: Kathleen R. Brady (kbrady12@umd.edu)  
Subject: Principal Leadership Practices Survey Reminder  
Date: March 10, 2016

Greetings,

I recently contacted you about completing my short 15-minute survey regarding your perceptions of the importance of principal leadership practices to literacy achievement at middle schools. Your participation will help the school district learn more about principal leadership practices that impact literacy at middle schools.

**The last day to submit the survey is March 11, 2016.**

Please take a few moments to complete the survey. Your answers will be kept entirely confidential. Participants who complete the survey before March 11, 2016 will be entered into a drawing for one of five \$100.00 VISA gift cards.

**Click here** to take the 15-minute survey.

Thanks,  
Kathleen  
kbrady12@umd.edu  
(240) 694-9194

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