

EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF ASSISTANT  
PRINCIPALS IN SOUTH TEXAS REGION ONE SCHOOL DISTRICTS: A CASE STUDY

A Dissertation

by

VERONICA YVETTE LERMA

BIS, University of Texas Pan American, 2001  
M.Ed, University of Texas at Brownsville, 2006

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

Guang Zeng, Ph.D.  
Chair

Rosa M. Banda, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

D. Scott Elliff, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

Devanayagam Palaniappan, Ph.D.  
Graduate Faculty Representative

December 2023

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explored assistant principals' practices in instructional leadership. This study was conducted in two small school districts in the South Texas Region 1 area. Research questions included (a) What instructional leadership behaviors are assistant principals in Region 1 engaged in? (b) What support is needed for assistant principals in Region 1 as instructional leaders? (c) What relationship between the principal and assistant principal fosters the instructional leadership practices of the assistant principal in Region 1? The conceptual framework for instructional leadership, based on the Hallinger Model of Instructional Leadership (1985), served as the guide for this study. To triangulate data sources, demographic profiles, interviews, and document analysis were used. The study's findings indicated that assistant principals exhibit a range of instructional leadership behaviors consistent with the conceptual framework of instructional leadership. The data analysis revealed the following three main themes: (a) communication and collaboration skills are vital to the AP role, (b) challenges of being an assistant principal, (c) seeking multiple forms of support. The results of this study add to the body of knowledge on assistant principals by examining the instructional leadership practices used by assistant principals, identifying challenges they face as instructional leaders, and providing recommendations to support the leadership development of assistant principals in the South Texas Region 1 school districts.

## DEDICATION

First, I would like to express my gratitude to God for giving me the confidence that I would successfully complete this journey. I dedicate this work to my family with a grateful heart. Without their love, support, and encouragement, I might not have been able to accomplish this.

To my significant other, Gilbert. You took on the brunt of the family chores, dinner, and taking Jake to and from where he needed to be. I appreciate all you have done throughout this journey. I would not have accomplished this without your love and support.

Thank you to my daughters Victoria and Ashlee for their encouragement and faith in me. Your patience and understanding as I completed my bachelor's when you were toddlers, then my master's degree while you were in elementary school, and now as adults as I completed my doctorate. My being in school for the greater part of your lives has been difficult for you both.

To my son, Jake Ryan, thank you for understanding all the nights I had to work instead of dedicating time to you. I hope this has taught you the value of education and perseverance.

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To my mother, Santos B. Lerma, who instilled the love of learning within me from a very young age; my love of learning got me to the point I am today. Mom, thank you so much for all you have done for me throughout my educational journey.

This is the last ride, my family. I have reached the end of my school journey, and I love you all very much for seeing me through all this. This dissertation is the work of all of us. Dream big, believe in yourself, and you can accomplish anything you put your mind to.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

According to Grissom et al. (2021), a wealth of knowledge of school leadership has transformed over the last two decades (p. xi). Due to high-stakes accountability, multi-faceted teacher evaluation systems, and an increase in legislative attention to educational equity for all, what leaders must be cognizant of and how they manage their time has been significantly revamped (Grissom et al., p. xi, 2021). In addition, school leaders have a substantially more challenging job due to a critical need for increased student learning after the pandemic (Duffrin, 2022). Assistant principals (APs) are school leaders who fill essential support positions in administration for schools. Weller and Weller (2002) stressed that the assistant principal (AP) is a topic that has been granted insufficient research and discussion in educational leadership, regardless of the significant position they hold in school administration and improving student achievement (Armstrong, 2010; Hunt, 2011; Morgan, 2018). To understand how an assistant principal can share the instructional leadership (IL) role, it is vital to first be cognizant of the origin of the AP position.

### **Background of the Study**

The demand to handle steadily growing enrollments in consolidated schools gave rise to the historical occurrence of APs in the 1900s (Glanz, 2004). According to Mertz and McNeely (1999), the position was developed for convenience rather than for a particular purpose (Gearing, 1966, p.9; Hentges, 1976). The first APs emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to reduce some of the demands on principals. They were responsible for managing schools' administrative and operational tasks, such as student discipline and staff management (Glanz, 1994).

Glanz (1994) noted that school reform during the 19th century aimed to turn schools into structured, effectively run, centralized organizations where superintendents would be responsible for making decisions about education as well as overseeing the routine functions of the schools. Assistant principals were hired in the United States in the late 19th century to raise the caliber of instruction in public schools. No formal training was required to acquire the position. According to Glanz (1994), the rationale behind the assistant principalship was to decrease the workload of the principal. Originally, APs were responsible for managing schools' administrative and operational aspects, such as overseeing student discipline and managing staff (Glanz, 1994).

Prior to 1900, school supervision was carried out primarily by the superintendent, with limited responsibility assigned to principals; nevertheless, the school system became more complex after 1900. The superintendent removed himself or herself from the routine functions of the schools (Glanz, 1994). Due to this separation, the principal, who served as the school's "head teacher," assumed control over school administration but had no authority (Glanz, 1994). Schooling grew dramatically in the twentieth century, from 1895 to 1920. Due to an influx of immigrants coming into the country, enrollment surged from 14 to 21.5 million pupils (Glanz, 1994). The principal was not released from teaching responsibilities until 1920 and was subsequently only given limited autonomy to produce administrative reports and expected to obey the superintendent's directives (Glanz, 1994). The principal position developed a more managerial role between 1920 and 1930 as a result of an increase in administrative responsibilities, and other supervisory roles were created to fulfill the needs and demands of the educational system (Glanz, 1994).

Special supervisors and general supervisors were the two types of supervisors that were frequently encountered in schools. The special supervisor did not have any autonomous power



and did not conduct any evaluations; they did, however, aid less seasoned teachers in mastering the subject they were teaching (Glanz, 2004). Conversely, general supervisors were more involved in supervisory and appraisal tasks. By the 1930s, the general supervisor assumed the obligations of the special supervisor and became the principal's right-hand person (Glanz, 2004).

The term "assistant principal" originated in literature in the 1940s and 1950s to depict the connection of the principal to the general supervisor more appropriately (Glanz, 2004). Assistant principals reported to the principal and were treated as advisors with little to no official authority. In many instances, the AP was cautioned "not to lose sight of the fact that the superintendent controls the whole system, and the principal manages the school; they simply served as a specialist whose responsibility was to assist" (Sloyer, 1928, p. 429, as referenced in Glanz, 2004).

In the late 1950s and 1960s, the assistant principal position evolved to include additional educational duties, such as student instruction and curriculum development, due to the absorption of the special supervisor duties. This shift of responsibilities was in acknowledgment of the growing prominence of the changes in education and the need for more educational leadership in schools. The AP's responsibilities for the welfare and protection of the school expanded during the 1970s. At this time, assistant principals also began to take on a more active part in evaluating and managing teachers and providing leadership in school improvement efforts. Consequently, research into assistant principal roles began to emerge.

The 1980s period of educational reform created a need for the position of the AP to adapt to the newfound issues confronting schools (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012).

By the 1990s, there was a call from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) for reform of the role of the AP to include more instruction in their roles; this call is

still in effect today. Many demands of accountability placed on APs not present 40 years ago have added layers of stress and apprehension to a sufficiently challenging job. A few of the pressures on today's school leaders encompass various factors such as new teacher and principal evaluation systems, adjustments to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), state assessment changes, technological advancements, and serious learning gaps following the pandemic.

Twenty years of inquiry on principals and assistant principals have been integrated into two studies by The Wallace Foundation, which note how effective principals raise student achievement in their classrooms and emphasize the unique roles APs play in advancing school equity (Duffrin, 2022). The Wallace report from 2021, "How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research," asserts that the principal's influence on pupil achievement is significantly greater than previously believed (Grissom et al., 2021). The researcher's findings indicated that in terms of effectiveness, principals ranked in the 75th percentile when compared to teachers. They were found to have extended the math and reading knowledge of students by three months on standardized exams, while teachers added four months of learning (Grissom et al., 2021). Additionally, researchers pointed out that administrators affect learning for all students across the board, whereas teachers primarily affect accomplishment for their specific students (Grissom et al., 2021). A strong principal optimizes the opportunity for significant effects (Duffrin, 2022); however, the principal cannot do the job alone.

According to the 2021 Wallace Foundation Report, "The Role of the Assistant Principal: Evidence and Insights for Advancing School Leadership," the number of APs has increased vastly in current times. The number of APs and principals with precursory AP backgrounds has

been continuously rising over the past 25 years (Goldring et al., 2021). According to the researchers, there were 44,000 APs in the country in 1990; by 2015, that number had increased to 81,000, an extraordinary growth of 83% (Goldring et al., 2021). The body of information about APs, however, has not expanded at the same rate as their prevalence in schools. The assistant principal devotes a preponderance of time to duties unassociated with instructional leadership, which impacts both the present and future learning of students (Goldring et al., 2021).

Goldring et al. (2021) noted duties, the best ways to support APs in their current roles, and the most compelling manner to develop them to flourish as principals had not been agreed upon by policymakers, practitioners, and researchers (p. xvii). The authors of the report demand a reexamination of the AP role, much like the NASSP report did in the 1990s (Goldring et al., 2021).

An abundance of research has been completed on the principal throughout the century; however, Brooks and Niewenhuizen (2013) found that the literature on the assistant principal is inconsistent. Barnett, Soho, and Oleszewski (2012) note that research typically emphasizes principal leadership instead of AP leadership, following Austin and Brown's 1970 report, which stated that APs were in charge of school management, including the routine functions associated with school operations and physical necessities of the instructional program. Five decades have passed; however, AP's responsibilities and duties have remained essentially the same (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). Although the literature offers various definitions of the AP position, Neumann and Somoza-Norton (2021) argue that the traditional position of attendance and discipline manager does not correspond with the instructional leadership qualities required as a leader of campuses in the twenty-first century. The development of learners who are workforce-ready and prepared for college in order to lead in a technologically advanced and globally

integrated society is a requirement for 21st-century leadership skills (Oleszewski et al., 2012). According to Hilliard and Newsome (2013), APs should serve in a wider capacity as instructional leaders rather than just serving as conflict organizers, hallway and bus monitors, and disciplinarian mediators (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013).

Early attempts to define the term instructional leadership in the 1980s were limited as compared to the more comprehensive definitions of the 2000s (Searby et al., 2017). National and state standards have evolved to reflect how new leaders should be prepared for their responsibilities as different notions of instructional leadership emerged (Searby et al., 2017, p. 405). Searby et al. (2017) assert that the constant and unwavering mandate is that principals must make instructional leadership a top priority (p. 405). According to Townsend, Acker-Hocevar, Ballenger, and Place (2013), this resulted in an extensive workload for principals, which renders the role of a single "heroic leader" impossible (Searby et al., 2017, p. 405). Consequently, leadership in schools must involve collaboration where the assistant principal has a duty to be a leader in the learning space or an instructional leader (Owen-Fitzgerald, 2010). Instructional leadership must be purposefully distributed among the principal and assistant principal. According to a number of researchers (Pounder & Crow, 2005; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Oleszewski et al., 2012; McBrayer et al., 2018), assistant principals must be exposed to the duties associated with instructional leadership, professional development, chairing leadership teams, and regular participation in professional learning community discussion with staff.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to researchers, the assistant principal's leadership responsibility is ambiguous due to unwritten regulations and standards (Hutton, 2012; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Goldring et al., 2021). It is also problematic as the concentration is not solely on either instructional

leadership or management but rather a combination of both. The AP lacks sufficient time to participate in essential instructional activities on account of the administrative and operational duties they are overloaded with to keep the school running (Brooks & Niewenhuizen, 2013). They handle urgent situations almost daily, and their agenda conceivably can be altered at any given moment. APs' day-to-day tasks are erratic and ever-changing due to unanticipated employee absences, unforeseen building or transportation issues, and student behavior challenges (Hartzell, 1993). The duties of APs are described by Marshall and Davidson (2016) as "inconsistent and ill-defined, requiring instinct and foresight of potential problems" (p. 274). Due to additional obligations, APs are not afforded enough time to do all the tasks expected of them, although they have indicated they prefer to participate more in instructional leadership tasks (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Walker (2009) points out that it can be extremely difficult for school administrators to achieve a balance amid what they desire to do and what their schedule allows them to do; assistant principals frequently struggle with this (McCarthy & Hoover, 2016). As a result, activities involving instructional leadership are neglected; however, the expectation of the AP to resolve issues and sustain a productive learning environment in the classroom remains (Brooks & Niewenhuizen, 2013). Researchers urge that enhancement of the instructional program in the AP role must be at the forefront (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).

Many principals depart or announce their intention to quit their jobs each year, necessitating the need for a pipeline of capable APs to fill the void. According to Goldring & Taie (2018), as reported in Goldring et al. 2021, "18% of public school system principals nationwide left their institution the following year of 2015–2016." This indicates that there are roughly 18,000 principal vacancies annually. Furthermore, according to a survey, "42% of secondary principals are thinking about departing their position or transferring to a different

institution" (Levin et al., 2020). To make certain APs are prepared to undertake the principal role when the time comes, we must ensure they are exposed to and actively participate in instructional leadership duties.

Future principals must possess knowledge of instructional leadership; however, according to researchers (Oleszewski et al., 2012; Oliver, 2005; Petrides et al., 2014), assistant principals are seldom given opportunities to acquire new knowledge via professional development. Researchers highlight because they are the successors of principals, support systems must be provided for them as they build their leadership skills (Oleszewski et al., 2012). According to study findings, district leaders are starting to recognize assistant principals' undiscovered leadership capabilities and offering them professional development so they can be successful in their current positions and be prepared to pursue principalships in the future when they become available (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, as cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 286). However, Pedtrides et al. (2014) contend that not all school districts provide APs with targeted professional development.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Considering the high-stakes accountability of today, principals and assistant principals have a duty to be instructional leaders to meet the demands. The AP is often the foundational position one might hold upon entry into school administration. Assistant principals, as next in line to become principals, must be refined into instructional leaders. Behaviors essential to the enhancement instruction are apparent; however, there is much unknown concerning by what means leaders actually put these behaviors into practice regularly (Spillane et al., 2003). This qualitative case study intended to explore the instructional leadership practices of APs in the South Texas Region 1 area.

## **Research Questions**

Three research questions were formulated for this study to explore the instructional leadership practices enacted by assistant principals in their current positions. The following are the research questions:

1. What instructional leadership behaviors are assistant principals in Region 1 engaged in?
2. What support is needed for assistant principals in Region 1 as instructional leaders?
3. What relationship between the principal and assistant principal fosters the instructional leadership practices of the assistant principal in Region 1?

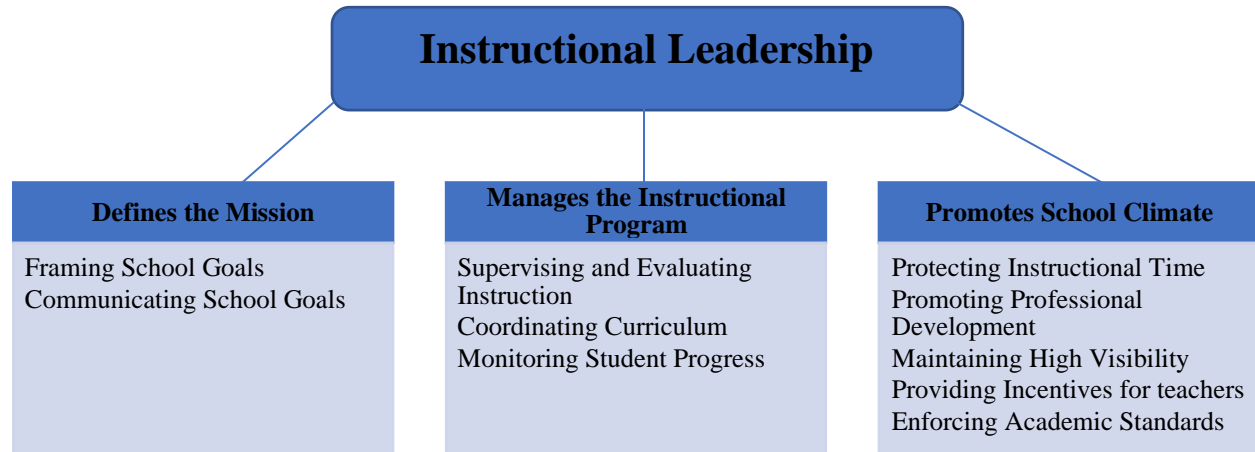
## **Conceptual Framework**

According to research, instructional leadership entails the qualities, actions, and practices necessary to successfully manage a school. Models of instructional leadership started to appear as the term grew more strongly linked to effective principals (Searby et al., 2017). The significance of instructional leadership in accomplishing an organization's goals is underscored by Hallinger's (1985) model. The approach advises instructional leaders to seek to foster a culture of cooperation and support among staff members as well as a common vision (Hallinger, 2010). Additionally, it highlights how crucial instructional leadership is in fostering and upholding a sense of accountability and ownership among staff members, as well as in coming up with novel ways to meet students' educational requirements (Hallinger, 2010).

Further, this model emphasizes the need for continual professional growth for all staff members and the necessity of ongoing evaluation to guarantee that instructional objectives are reached (Hallinger, 2010). These three dimensions together were utilized to guide this study (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework of Instructional Leadership*



*Note.* Adapted from “Assessing the Instructional Management Behaviors of Principals” by P. Hallinger & J. Murphy, 1985, *The Elementary School Journal*, 86(2), p. 221

This study utilized the conceptual model of instructional leadership to examine assistant principals' instructional leadership practices and ways to support them. The relationship concerning assistant principals and their principals was also examined to determine how this supports their leadership growth.

### **Methods**

The case study method of inquiry was utilized in this study's qualitative methodology (Yin, 2014). An issue-specific case study selects one bounded case to investigate the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the single-bounded case is framed by the APs. A case study was selected for this study to attain discernment into instructional leadership practices employed by APs in their roles and the support needed for their leadership development. Semi-structured interviews with current APs from small school districts in the Region 1 area of South Texas provided insight into how APs enact instructional leadership duties, including strategies



they use to balance management and instructional leadership duties, challenges faced in their roles, and support provided to them which could be translated into future best practices.

To enable the participants to convey their ideas in their own words, a semi-structured interview approach was utilized. School districts of South Texas within the Region 1 area provided the context for gathering best practices via purposeful sampling. Small school districts were identified via the small school consortium of the Regional Service Center. Only those schools identified within the small school consortium of Region 1 were used for site selection. In this case, 14 school districts met the classification criteria. To select participants for the study's interviewees, the researcher used a purposeful sampling strategy with predetermined criteria. APs who monitor instruction as part of their assigned job duties were chosen and interviewed to describe their practice. A more thorough discussion of the methodology is detailed in chapter three.

### **Positionality Statement**

The use of my subjectivity as a researcher as a tool in the interpretation and analysis of the data was very important. My pre- and post-study thought processes centered on the significance of instructional leadership because I have been an educator for more than 20 years and an administrator for the last 10 years in a small school district. Assistant principals significantly impact student learning as a key administrative position in schools. I believe that we must develop our assistant principals through professional development, coaching, and mentoring. These individuals are often forgotten leaders, left to carry out tasks that ensure the school runs, which allows them little time to perform instructional leadership tasks to prepare them as future principals.

It's crucial to recognize my role as a researcher. It is important to take into consideration my experience as a former assistant principal, principal, and current special programs coordinator, as it can influence how I think about topics based on my professional background and personal experiences, which could result in bias. When this study was conducted, I will have formerly worked in the position of AP for a little over a year, central office as an instructional/testing coordinator for three years, a campus principal for four years, a high school at-risk/testing coordinator for three years, and a special programs coordinator for a year.

Given my prior career experiences as an assistant principal, intentional and careful questioning was utilized during the interview process so as not to assume what the assistant principal participants interviewed were feeling. Mindfulness to note the experiences the participants convey and not conflate their experiences with my personal experiences as an assistant principal was intentional to mitigate bias. Experiences were noted, and memos were utilized when reviewing and coding the participant's interviews to curtail bias'. Additionally, a personal journal was used before, during, and after data collection to abate potential biases.

### **Significance of Study**

The instructional leadership role of the assistant principal, independent of the principal, is seldom researched; the majority of literature on this topic focuses on the AP's collaboration with the principal. The study's significance to educational leadership lies in the addition of research-based knowledge that can be applied to enhance the position and establish whether there is an intentional pipeline from assistant principal to principal. Research in this area provides much-needed discernment into the challenges assistant principals face as instructional leaders and an exploration of ways to support them in their roles. Assistant principals can contribute to this field of study by sharing their personal and professional experiences, which will help district and

school-level practices surrounding assistant principal leadership development. In addition, local, state, and national agencies will benefit from studies that assemble relevant literature to apply in various contexts to sustain assistant principal leadership development.

## **Limitations and Assumptions**

### **Limitations**

Factors outside of the researcher's control are limitations. Conveying limitations provides a method for identifying potential difficulties in understanding the potential weaknesses of the study (Creswell & Poth 2018). Some limitations of this research include the openness and willingness of the participants to discuss their jobs, the truthfulness of the responses of the participants in the school district where the researcher works, the duration to conduct the study, and generalizability.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are things that are believed to be true. This study assumed that assistant principals face various challenges in their roles. The participants were assumed to be sincere and forthright in their replies to the interview questions, as they were assured their responses would remain anonymous. Another assumption was that the assistant principals were genuinely interested in the study, voluntarily participated, and self-selected. An assumption was that APs are not supported in enacting the behaviors of an instructional leader. Arguably, you could assume that APs continue to wear many professional hats based on existing research and my personal experience.

### **Definition of Terms**

- *Assistant Principal*: Marshall and Hooley (2006) described an assistant principal as someone who reports directly to the principal.

- *Instructional Leadership*: Leaders with titles like "principal," "assistant principal," or "lead teacher" greatly involved in supervision via providing direct and indirect support to teachers in the classroom, with curricula and offering training as needed or warranted (Glickman et al., 2001).
- *School instructional leadership roles and responsibilities*: heavy emphasis on "curriculum, instruction, and assessment" and instructional activities (Walker, 2009, p. 217; as cited in McBrayer et al., 2018).
- *Mentoring*: According to Darsh (2004), mentoring is a form of assistance, direction, and advice given by a more knowledgeable person to a less knowledgeable person.
- *Professional Development*: The opportunity for leaders to create and improve the techniques required for school leadership is known as professional development (Conger & Benjamin, 1999).
- *School Climate*: the character and quality of school as it is perceived by students, their parents, and staff members of the school district (Texas Education Agency, 2021). This includes interpersonal interactions, instructional strategies, and organizational structures.

### **Summary**

This case study aimed to explore the instructional leadership practices employed by APs in school districts classified as small schools in Region 1. The gap in the research existed within the context of APs as instructional leaders in small schools in the South Texas Region 1 area. This study's findings were intended to identify assistant principals' instructional leadership

practices, opportunities for leadership development, and methods for overcoming challenges faced in the workplace associated with instructional leadership.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of literature offers a synopsis concerning the role of the assistant principal. An investigation of instructional leadership, including its definition, historical development, and theoretical underpinnings, is presented at the start of the literature review. Studies on the history of the AP position and their duties were examined. Additionally, research on the balance between management and instructional duties was conducted. This chapter also reviews the literature on the challenges encountered by APs, mentoring, and the necessity for professional development in current roles and as future principals. One must first comprehend the obligations of an AP and what instructional leadership entails to understand how they function as instructional leaders.

#### **Instructional Leadership**

Enhancing education and learning in the classroom is the aim of instructional leadership. According to a number of scholars, the endeavor to acknowledge the relationships between school leadership and learning has been one of the most substantial, pervasive, and tenacious global advances in educational leadership and management during the past century (Bell et al., 2003; Bridges, 1967; Erickson, 1979; Gross & Herriot, 1965; Hallinger and Heck 1996a, b, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2010; Rigby, 2014; Robinson et al., 2008; Scheer, 2012; Witziers et al., 2003; Hallinger and Wang 2015). Over the past 50 years, numerous researchers have studied various leadership models, including instructional leadership (Bossert et al., 1982; Bridges, 1967; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leitner, 1994, as cited in Hallinger and Wang, 2015). This research endeavors to acquire knowledge of the attributes of school leadership that affect student learning. The current synthesis of worldwide literature regarding educational leadership supports

the presumption that instructional leadership demonstrated the most substantial empirical evidence impact on student's academic performance among other competing models such as transformation and transactional, strategic, teacher, and distributed leadership (Bell et al., 2003; Hallinger, 2011b; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2008; Southworth 2003 as cited in Hallinger and Wang, 2015). According to the following studies (Hallinger, 2003; Heck and Hallinger, 2009, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2011; Printy, no date; Robinson et al., 2008 as cited in Hallinger and Wang, 2015), attention to the development of competency in instructional leadership is what school staff should focus on as a lever for enhancing education.

According to Bridges 1967, Erickson 1967, and Lipham 1981, in the US, instructional leadership first arose in the 1950s as a method rather than a philosophy (as cited in Hallinger & Wang 2015). The adage "good schools have good principals" was expressed mid 20th century by all school leaders, teachers, and parents in the United States (e.g., Grobman and Hynes, 1956; Gross & Herriott, 1965; Lipham, 1964, 1981; Miller, 1960; Tyack & Hansot, 1982; Uhls 1962 as cited in Hallinger & Wang, 2015, p. 2). This normative belief was frequently mentioned in school professionals' discourse, which attracted academics' attention (Hallinger & Wang, 2015, p.2).

### **History of Instructional Leadership**

A conceptual study published in the *Journal of Educational Administration* in 1967 by Edwin Bridges implanted the underpinning for investigation into instructional leadership. He evaluated the academic and professional discussion about principal instructional leadership.

Of the seven major task areas for which principals are responsible, curriculum and instruction have generated the soundest fury. 'On the one hand, the principal has been exhorted to exert instructional leadership, while on the other hand, he has been told flatly

that such a role is beyond his or any other human being's capacity.' The problem with these disputations is that the exponents of a given position have neither defined what is signified by the concept of instructional leadership nor made their assumptions explicit. (Bridges 1967, p. 136, cited in Hallinger & Wang, 2015, p. 2)

The initial research synthesis of academic leadership was circulated in 1982 by Bossert et al. This study examined primary instructional leadership studies and research on school management, instruction, and learning. It defined the function of instructional leadership, which resulted in the Far West Lab Principal Instructional Management Framework (Hallinger et al., 2020). Hallinger, Gümüş, and Bellibaş (2020) offered additional commentary on this model, stating that this framework proposed a comprehensive conceptual model to include mediators and theoretically supported moderators of primary instructional leadership expressing by what means principal instructional leadership affects student achievement (p. 1631).

The U. S. Secretary of Education published a report in 1982 on the state of education indicating that nation was “at risk” due to deteriorating educational standards marking the beginning of the education reform in the US; this research quickly shifted policymakers attention from effective schools to principal instructional leadership growing the market for research in this area (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Additionally, the NASSP bulletin published articles that urged principals to be "instructional leaders" as opposed to just "administrators" (Corey et al., 1951; Spears, 1941; Willey, 1942, as cited in Hallinger et al., 2020). These articles laid the foundation for future research on principal instructional leadership. Moreover, according to Hallinger & Wimpelberg (1992), this led to redesigning the curriculum for principal preparation and establishing Principal Leadership Academies.



Attributable to the mounting understanding of the implications of instructional leadership in enhancing student learning and accomplishment, the focus began to increase again in the late 1990s and early 2000s. According to studies that first emerged in 2004 (Leithwood et al. ), instructional leadership was vital in improving student performance. Consequently, instructional leadership has become essential to effective school reform initiatives (Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson & Robinson, 2012). The goals and expectations set in the Common Core State goals and other associated programs have further supported this more significant emphasis on instructional leadership. Consequently, an essential aspect of effective school leadership is instructional leadership.

Despite the obstacles encountered by today's leaders, instructional leadership is becoming increasingly important. According to research, instructional leadership is crucial to ensuring teachers have the tools, support, and training they need to succeed in the classroom (Rosenholtz, 1989). Furthermore, instructional leaders directly impact student achievement, as they are charged with establishing and maintaining standards, evaluating students' learning, and offering feedback and assistance to staff (Leithwood et al., 2006). Instructional leadership is all about balancing prior teaching expertise into practice as an assistant principal. Having all the right answers all the time is not necessary for effective instructional leadership. Asking the appropriate questions is essential, starting with implementing educational innovations.

### **Defining Instructional Leadership for Assistant Principals**

The contemporary literature on principal instructional leadership is vast and varied, with research from many theoretical and methodological perspectives. A significant body of current research on principal instructional leadership covers many theoretical and methodological stances. Studies have examined, for instance, the elements that affect the emergence and success

of instructional leadership (e.g., Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger & Leithwood, 2006; Murphy & Hallinger, 2005), the influence of instructional leadership in raising student achievement (e.g., Fink & Resnick, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Shoho et al., 2006), and the connections between instructional leadership and other elements of school culture (e. g., Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Harris & Muijs, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2006). In accordance with the literature, principal instructional leadership is crucial for raising student achievement and effectiveness. Bush and Glover (2002) offered the following as the most comprehensive description of instructional leadership:

Instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning and on the behavior of teachers in working with students. The leader's influence is targeted at student learning via teachers. The emphasis is on the direction and impact of influence rather than the influence process itself. (p. 10)

In other words, instructional leadership is the process that provides teachers direction and advice to make sure they are instructing students effectively. In addition to evaluating achievement and giving teachers feedback, this is achieved via offering resources, professional development, and support. Instructional leadership entails an ongoing assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of instruction to ensure students are learning and teachers are effective.

The establishment of the AP position in the mid-20th century laid the groundwork for the history of instructional leadership for assistant principals. During this time, the assistant principal's job was viewed as administrative, focusing on maintaining order and managing the school's daily operations. In this era of achievement and accountability, instructional leadership—one of the numerous duties assigned to principals—has drawn more attention than

other duties since the 1980s and continues to rule relevant works. However, the position started to change early on in the 2000s.

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, the Obama administration's Race to the Top competitive education programs, and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 have intensely concentrated on school instructional leadership. The NCLB Act of 2001 strengthened the position of assistant principals as instructional leaders by affording them a more emulated part in the classroom. The assistant principal was no longer regarded as solely an administrator but an important element of the school's teaching staff. The assistant principal was required to mentor and direct teachers in implementing best practices in the classroom.

The assistant principal's position continuously progressed in the 2010s, with an unwavering focus on assistant principals serving as instructional leaders. A report detailing the significance of assistant principals as instructional leaders was published in 2011 by the NASSP. It stressed the importance of the assistant principals' ability to support and mentor teachers and their knowledge of the most recent research on teaching strategies, as they are now required to guide instruction in their respective schools. They must support teachers by assisting them in putting best practices into practice in the classroom, being up to date on the most recent research on instructional strategies and being able to give teachers advice and direction on how to implement such strategies. They must also identify areas where the school needs to improve and work with the principal to create plans.

Since the 1980s, the idea of instructional leadership has expanded from a limited emphasis on teacher and classroom supervision to a more holistic perspective, which is also described by Printy, Marks, and Bower (2020) as a "holistic method to school improvement that involves the investigation of instructional data, the monitoring of student attainment, and the

development of instructional strategies to support student learning" (p. 15). the necessity for schools to be held accountable and the significance of academic performance has grown in recent years, and so has the movement toward a leadership style for schools. According to research, educational leaders involved in establishing clear objectives, developing the skills of teachers, and fostering a climate of cooperation and trust have the greatest influence on student accomplishment (Jenkins, 2009). Instructional leaders should also actively connect with students, teachers, and staff to foster a climate of trust, respect, and cooperation. Several approaches have been developed to define instructional leadership. The model created by Hallinger in 1985 is discussed in the following section.

### **Hallinger & Murphy's Model of Instructional Leadership (1985)**

In their research, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) studied the instructional leadership actions of 10 elementary principals in one school system. From this data, they created their model of instructional management. Using a questionnaire incorporating instructional leadership characteristics, they gathered data from principals, teachers, and central office administrators. Additionally, they looked at information from school records, including faculty meeting agendas, minutes, and narratives outlining the principal's activities to enhance curriculum and instruction at their schools. They developed a framework of instructional management grounded on their analysis of the questionnaire and organizational data, which divided the practice of instructional leadership into three categories: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and fostering a supportive environment (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, p. 5). The categories were additionally broken down into 11 instructional leadership functions, which include "setting and communicating school goals, coordinating curriculum, monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility,

rewarding teachers, upholding academic standards, and providing incentives for learning that include an appraisal system” (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, p. 5). Studies utilizing the Hallinger model will be covered in the section that follows

### **Studies Utilizing Hallinger’s Instructional Management Model**

The first researchers to explicitly connect principal leadership with student learning were Hallinger and Heck, who discovered a definitive correlation amid instructional leadership and student accomplishment in their empirically based examination of the literature (Hallinger et al., 2020). Additionally, they deduced that "leadership effects on learning" were rectified by additional school-level factors, which was in accordance with the findings of the Far West Lab model (Bossert et al., 1982) and suggested that future research explore these "paths" (Hallinger et al., 2020, p. 1631).

In the 2000s, empirical findings indicated an association between effective instructional leadership and student learning in research (Witziers et al., 2003; Robinson et al., 2008; Scheerens, 2012, as mentioned in Hallinger et al., 2020). Despite the abovementioned researchers yielding different results, their studies concentrated on instructional leadership as a crucial function of school leaders. Additionally, in their studies, Leithwood (2008) and Louis (2010) confirmed the value of instructional leadership while highlighting additional aspects of leadership necessary to corroborate successful teaching and learning, for example, emotional dimensions of leadership and parent engagement via family-school partnerships (Hallinger et al., 2020). Two more studies conducted by Hallinger (2011) and Boyce & Bowers (2018) utilized a textual analysis to expand the foundational knowledge of instructional leadership further. Hallinger (2020) studied the instructional leadership of principals amid 1983 and 2010 by examining 130 dissertations that used PIMRS; he analyzed the conceptual models utilized in the

studies, as well as the method of inquiry and the topics studied. In this time period, he found that since 2000, research shifted towards “mediated effects models” that linked statistical analysis to measure the association amid leadership and learning. He added that research in regards to the outcomes of leadership has concentrated on factors including student attainment, school climate, teacher satisfaction and morale, and principal and school effectiveness (Hallinger et al., 2020).

A thorough analysis of 25 years of research from 1988 to 2013 was presented by Boyce and Bowers (2018). They noted that teacher commitment, retention, and satisfaction were the three most frequently studied criteria for instructional leadership topics. Their analysis aligned with a development identified by Leithwood et al. (2008), who noted that the literature shifted from a specific emphasis on instructional leadership to a more general concept of leadership for learning.

An examination of the preceding 25 years of studies conducted by Hallinger and Heck (1996) revealed instructional leadership was the most often studied model of school leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Hallinger, 2005). Utilizing the Hallinger Model and associated instruments, the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale, approximately 110 empirical studies were completed in the early 1980s (Hallinger, 2005). Over 100 studies on instructional leadership were published between 1983 and 2005 due to the establishment of the effective school movement in the early 1980s (Hallinger, 2005). The following section reviews the duties and responsibilities of the assistant principal.

### **Categories of Assistant Principal Responsibilities**

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), “an assistant principal's responsibilities can be delineated into four classifications: interacting with students and parents, addressing behavior issues, development of the master schedule, registration, and attendance; and the counseling of

students” (Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 274). In a similar vein, Kwan (2009, p. 202) carried out a thorough investigation into the position of the assistant principal and grouped them into seven categories: external communication and connection, quality assurance and accountability, teaching, learning and curriculum, staff and resource management, leader and teacher growth and development; and strategic direction and policy environment (Oleszewski et al., 274).

Brooks and Niewenhuizen investigated the duties and obligations of assistant administrators in elementary and intermediate schools in 2013. They discovered that although the duties of assistant principals can differ between schools and districts, there are some recurring characteristics in the position. The study identified several themes: staff development, collaboration with multiple stakeholders, organizational and communication abilities, and student discipline. The study discovered that assistant principals are frequently uniquely positioned to create supportive school environments and forge connections with teachers, parents, and students. They should be equipped to partake in the process of improving the whole school, including developing and carrying out initiatives and programs. In addition, the study noted that assistant principals are in charge of various tasks to ensure the school is well organized and runs efficiently. The literature on the duties of the assistant principal is reviewed in the following section.

### **Duties of Assistant Principals**

The position of the AP has typically been seen as a management position emphasizing managing behavior and student activities. The phrase "books, behinds, and buses" has been used to describe how assistant principals spend their days (Good, 2008, p. 46, as referenced in Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 276). Even if this proverb is oversimplified and ironic, it accurately describes the typical tasks performed by the AP (Oleszewski et al., 2012). The Report of the

Assistant Principalship, an endeavor financed by NASSP that collected data from 1,127 APs and 1,207 principals from all fifty states, was the most thorough study on the AP. role during the 20th century (the 1970s) (Austin & Brown, 1970). The study's findings provided an early indication of the significance of the AP job and the required duties.

It was not until the middle of the 1980s that studies primarily focused on assistant principals emerged in the United States (Sun & Shoho, 2017, p. 459). Studies conducted in the 1980s confirmed the results of the Austin and Brown (1970) report, noting that APs continued to serve in management roles (Greenfield, 1985; Marshall & Greenfield, 1985; Pellicer et al., 1990; Reed & Himmler, 1985) (Sun & Shoho, 2017, p. 459). This idea of assistant principals acting as managers was supported by Reed and Himmler (1985), who asserted that they primarily made sure the school ran efficiently, as their duties were significantly unrelated to duties that involved instruction (Sun & Shoho, 2017). A call to reconsider the role of the assistant principal during this period came after researchers highlighted their uncertain roles and the fact that their school principals determined their job responsibilities (Marshall & Greenfield, 1985). The NASSP issued a paper entitled "Restructuring the Role of the Assistant Principal" (1991), which proposed a restructure of the AP responsibilities from those typically managerial to those more instructional. This argument persisted into the 1990s. According to this paper, assistant principals are great resources better served by participating on the school leadership team. The study also noted that research from this time indicated that assistant principals were very interested in taking on greater leadership responsibilities in the classroom (Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Pellicer et al., 1990; as cited in Sun & Shoho, 2017, p. 459). The literature of studies between 1970 and 2013 is reviewed in the following section.



The job duties of assistant principals in K–12 Virginia school systems were investigated by Kaplan and Owings (1999). The intent of the research was to learn more about the duties of assistant principals and the manner in which students and staff perceive them. Through a survey, the authors attempted to discover essential themes in AP's roles. The study's findings report that APs are in charge of a variety of duties, including discipline, student support, and instructional leadership and supervision. To highlight the disparity amid these roles, this study underscored that assistant principals have to be prepared to perform in both instructional and operational leadership roles.

The NASSP and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) steered Kwan's (2009) study with the intention of evaluating the responsibilities and obligations of assistant principals in the United States. According to the research outcomes, they are accountable for a variety of duties concerning managing student behavior, leading instructional efforts, ensuring that school rules are followed, and planning and directing professional development programs. Additionally, they controlled student attendance, conducted emergency drills, and interacted with parents. This research is similar to that of Hausman et al. (2002), who investigated the daily routines of assistant principals in Maine. They determined that the responsibilities of the AP involve managing students and people, providing instructional leadership guidance, interacting with the educational hierarchy, and the management of resources and school public relations (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

## **Management**

Researchers discovered that APs were responsible for "school management," which they defined as "a classification encompassing the day-to-day tasks related to running the school and providing for the physical necessities of the educational program" (Austin & Brown, 1970, p.31)

as described in the NASSP (1970) report. As mentioned in Sun & Shoho (2017), further recent research (Greenfield, 1985; Marshall & Greenfield, 1985; Pellicer et al., 1990; Reed & Himmler, 1985) confirmed Austin and Brown's (1970) observation wherein assistant principals continued to govern their schools. This assertion primarily maintained school stability, and work activities not focused on instruction was reinforced by Reed and Himmler (1985). The main jobs and duties of APs in secondary schools were also examined in research on assistant principals conducted by Glanz (2004). The study used surveys to examine the perspectives of APs in 120 secondary schools; outcomes indicated that the assistant principals believed their primary responsibility was to ensure the school operated efficiently to aid the principal in leading the school.

## **Discipline**

According to the NASSP (1970) study, APs expressed that monitoring student behavior was their top priority, followed by monitoring student attendance, creating the master schedule, school policy, curriculum creation, and teacher assessment. According to Austin and Brown (1970), the relevance of new teacher orientation was low. A number of studies (Austin & Brown, 1972; Gorton, 1987; Mitchell, 1980; Reed & Himmler, 1985) supported the Austin and Brown Report's conclusions that the APs main duties were overseeing student conduct, attendance, and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, according to research conducted by Pellicer and Stevenson (1991), "Student discipline was still the number one responsibility of high school assistant principals" (p. 61). The study by Hassenpflug (1996) also revealed that APs' three main duties are managing the classroom, providing textbooks, disciplining students, and supervising lunch.

In addition, Weller and Weller's study from 2000 included interviews with 100 active

APs from urban, rural, and suburban schools to learn more about their work. As reported by this research, the majority of the participants divulged discipline and attendance as their key job duties, whereas only a few revealed improvement of instruction or oversight of the vocational program as their key responsibility (Weller & Weller, 2002). According to Glanz (2004), the assistant's secondary responsibility includes overseeing student discipline in addition to their primary responsibility of managing students. In addition, a study by Koru (1993) associated the job of the AP with that of a police officer on duty; as this correlation implies, the AP's duties include upholding school policies, ensuring student safety, mediating disputes, and patrolling the hallways (Kaplan & Owings, 1999). Unfortunately, studies have painted the AP role as a disciplinary authority in a bad light.

### **Assistant Principal as an Instructional Leader**

Stricter standards and accountability lead to the expansion of the AP's responsibilities to incorporate instructional leadership (Browne-Ferrigno, 2017; Sun & Shoho, 2017). The U. S. Secretary of Education published a report in 1982 on the state of education indicating that nation was “at risk” due to deteriorating educational standards marking the beginning of the education reform in the US; this research quickly shifted policymakers attention from effective schools to principal instructional leadership growing the market for research in this area (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Additionally, the NASSP bulletin published articles that urged principals to be instructional leaders as opposed to just administrators Corey et al., 1951; Spears, 1941; Willey, 1942, as cited in Hallinger et al., 2020). These articles laid the foundation for future research on principal instructional leadership. Moreover, according to Hallinger & Wimpelberg (1992), this led to a redesign of the curriculum for principal preparation and the establishment of Principal Leadership Academies.

Oversight of the instructional program is now a component of the assistant principal's obligations, which Harris and Lowery (2014) claim has evolved to reflect how complex the role of the principal has grown to be. The AP's role in overseeing the instructional program may include duties like supervising curriculum and instruction, evaluating and choosing instructional materials, assessing student learning, giving teachers feedback, fostering a learning-friendly environment in the school, and encouraging a culture of cooperation, respect, and excellence (Harris & Lowery, 2014).

One of the first studies to look at the leadership responsibilities and functions of school administrators was Glanz's (1994) study of assistant principals. The research concentrated on the work attributes, experiences, and career course of 300 APs nationwide. According to nearly 80% of the sample, Glanz discovered that assistant principals' key responsibilities were curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This indicated that the AP's primary emphasis was on instructional leadership. In a study that used the same methodology as Glanz's (1994) study, Sun (2011) discovered a lack of instructional leadership in the job of the assistant principal, suggesting more than ten years later, there was still an insufficient focus on instruction in the work of the AP (Sun & Shoho, 2017).

To ascertain the degree in which secondary assistant principals in major Texas high schools exhibit behaviors aligned with what research refers to as instructional leadership, Howard-Schwind (2010) performed a study. The study's participants included 377 principals and assistant administrators from significant Texas high schools (Howard-Schwind, 2010). Instructional leadership was measured in 10 job tasks by the PIMRS (Hallinger, 1987). The study's outcomes denoted that assistant principals and their principals believe they demonstrate instructional leadership frequently, which showed that the views were similar; additionally, the

results proposed that assistant principals perceive themselves as modeling instructional leadership behaviors frequently, and (d) under No Child Left Behind's accountability, rating criteria, and state evaluations, both APs and principals reported feeling more pressure and this being more involved in instructional matters.

The research by Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglani (2014) yielded data that offered empirical support for the AP position as an instructional leader. According to the study, they can work on their campuses as instructional leaders and have a favorable effect on students' academic performance. The study also discovered that assistant principals can effectively aid teachers in their instructional practice and offer direction in creating curricula and evaluations. A collaborative learning environment can be fostered by assistant principals, who can also successfully convey goals to teachers and offer feedback and support. The results indicate that the AP can contribute significantly to the achievement of their schools and should be given the tools and instruction required to lead instruction effectively.

Between October 2013 and April 2014, Searby et al. (2017) carried out a mixed-methods study in Alabama with permission from the IRB at Auburn University. It is regarded as the most thorough study of assistant principals conducted in a single U.S. state to date. It outlined the traits of APs in Alabama who believed they were "ready" instructional leaders and the elements that contributed to this belief. The survey responses of 461 assistant principals were used to gather data. The preponderance of the respondents claimed their current position required them to devote at least half their time to instructional leadership. A significant finding from the study revealed that 63% of the participants had no notion of what proportion of their appraisal was dependent on their performance in instructional leadership.

In contrast to earlier research, Marshall and Mitchell's (1991) study discovered that

the average work week for the AP was spent on student management concerns and averaged approximately 55 hours. These concerns included handling student discipline matters, making contact with parents, managing the extended day program and weekend extracurricular activities. Personnel management received the next-highest time allowance. Revision of student schedules, coordination with replacement instructors, and teacher evaluations were among the duties carried out in this area. These responsibilities consume the bulk of the assistant principal's time, leaving little to no time for work involving instructional leadership. The study revealed that assistant principals devoted insufficient time to leading instruction and too much on non-instructional responsibilities. In addition, the study by Oleszewski et al. (2012) concurred with Marshall and Mitchell's (1991) study that time managing discipline matters and student issues could divert attention away from their responsibilities for instructional leadership. Koru (1993) and Chan et al. (2003) point out that, aside from teacher evaluation, assistant principals don't often have the chance to demonstrate their expertise in instructional leadership.

When assistant principals perform instructional leadership duties, their attention is drawn to enhancing teaching and learning at the institution. This focus could involve performing duties such as leading professional development, coaching and evaluating teachers, collaborating with other school leaders, and providing instructional support. Additionally, they may work to ensure that the school's curriculum aligns with district and state standards and collaborate with other educational leaders to create and implement school improvement initiatives.

Assistant principals are educational leaders in a school responsible for overseeing the school's daily operations. They are accountable for fostering a supportive school atmosphere and offering assistance to instructors, staff, and students. They provide teachers and other staff members with direction and guidance regarding curriculum, instruction, student behavior, and

school safety. They also oversee student activities and oversee student records, including attendance. The multitude of duties performed by the assistant principal can be overwhelming. Thus, assistant principals must balance instructional and managerial tasks; the next section will review the literature.

### **Balance of Instructional and Managerial Tasks**

According to McCrawyer et al. (2018), state officials are progressively making school districts responsible for the systemic achievement of each school; thus, district administration emphasizes accountability for school leaders to ensure state exam requirements tied to accountability are met (McBrayer et al., 2018). Consequently, the pressure of the administrative role, including both managerial and instructional responsibilities, is increased by the accountability requirements despite school leaders already having difficult jobs. A balance must be pursued amid the overwhelmingly large number of tasks connected to these responsibilities to enable principals and assistant principals to manage schools and encourage exceptional levels of student achievement successfully.

According to McBrayer et al. (2018), school principals often gauge their ability to balance managerial and instructional responsibilities to guide their institutions to success. School administrators face considerable challenges in balancing their desire to carry out their work as instructional leaders and the time available to do so, which creates significant concerns for making a difference in their schools (Walker, 2009).

### **Instructional Leadership**

The emphasis on "curriculum, instruction, and assessment" and instructional duties will constitute the definition of school instructional leadership duties for this study (Walker, 2009, p. 217), referenced in (McBrayer et al., 2018). Instructional leadership is the practice of leaders

who devote the bulk of their time to assignments that support teaching and learning, for instance, mentoring, modeling, observation, feedback, and professional development. According to McBrayer et al. (2018), administrators have a responsibility to instruction that directly impacts teachers' capacity to implement effective instruction and students' opportunities to learn. Among the tasks are observing classes and students, providing staff the opportunity for critical professional development, analyzing data to pinpoint areas where the school needs to improve, and monitoring students' academic achievement (Zepeda, 2003). Additionally, responsibilities include the management of student discipline, tracking the budget, building and facilities matters, and completion of paperwork are all factors that hinder the administrator from attending to instructional leadership duties (McBrayer et al., 2018). To manage all these responsibilities, the principal must distribute them amongst themselves and the assistant principal. Although principals have shown a desire to spend additional time engaging in instructional leadership tasks, they cannot devote the necessary extent of time to these roles due to the essential administration tasks. Hallinger and Murphy (2012) found that although principals possess the intent to engage in these behaviors, their ability to be effective instructional leaders can be hindered by a lack of expertise to lead learning, time to lead, and the "normative environment of the principalship" (as cited in McBrayer et al., 2018, p. 8).

### **Management Leadership**

School administration tasks and responsibilities are described by Spillane and Hunt (2010) as the "work necessary to maintain organizational stability," including building upkeep, discipline, and human resource management, which will also be referenced as management and managerial duties (p. 295, McBrayer et al., 2018). Approximately 50% of principals who partook in the research revealed that close to 70% of their time was spent on administrative tasks



at the school, including managing student behavior, developing budgets and schedules, and monitoring staffing levels and facilities maintenance (McBrayer et al., 2018). In their study, Spillane and Hunt (2010) found that elementary principals devoted only 2.5% of time observing instruction and 32.5% of time conducting unscheduled conferences and filling out paperwork (McBrayer et al., 2018). According to a different study by Gilson (2008), principals spend between 30% and 50% of time occupied with after-school activities, completing paperwork, and addressing student discipline matters, all tasks that are associated with management duties (McBrayer et al., 2018).

### **Shared Leadership**

The growing amount of time principals spend on school instructional leadership and management duties, according to Killion and Roy (2009), has caused them to become more conscious of the support they need to fulfill their administration and leadership obligations. Walker (2009) performed research intending to highlight the assistant principal's position as administrative support by taking on managing responsibilities so that the principal can concentrate on providing instruction. According to Walker (2009), the assistant principal's duties as school manager encompassed overseeing student behavior, office administration, facility and employee management, and parent conference facilitation (as cited in McBrayer et al., 2018). Pounder and Crow (2005) contrasted this study, stating that this "narrowly focused" the AP as a manager and distanced the AP from instructional leadership (p. 59). They further noted concern that if the AP had to step in for the principal in the event the principal was absent or if the AP wanted to become a principal in the future, allocating only management duties to the AP would not prepare them for the principalship (McBrayer et al., 2018). Due to the disproportionate amount of instructional leadership experiences, it was further noted in research conducted by

Oleszewski et al. (2012) that APs discerned themselves as underprepared to take charge without their principal's guidance or to one day be a principal.

### **Self-Efficacy**

As described by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is the awareness that one can successfully carry out the action necessary to accomplish the intended results. Having the tools required to carry out a particular activity to attain a goal is what it means to be effective. According to Murphy and Johnson (2016), a leader's assessment of their job capability is noted as having leadership self-efficacy (as cited in McBrayer et al., 2018, p. 74). A school assistant principal's extensive administrative and instructional leadership duties may contribute to developing their sense of leadership self-efficacy during their employment (McBrayer et al., 2018). According to McCormick et al. (2002), leadership self-efficacy is frequently affected by the widespread range of internal and external influences on school administrators' experience while leading schools. Self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of success across various domains, including academic performance, workplace effectiveness, and health outcomes. A person's environment, prior experiences, and current skills impact their self-efficacy. As an assistant principal, one must have confidence in themselves and their abilities; lacking confidence will pose challenges. The following section summarizes the literature on assistant principals' job challenges.

### **Job Challenges for Assistant Principals**

Without a sense of clarity and direction, APs can become overwhelmed by the job's complexity and be unable to achieve the best they can. This sentiment underscores the importance of providing APs with clear guidance and expectations for their duties. According to McCarthy and Hoover (2016), assistant principals frequently struggle to manage their workload and set priorities. They manage student discipline, coordinate curriculum and instruction,

evaluate teachers, and create a safe, nurturing student environment (McCarthy & Hoover, 2016). Additionally, assistant principals are called upon to mentor staff and students, conduct professional development, and provide leadership opportunities (McCarthy & Hoover, 2016). The assistant principal's position is intricate and difficult to navigate. While assistant principal's fulfillment of various roles is expected, the reality of their job often falls short of their expectations. Glanz (2004) found that assistant principals often had difficulty balancing their administrative and instructional roles, leading to role conflict and job dissatisfaction.

### **Role Ambiguity**

Rarely does the AP possess a predictable, clear description of their role, a list of specific responsibilities, or a system for evaluating task results (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). As declared by Marshall and Hooley (2006), the duties of the assistant principal have a lot of "gray areas"—inaccurate, unpredictable, and often incoherent responsibilities, roles, and resources, which could add to their struggle with role ambiguity.

One assistant principal might take charge and complete whatever is needed to be taken care of simply because they get the job done. In contrast, another assistant principal allows the fact that they keep absorbing more and more duties to lead to dissatisfaction with their jobs; they feel ineffective in their roles and might even lack confidence in performing what is being asked of them. According to Austin and Brown (1970), Fulton (1987), Kahn et al. (1964), Kelly (1987), Norton and Kriekard (1987), as referenced in Marshall and Hooley (2006), these individuals would argue, "This is not in my job description." The uncertainty of AP roles and responsibilities, according to Marshall and Davidson (2016), "may cause APs to flounder among myriad tasks" (p. 273). This viewpoint emphasizes giving APs clear direction and expectations for their duties and responsibilities is noteworthy to mention. Without determination and goals,

APs may become overwhelmed by the complexity of the job, which will prevent them from working to their maximum potential.

### ***Role Conflict***

An improvement versus evaluation dilemma faces assistant principals in the form of role conflict (Glanz, 2004). In their positions, APs are authorized to enforce organizational mandates and evaluate teachers (Glanz, 2004). The conflict arises from the need to evaluate and the desire to support instructors as they carry out their educational duties (Glanz, 2004). For example, one of the assistant principal duties might be to assist teachers with curriculum; however, doing so conflicts with their other duties of monitoring, supervising, and evaluating. Further, coaching the teacher in curriculum and then having to redirect noncompliance with the same teacher may hinder collegial and professional relationships with them. Although efforts have been made to involve assistant principals in instructional matters as opposed to administrative and managerial matters (Weller & Weller, 2002), the intractable problem of improvement versus evaluation still exists, which means APs face role conflict. Again, the evaluation of the teacher's aspect comes into play here, where the AP wants to help the teachers as a coach; however, they must also make evaluative recommendations.

Role conflicts of this kind were noted by Marshall (1992) in her thorough investigation of APs. According to Marshall, in their role, an AP might need to assist a teacher with curriculum; however, this assistance interferes with the evaluative function they perform with that same teacher. Marshall stated, in a single day, the assistant may collaborate with a teacher and might convene an hour later to reprimand this same staff member for failing to follow an established policy or guideline, which could cause difficulty for the AP working to form and maintain collegial relationships (Glanz, 2004).

Other scholars have documented this role conflict. For example, Tanner and Tanner (1987) acknowledge this very dilemma in which supervisors (as noted in their book) interact with teachers personally and professionally, maintaining friendly, helpful relationships while also enacting the role of their evaluator, which could jeopardize the collegial relationship (as cited in Glanz, 2004). This is described as a "basic conflict: amid 'in-service education' and 'evaluation'" (Tanner and Tanner, 1987 as cited in Glanz, 2004, pp. 105–106). According to Tanner and Tanner (1987), the tension amid "helping" and "evaluative" responsibilities presents supervisors with nearly insurmountable challenges (as cited in Glanz, 2004).

This conflict exists because evaluation is often seen to assess the effectiveness of a teacher's instruction. In contrast, assistance is seen as a form of support for teachers in their instructional efforts. In other words, evaluation is seen to measure a teacher's performance, while assistance is seen to help teachers become effective educators. The conflict lies in the need for both approaches, as evaluation can provide feedback on improving instruction, while assistance can provide the support needed to make those improvements. A balance between evaluation and support must be found to guarantee that instructors get the support they need while still being held accountable for their lessons. Researchers in the study by Glanz (2004) proposed that supervisors should concentrate on teachers' professional development rather than only their evaluation to overcome this issue. Furthermore, they recommended a helping relationship between the AP and teachers based on mutual trust and respect (Glanz, 2004). This relationship should be based on the understanding that the AP's primary goal is to abet the teacher in the pursuit of professional learning, and the teacher has to be willing to accept guidance and seek assistance from the AP (Glanz, 2004).

When an assistant principal cannot adequately perform all the tasks asked of them, a never-ending role conflict occurs. As a result, the AP cannot decide which task to prioritize, which may impact their personal lives, or try to advance their careers to satisfy the demands of their position (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Furthermore, when assistant principals take on roles requiring extensive knowledge and experience, they may need help managing the workload (Hooley & Marshall, 2009). This feeling can lead to burnout and frustration, which can negatively impact the work performance of the AP. To prevent role conflict and burnout, ensuring they have the tools and assistance needed to perform the expected duties is crucial.

### **Stress Related Burnout**

Burnout is a common problem among assistant principals due to the high levels of stress they experience. Too many tasks and inadequate preparation without proper support to lead the various stakeholders they serve are some causes of burnout among administrators (Beausaert et al., 2016). Burnout can result from a variety of circumstances, such as an excessive workload, a lack of resources, inadequate support from coworkers or superiors, or a lack of acknowledgment for achievements. It can also be caused by a lack of emotional, mental, and physical resilience, leading to exhaustion and a feeling of helplessness. Clayton and Bingham (2018) assert that the assistant principal position is unusually stressful. Therefore, leaders must recognize their mistakes as learning opportunities and be able to recognize others' mistakes as teaching moments. This recognition involves providing constructive feedback to staff and students and helping identify the underlying reasons for the mistake.

Burnout can be avoided by establishing a balance between work and personal life. This balance can be achieved by arranging regular breaks throughout the day, taking regular breaks from work, eating well, exercising frequently, and getting adequate sleep. Taking care of

yourself and identifying healthy stress-reduction strategies, such as participating in enjoyable hobbies, communicating with loved ones, and obtaining professional assistance if necessary, is critical. Setting reasonable objectives and seeking aid from coworkers and superiors when needed are also crucial.

Clear expectations also help create an environment of trust between the employer and employee. Clear expectations provide certainty and understanding between the two parties, leading to better communication, collaboration, and productivity. This communication can encouragingly affect the general performance of the team and the individual. Additionally, clear expectations can help reduce misunderstandings, miscommunications, and other issues arising when expectations need to be clarified.

### **Role Clarity**

According to Celikten (2001), assistant principals oversee a variety of jobs and face a variety of challenges every day; consequently, the job description for the position lacks a well-defined set of responsibilities. And a system for assessing the results of tasks they have completed. This is concurred by Marshall and Hooley (2006), who maintain that the duties of the AP are not well-defined. Sharing the same sentiment, Weller and Weller (2002) point out that there is not a single definition of what an assistant principal does. Moreover, Brooks and Niewenhuizen (2013) assert that practice or literature does not clearly define the assistant principal role.

They cite numerous authors (Black, 1980; Celikten, 2001; Kindsvatter & Tosi, 1971; Kriekard & Norton, 1980; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Norton & Kriekard, 1987; NASSP, 1991; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993) who have expressed frustration over the ambiguity of the position's duties and the absence of a clear job description. Celikten (2001) revealed that AP softens lacked

role descriptions that clearly outlined their responsibilities. As a result, they were frequently asked to perform duties that had little to do with instruction, preventing them from implementing their instructional leadership tasks. This study showed that APs often felt overwhelmed by the lack of clarity regarding their duties and could not contribute to instructional leadership. The obscurity encompassing the AP role is likely because the job constantly evolves to take on the shifting demands of the educational institution.

The AP's job description differs from one school to the next. Olszewska et al. (2012) found that a vague job description can affect an assistant principal's emotional health and job performance. According to Harvey (1994), knowing the intent of their role would make the AP feel less frustrated and help them prioritize their responsibilities more effectively (as stated in Oleszewski et al., 2012). When an individual understands what is expected of them in their role per their job description, there is a level of certainty and understanding between the two parties, leading to better communication, collaboration, and productivity. The wide range of duties an assistant principal must perform poses challenges to the role for which they might not be prepared. The following section will discuss the preparation and support for the assistant principal.

### **Professional Development and Mentoring**

#### **Professional Development**

According to Mertz (2006), a significant portion of the literature offers alarming conclusions regarding the advancement of assistant principals. For example, Hausman et al. (2002), Johnson-Taylor & Martin (2007), and Koru, 1993 as reported in Barnett et al. (2017), p. 287, all claim that they are insufficiently and poorly trained for the principalship. According to Hausman et al. (2020), only a small amount of assistant principals in the U.S. are permitted to



direct the organization's direction, oversee curriculum and training, and inspire employees (as cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 287). Glanz's (2004) study found that the assistant principals lacked adequate support from the school district and felt they had too many administrative tasks, limiting their ability to undertake instructional leadership. Per the study's findings, assistant principals would be better able to carry out their duties if they were given a more significant amount of support and had less administrative work. The study also identified several areas of concern for the profession, including an absence of professional development availabilities. According to Oliver (2005), assistant principals should pursue professional development to advance their careers and abilities (Barnett et al., 2017). Additionally, Hillard and Newsome (2013) noted that professional development should include mentorships where assistant principals can observe and learn from experienced principals. These opportunities should be provided to assistant principals to ensure they can develop the necessary skills and knowledge to steer a campus effectively as a principal.

### ***Skill Development***

The assistant principals' identified needs should be the focus of professional development for skill development. Hausman et al. (2002) utilized surveys in their research that in addition to finance, discipline, and facilities management, assistant principals expressed a desire for training on other issues they face daily (Barnett et al., 2017). Additionally, according to Petrides et al. (2014), Oliver (2005), Searby et al. (2016), and Barnett et al. (2017), assistant principals look for support to advance their knowledge and abilities in instructional leadership. For instance, in Oliver's study from 2005, APs were reported to be in need of continuing education in duties linked to instructional leadership. A study by Hunt (2011) also indicated that assistant principals

require additional assistance and training to become efficient instructional leaders. Assistant principals cannot encourage and mentor students today without the proper training.

Peter Dewitt states, "It is never too late for principals and assistant principals to learn how to be instructional leaders and work collaboratively, and quite honestly, there is no longer a choice" (NAESP, 2020, page 4). Assistant principals conscious of the abilities and skills necessary to support and guide their schools effectively as they become more engaged in instructional leadership. The AP must function as a curriculum director, teacher coach, instructional leader, and instructional expert to provide effective instructional leadership (Armstrong, 2010). Therefore, assistant principals must be flexible and knowledgeable in various areas and roles, including instruction, assessment, curriculum, and continuing education.

### ***Career Advancement***

To ensure a qualified pool of assistant principals, professional development opportunities should be provided to help them better prepare for the principalship (Hillard & Newsome, 2013). This will help to ensure a qualified pool of assistant principals. To prepare assistant principals for principalships, many school districts are developing specialized continuing education, such as "grow your own" programs (Barnett et al., 2017; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). These programs, which see APs as principals in training, make certain that every assistant principal acquires ample expertise of operations, policies, and procedures across the district (Lovely, 2001, p. 7, cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 288). APs receive a variety of experiences from districts that provide "grow your own" programs (Barnett et al., 2017). According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), standard components of creating your grow-your-own programs involve university instruction, mentorship connections, regular meetings, enlarged and broadened tasks, and opportunities to succeed (as cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 288).

## **Job-Embedded Professional Development**

According to Hutton (2020), it is crucial to incorporate professional development into the daily duties of the AP. A significant portion of the school day is dedicated to the assistant principal's involvement in all facets of the school, to include activities such as student management and teamwork with staff, parents, and the community. The APs workload during the school day is so extensive that attending professional development outside campus is impossible. Furthermore, because their attendance at the institution is mandatory, they frequently skip seminars and workshops for which they must leave the campus.

According to the literature, school administrators should incorporate varied professional development methodologies into the assistant principals' everyday tasks through job-embedded professional development to ensure they can engage in it. Administrators could, for instance, designate assistant principals to oversee faculty gatherings and professional learning groups that concentrate on particular areas of professional development. This enables them to continue taking part in valuable professional development activities while still being present on the school premises. According to Hutton (2020), it has been established that job-embedded professional development can improve teaching techniques and bring about long-lasting change. Assistant principals may also be tasked with mentoring new teachers and providing advice and comments on their pedagogical approaches. This can ensure that assistant principals are knowledgeable about the most recent curriculum and teaching techniques. To help APs better understand the school's needs and give them valuable insights into how they can improve the school environment, principals can designate assistant principals to serve on committees responsible for creating new policies, procedures, and educational programs. Principals can ensure assistant principals can participate in significant job-integrated professional development without leaving

the school by implementing these techniques. The research performed by Oliver (2005) captured assistant principals' preference for job-embedded learning experiences. Oliver's (2005) study of more than 900 assistant principals in Southern California revealed that their desired form of professional development was sessions on their campuses or central office, to be provided in quick segments or via virtual method; additionally, they added they wanted time for thought to process in what manner they can employ the concepts learned on their campuses

### ***Mentoring***

Mentoring is a type of job-integrated professional development. According to many researchers, mentoring is a prevalent method to provide professional assistance for current and those seeking to become school leaders (Zepeda et al., 2012, as cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 288; Barnett & O'Mahony, 2008; Daresh, 2004, 2010; Fuller & Young, 2009; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013). According to Daresh (2004), the most effective activity an assistant principal can engage in to enrich their work performance is to have a mentor (p. 97, as cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 288). A healthy principal-assistant-principal relationship will assist the AP's progress, growth, and preparation to take over the principalship (Retelle, 2010; Barnett et al., 2017).

Novice principals are typically "thrown into their jobs without a lifejacket" (p. 8), according to the NAESP (2003), leaving them unprepared for the responsibilities of the role (Searby et al., 2017). As APs advance in administrative positions, their mentors should offer advice and assistance. They must be influential instructional leaders; they should not have to put off mentorship by a senior principal until they become principals (Searby et al., 2017). In a white paper released by the University Council for Educational Administration, it is stated that:

Potential assistant principals broadly approach the assistant principal position as a training ground for the principalship and look for principals who will afford them.

Growth opportunities and exposure to a spectrum of responsibilities reflect their future positions. Such exposure will benefit not only the individual but, ultimately, the future of the profession, for it is the quality of assistant principals learning and growth that help determine the quality of tomorrow's principals. (Hitt et al., 2012, p. 8, as cited in Searby et al., 2017)

Several crucial elements are necessary to create and sustain thriving mentoring relationships: one's traits, skilled interaction, and dedication influence the mentoring circumstance. According to Corwin et al. (2016) and Schechter (2014), the mentor-mentee relationship thrives “when mentors establish mutual respect, openness, honesty, and trust; engage in reflective, thought-provoking, and non-judgmental conversations; and make mentoring a priority with numerous opportunities for face-to-face contact” (as cited in Barnett et al. 2017, p. 289). Clayton et. al (2013), noted when mentoring activities are pertinent and concentrate on the "authentic needs of the school district related to strategic improvement plans", it is clear that mentoring has been prioritized (as cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 289). Careful pairing and specific parameters concerning the activities and opportunities they will encounter with their mentors are essential for a successful mentoring experience (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Oliver, 2005, as cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 289).

Programs are currently being developed by school districts and professional organizations like the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA), NASSP, and NAESP to mentor assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2017). Making sure that programs and mentoring relationships continue beyond the AP's initial year in their role, guiding mentors on how to initiate and sustain

solid relations, keeping an eye on the relationship, and forming well-defined procedures for mentor's duties are some recommendations for ensuring productive mentoring interactions for assistant principals.

Learning strategies that mentor principals can incorporate into their mentoring activities are activities such as modeling classroom visits and teacher feedback and then having the assistant principal practice then discuss it, make certain the assistant principal is permitted to participate in all school activities like budget, facilities issues, site-based decision making, and delegation of duties without micromanaging their decisions. Additionally, the principal must support continuing education for the AP and encourage the growth of the assistant principal's professional networks to enable them to reflect on their leadership practices (Armstrong, 2014; Johnson-Taylor and Martin, 2007, as cited in Barnett et al., 2017). Johnson-Taylor and Martin (2007) contend: "It is inadequate to discuss their improvement on the superficial level; principals have to probe their assistants to think critically, to be reflective thinkers, to learn to grow from mistakes, all intentional ways of developing their leadership skills (p.25, as cited in Barnett et al., 2017). According to Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991), the AP job is crucial in schools; the principal has been charged to mentor their assistant principals as future principals (as cited in Searby et al., 2017). Mentors should provide advice and guidance on effectively managing their position's various responsibilities. The assistant principal can benefit from mentoring from their principal by gaining insight into essential leadership skills, such as effective communication, setting and achieving goals, building relationships, and problem-solving. Additionally, mentoring can give the AP a greater understanding of the school district's mission and vision and how to operate effectively. Finally, mentoring can help the AP better understand their role's goals and objectives and how to best support the principal in meeting

those goals. Ultimately, mentoring by their principal can provide the AP with the abilities and wisdom to develop into a successful leader.

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), new assistant principals commonly imitate the behaviors of their principals, whether or not those behaviors are acceptable (as cited in Searby et al., 2017). This may result in maintaining the outdated status quo in educational institutions. They also mention the possibility of assistant principals benefiting from principal mentoring. For example, assistant principals have stated a desire to lead instruction, but usually, the principal gives them responsibilities that have little to do with instruction. Principals and APs need to develop strong relationships to take advantage of mentoring's importance in developing early leadership (Zellner et al., 2002, as cited in Morgan, 2018). This is because the principal has the greatest influence over how the AP's role is defined (Goodman & Berry, 2011).

According to Hausman et al.'s (2002) study, to achieve success as an AP, they must be provided access to continuing education and have the support of their principals. The assistant principal ought to be provided opportunities to discuss with the principal how they may develop their leadership skills and actively participate in creating the live school improvement plan in a professional and progressive manner. For the assistant principal to enhance their instructional leadership abilities, they should be given the responsibility of organizing or facilitating team and grade-level meetings. The assistant principal can and ought to be able to acquire the instructional leadership skills and knowledge that can result in a more prosperous and high-performing school with the help of the principal (Lashway, 2002, as cited in Hilliard & Newsome, 2013).

A study conducted by Retelle (2010) studied three novice assistant principals' mentoring experiences during a school year. The findings suggested that the APs believed being mentored by their principals would strengthen their leadership development, and they wanted their

principals as mentors. The study's results showed that the principal and assistant principals had different perspectives on mentoring, which disadvantaged the APs. For example, one participant indicated she wanted direction on prioritizing her work and advice on developing leadership skills and practices. Another participant stated there was not enough meeting time with the principal for feedback and that they only met on the fly, which was insufficient support. Principal feedback conveyed that there were no guidelines for mentoring, so they mentored based on what they observed and how much support they felt their AP needed. It was suggested that the assistant principal's development was not the principal's primary responsibility.

Additionally, it was advised that mentoring must be a districtwide effort and that policies and procedures must be developed. In their study, Searby et al. (2017) asked assistant principals to identify the mentoring needed to grow as instructional leaders and in what situation they felt they would seemingly like to receive it. A significant conclusion of the study was that one-on-one mentoring sessions with existing principals and casual gatherings with other assistant principals provided ready principals with the most beneficial coaching.

A study was implemented by Barnett et al. (2017) to comprehend the endorsed and unendorsed methods used by assistant principals to increase their cognizance and abilities. The goal was to look at the key guidance mentors gave them and the continuing education activities that helped them prepare for their leadership positions. Sixty-nine assistant principals from elementary, middle, and high schools participated in semi-structured interviews. The main topics of the questions were the advice mentors offered and key learning opportunities that benefited their growth as school leaders (Barnett et al., 2017). In accordance with the research findings, assistant principals respect mentors' advice on developing their decision-making abilities, strengthening their interpersonal and interaction abilities, considering their traits and capacities,



and defining their morals and viewpoints (Barnett et al., 2017). Additionally, working with former and present administrators they trusted and respected was their preferred method for professional improvement (Barnett et al., 2017).

A principal mentorship program for assistant principals can help ensure that new principals have the resources and guidance they need to succeed in their new roles. The principal can mentor the assistant principal, providing guidance and advice on navigating the school district, how to best interact with teachers and staff, and managing their responsibilities effectively. The assistant principal can benefit from their guidance and resources as they take on new tasks and hone their leadership abilities. They may additionally provide direction on serving the school community and the many obligations of the assistant principal. Furthermore, the principal should provide an environment that fosters advancement and improvement for the assistant principal and encourages them to strive for the principal position.

### **Overview of Chapter**

An abundance of research has been completed on the principal throughout the century; however, Brooks and Niewenhuizen (2013) found inconsistent literature on the assistant principal. Barnett, Soho, and Oleszewski (2012) note that research typically emphasizes principal leadership instead of AP leadership. Goldring et al. (2021) stated the duties, the best ways to support APs in their current roles, and the most effective approaches to develop them to flourish as principals have not been agreed upon by policymakers, practitioners, and researchers (p. xvii). The assistant principalship is a key position for those looking to enter the administrative field, and it is a significant area of policy concern for concerns related to equal opportunity, according to Marshall and Hooley (2006). When drafting their suggestions, policymakers must take the assistant principalship into account to identify and promote

instructional leadership. As more principals leave the sector each year, Barnett (2012) claims there is an urgent need for replacements capable of managing a school through instructional leadership. Effective principal replacements should be made by school administrators who are qualified, certified, and experienced, according to the NASSP (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013).

The assistant principal (AP) is a position that functions as a stage of progress toward principalship and is one source for replacing principals (Daresh & Voss, 2001). It would stand to reason that the assistant principal would provide a suitable principal replacement. However, research (Koru, 1993; Kwan, 2009; Mertz, 2006), as referenced in Oleszewski et al. (2012), indicates this is not always the case. According to Goldring, Rubin, and Hermann (2021), strategically utilizing the assistant principalship could give future principals opportunities for professional growth and real-world leadership experiences. According to Barnett et al. (2012), the assistant principal's capacity to assume the role of principal depends on the experiences and duties to which they are exposed.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

This chapter's goal is to describe the research methods used for this qualitative case study, which examines the instructional leadership practices employed by assistant principals in South Texas Region 1 area. This method made it possible to comprehend the assistant principals' experiences as instructional leaders on a deeper level. This chapter discusses the methodology, the procedure for selecting participants, the aim and design of the study, the researcher's role, data collection and analysis, and reliability. The themes from the data analysis emphasize behaviors assistant principals engage in as instructional leaders, the challenges they encounter, and the support they require to succeed in their positions as instructional leaders. The following section will explain the research design chosen and its rationale.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

Because case studies focus on how, what, and why questions, they are meant to explore and comprehend a phenomenon in depth (Yin, 2018), they were ideal for this topic. To understand the essence of people's experiences, the technique takes into account the how and why of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Case studies focus on a specific subject and choose one bound case to study it, according to Creswell & Poth (2018). The instructional responsibilities of assistant principals, the challenges they face in enacting their instructional leadership position, and the support they require for their leadership development were examined in this single-bounded case study of four APs. Because the study aimed to investigate the instructional leadership practices of assistant principals, the case study was the most appropriate. This study sought to explore the instructional leadership practices enacted by assistant principals in their

current positions; three research questions were formulated for this study. The following are the research questions:

1. What instructional leadership behaviors are assistant principals in Region 1 engaged in?
2. What support is needed for assistant principals in Region 1 as instructional leaders?
3. What relationship between the principal and assistant principal fosters the instructional leadership practices of the assistant principal in Region 1?

### **Role of the Researcher**

Using my subjectivity as a researcher as a tool in the interpretation and analysis of the data was very important. My pre- and post-study thought processes centered on the significance of instructional leadership because I have been an educator for over 20 years and an administrator for the last 10 years in a small school district. Assistant principals significantly impact student learning as a key administrative position in schools.

It's crucial to recognize my role as the sole researcher of this study. Considering my experience as a former assistant principal, principal, and current special programs coordinator is important. It can influence how I think about topics based on my professional background and personal experiences, which could result in bias. When this study was conducted, my previous experience in administration was as follows: AP for a little over a year, central office as an instructional/testing coordinator for three years, a campus principal for four years, a high school at-risk/testing coordinator for three years, and a special programs coordinator for a year.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with four assistant principals for the study, recording each interview with a digital recorder. Given my prior career experiences as an assistant principal, intentional and careful questioning was utilized during the interview process not to assume what the assistant principal participants interviewed were feeling. Mindfulness to

note the experiences the participants conveyed and not conflate their experiences with my personal experiences as an assistant principal was intentional to mitigate bias. Experiences were noted, and memos were utilized when reviewing and coding the participant's interviews to curtail bias'. Additionally, a personal journal was used before, during, and after data collection to abate potential biases. After the interviews, each was transcribed verbatim with the participant's responses. Subsequently, transcripts were emailed to participants for verification, and upon confirmation, they began to be coded. Once transcripts were examined multiple times to look for recurring themes or patterns, I coded the data per my plan. After an in-depth analysis, findings emerged.

### **Methodology**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is grounded on assumptions and the use of conceptual frameworks that guide the examination of research issues relevant to the significance that individuals or groups attribute to social or human concerns. The conceptual framework for this study was the instructional leadership model developed by Hallinger and Murphy in 1985. When the researcher examines actual conditions, the qualitative research designs are naturalistic. There are no constraints on the research conclusion in these situations, and the researcher has no influence over what is observed (Patton, 2015). According to Saldana (2015), "thinking qualitatively means researchers are open to discovering new insights and understandings about the aspects of the world they are investigating by embracing various lenses, filters, and angles as they view social life intentionally" (p. 4). This study used a case study methodology to examine the instructional leadership methods of assistant principals in small schools in the Region 1 area of South Texas. Additionally, this study explored the assistance they

receive or need to be successful in their positions and the relationship with their principals that foster instructional leadership practices.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Site Selection**

#### **Recruitment**

Region One's small school consortium in Texas includes 14 districts with 1,600 or fewer students. Five of the 14 school districts were selected as viable for the sample, and only certain school districts in the consortium employ assistant principals. In total, there are 18 available assistant principals within the small school consortium. Participants for this study were selected using purposeful sampling. The process for selecting the sites to include in the research involved sending an email to five superintendents of school districts in Region One's small school consortium requesting support to recruit assistant principals in their school districts. Within one week, two superintendents responded to the emails approving the research to be conducted at their school sites. One superintendent did not respond to the email sent; however, after the follow-up phone call from the researcher, her secretary called to decline to have the school site included in the research. The other two superintendents did not respond to the two emails sent despite the follow-up phone call to inform them of the email. Thus, the researcher proceeded with the two school sites that approved their site participation.

#### **Ethical Considerations & IRB**

In research studies, one must adhere to various ethical procedures. The phrase "but first do no harm" applies to all research involving human participants (Saldana, 2011, p.24). Respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice were three ethical principles that this study utilized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Respect for persons required that participants get complete disclosure as part of the informed consent process, as well as information about privacy protections, data

security, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Consent for welfare was addressed with each participant and site and revealed only to the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and dissertation committee. Justice measures included contacting participants to advise them of the general rationale of the study, conveying the extent of site access, and the purpose and use of study data with participants selected using purposeful sampling. Finally, before conducting this study, approval was obtained from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board (IRB) ([TAMU-CC-IRB-2023-0793](#)) to ensure that the research follows the protocol to maintain high ethical standards.

### **Participant Recruitment Process**

Following approval from the IRB, the participating school districts were sent the IRB approval. Assistant principals' names and email addresses were requested from human resource personnel from the two sites after obtaining authorization to participate in the study. Using the IRB-approved forms and procedures, the researcher invited each prospective participant, detailing the study's purpose. Additionally, a demographic profile survey link was included in the invitation email. Consent and agreement to participate in the study were obtained from each participant via Google form, which served as informed consent to participate with an acknowledgment of understanding of the research process and their rights. Participants were considered if they were currently serving as a non-specialized assistant principal at a campus in the school districts of study. Interview dates were scheduled via participant selection of a date and time on the Google form provided. Six participants were the initial target sample size from the two school districts, two elementary, two middle schools, and two high school assistant principals who had zero to ten years of experience, are currently serving in K-12 public

education, and functioning as a nonspecialized assistant principal (i.e., assistant principal of instruction, assistant principal of operations, etc..).

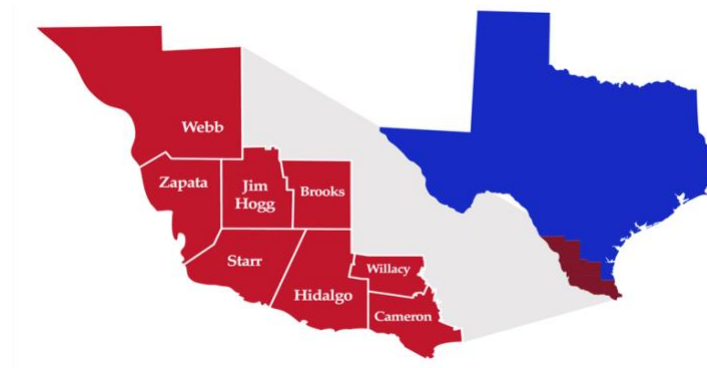
Six assistant principals from the two districts made up the initial pool. A total of four participants partook in this study. Two participants were excluded from the study; one declined to participate, and the other did not reply to repeated attempts to contact them. According to Patton (2015), although the study's sample size of four was somewhat small, it is normal for qualitative research to include fewer participants, enhancing the richness and depth of the study design. Additionally, APs from grades PK–5 in elementary school, 6–8 in middle school, and 9–12 in high school will share their insights, providing insightful information from all grade levels.

### **Site Selection**

This study focused on four assistant principals within the Region 1 area small school consortium in the lower Rio Grande Valley. Region One is 1 of 20 educational service centers in Texas located in South Texas on the United States-Mexico border (Education Service Center, 2023). The Small Schools Consortium comprises districts with 1,600 students or less within Region 1. In this consortium, participants were recruited from two districts, Parrot and Lark ISD, pseudonyms for the districts that participated in the study.

**Figure 2**

*Region One Service Area Map*





**Table 1***District Demographics*

Pseudonym	Student Population	Grade Levels Served	% Hispanic Population	% Economically Disadvantaged Population	% At-Risk Population	Number of Teachers
Parrot Elementary	620	PK3-5 <sup>th</sup>	98%	83%	67%	42
Parrot High School	460	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	95%	72%	33%	41
Parrot Middle School	350	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	95%	78%	66%	21
Lark Middle School	480	5 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	97%	94%	55%	31

**Data Collection**

The data sources used for triangulation included a demographic profile, semi-structured interviews (See Appendix D and E), document analysis of job descriptions, and school vision and mission statements. This study used a semi-structured interview approach with 13 questions as one of its data-gathering tools. Utilizing a semi-structured interview process allowed for asking clarifying questions as needed throughout the interview process. Probing and follow-up inquiries were used to elicit ideas, participant viewpoints, instructional approaches, and leadership behaviors. The participants' verbal responses and any other observable or audible behavioral patterns were noted throughout the interviews. After the interview was over, participants were given the opportunity to explain their answers or clarify the research method. Member checking was done after the interview had been transcribed. The participants received the transcript through email to verify their comments. Participants responded to the email, reiterating that their responses were accurate. To ensure anonymity, participants and school districts were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

## **Data Sources**

### ***Demographic Profile***

A demographic profile was employed to obtain general information regarding each participant. The information obtained from the profile included age, gender, ethnicity, the number of years they have been in education, and how many years they have been as an assistant principal. This information was utilized to determine if the individuals were representative of the targeted population. The demographic profile questionnaire (see Appendix D) adds information to each participant's rich, thick description.

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

This second data source was an individual interview with a semi-structured interview protocol (See Appendix E). According to Patton (2015), semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to look inside another person's mind to understand their point of view. The interview involved sharing and explaining the study summary, IRB approval, and participant rights as study participants. Each participant in this study participated in a one-hour semi-structured interview, either in person or over the Zoom online platform.

Participants were prompted to consider their roles, responsibilities, obstacles, knowledge, and professional development required to execute their obligations as instructional leaders. They were also asked to debate and share their opinions, beliefs, and experiences in this regard. The interview questions aimed to obtain information on the assistant principals' perspectives on the tasks they are currently performing and the significance of being an instructional leader.

Individual interviews were scheduled with four participants. Participants had the option to conduct the interviews face-to-face or virtually. Two participants opted to conduct the interview in person, and two opted to conduct it virtually. Interviews were scheduled at the

participant's discretion at a time convenient for them. Interviews were conducted in June 2023. Automated transcription was utilized to transcribe the recordings from each interview to ensure the accuracy and format organization of each transcript. The researcher reviewed the automated transcription for accuracy. All transcript recordings were kept confidential and stored in an online password-protected storage cloud. The transcript was shared via email with the participant to do member checking before being included to code. The researcher requested that the participants email back if any changes need to be made to the transcript. No participants noted any changes to be made to their transcripts; they responded to the email stating that the transcript was accurate.

### ***Document Analysis***

The third data source, a review of the assistant principal's job description, was obtained from each school district's human resource coordinator. This provided supplementary resource data. I employed document analysis to examine the duties performed as stated by the participants in relation to what is written in the individual's job description. Additionally, I obtained the district/campus mission and vision statements from each district/campus webpage.

### **Data Analysis**

The amount of information required to be managed and processed during a qualitative data analysis could seem overwhelming. During the analysis stage of the study, qualitative data analysis investigates claims regarding correlations about underlying themes. To give the data analysis activity structure and purpose, the researcher must classify and divide the data into segments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The handling of all data requires a plan. For analysis of the data, I followed the procedures outlined in Creswell & Creswell (2018), including: organization

and preparation of data for analysis, analysis of the data, coding of the data, description of themes that emerge, and representation and description of themes.

### **Coding Process**

This study's two-cycle coding method utilized in vivo and open pattern coding. "In vivo" is Latin for "in that which is alive." When used as a code, a word or brief phrase from the authentic language, also known as "the terms used by participants themselves" (Strauss, 1987, p. 33 as cited in Saldana, 2015), is designated in the qualitative data record. One of the key goals of in vivo is to use the verbatim principle, which entails using the participants' own words and ideas. It is noted that by doing this, researchers are more likely to capture the meanings inherent in people's experiences (Stringer, 2014 as cited in Saldana, 2015, p. 140).

I adhered to a methodical process for gathering and analyzing the data. After gathering data from interviews with four assistant principals, I reviewed each interview transcript during the hand-coding step. Orienting the interview questions by row and participant's responses by column to organize interview data entailed taking notes from each transcript and placing them onto an Excel document (see Figure 3). I read through each transcript several times during this process to ensure that all participants' ideas were recorded.

**Figure 3**

*Hand Coding*

Question Info	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
associated responsibilities	Student drop offs, lunch duty, meetings, walkthroughs, observations, student discipline, attendance, investigations, returning parent phone calls, responding to emails, meeting with admin team on daily/weekly schedule	<p>Reviewing emails from previous night not addressed or seen</p> <p>Breakfast duty or commons duty</p> <p>Making sure students are following dress code</p> <p>Touching base with staff briefly as I am doing morning duty</p> <p>Once first period gets started, the day goes into a mix of meetings (and staff meetings)</p> <p>Dealing with discipline issues</p> <p>Calling parents back regarding discipline, attendance, dress code, tardies.</p> <p>Lunch duty, then afternoon duty ensuring the entire day goes smoothly</p> <p>Putting out fires that come throughout the day</p>	<p>Morning Duty, making sure kids get to class on time.</p> <p>Check in with front office clerks, make parent phone calls or meet with parents that have come in for the day.</p> <p>Duty every 50-55 minutes when students switch classes being out in the hallway to monitor students, checking bathrooms to ensure no students are hiding in there.</p> <p>Speaking with teachers, parents, and students throughout the day for various matters.</p> <p>Discipline takes up a lot of my time as well as meetings scheduled throughout the day.</p>	<p>Morning duty. Then make sure kids get off to class.</p> <p>Office work: reports, disciplinary referrals.</p> <p>Duties run the day, morning, lunch and afternoon duty. Halfway duty and breaks in between duties.</p>
school's mission and vision	Don't know by memory. Promote students critical thinking, 21st century independent learners.	<p>Schools mission is similar to the district vision: work hard, dream big, conquer the future.</p> <p>The mission is associated with building lifelong learners, ensuring our kids are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century including post-secondary readiness and or preparation for joining the workforce.</p>	<p>Promote a collaborative environment that promotes high expectations for success. Taking into account students different learning styles. Vision focuses on each child's uniqueness and creativity. Committed to promoting a caring, safe, and conducive learning environment.</p> <p>Really it just focuses on each student as an individual and working to meet the needs of the individual student.</p>	<p>Mission: Excellence happens here.</p> <p>Vision: Better Together</p>
see yourself as an instructional leader	Participate in PLCs, teacher appraiser, strategies in the classroom go with school goals, teacher post conferences, suggestions and recommendations are provided. Doesn't just go with academics it encompasses behavior and classroom management often its left out, but there's a big umbrella to ensure TEKS are being covered. Looking at data, reviewing and analyzing the data, then creating a plan to meet students needs and goals as a campus.	<p>Teacher appraiser: need to know what's going on in the classroom, what the needs of our teachers are, expectations of our teachers, which teachers are on par with rigorous instruction, and knowing which teachers need support, knowing which teachers teach bell to bell and which ones struggle to do this.</p> <p>All of this will hopefully prepare me for principalship</p>	<p>It depends some days yes, some days no.</p> <p>Some days I am able to meet with teachers and go to all PLCs or department meetings collaborating with them.</p> <p>Other days attendance, deadlines, or major campus issue that requires an investigation that take up my time.</p> <p>Students and teachers feel comfortable popping in if they have a question or need clarification on something they come in to speak to me about that.</p>	<p>Involved with curriculum on campus.</p> <p>In charge of PLCs in charge of curriculum and data.</p> <p>Review specific strategies that teachers can implement, they hearing and appear to be. Listening but don't implement it.</p> <p>I know where we want to get the students, what teachers need to do, its just a matter of teachers doing what they are asked to do.</p>
skills as an instructional leader being underutilized	Maybe, since as an assistant principal mostly handle student discipline, attendance and school safety. However, still in the classroom, conducting walkthroughs and observations, provide support to teachers, a lot of my time is spent on discipline, attendance and school safety so I am a little bit inbetween.	<p>Not always provided the opportunity to participate in PLCs.</p> <p>Sometimes I feel because I don't participate in PLCs I don't know specifics about curriculum or programs that our campus uses.</p> <p>When trainings involve anything related to curriculum I sometimes feel out of the loop.</p> <p>Being my first year there was a huge amount to learn and I'm still learning. I feel that maybe not being involved was on purpose since I am in charge of discipline and attendance and special education that maybe instruction would have been overwhelming.</p>	<p>This being my first year at the middle school and playing the role of assistant principal and dean of instruction there are times that I feel underutilized because I'm doing AP things.</p>	

I then carefully analyzed the data via inductive analysis utilizing in vivo and open coding processes. Once complete, the codes were transferred into the Atlas.ti coding software. In the course of the second round of coding, the researcher linked the codes from Atlas.ti to previous codes from the manual coding phase. During the first data coding process, 114 codes emerged. A second coding process took place to analyze the data further. Data was further analyzed for

similarities and patterns. During this process, 25 codes were identified. Table 2 shows an excerpt of the codes that emerged using Atlas.ti.

**Table 2**

*Initial Coding Phase: In Vivo and Open Coding Categories*

Code Name	Description	References
Challenges	References various challenges experienced by Aps	21
Communication	This code references the various forms of communication, and AP engages in	20
Collaboration	This code references various forms of collaboration an AP engages in	20
Support	This code references various forms of support an AP requires and offered	16
Professional Development	References professional development AP provides to staff and how AP requests to attend PD	7
Time Management	Refers to management of tasks and time to perform tasks	5
Responsibility	References the various responsibilities carried out and tasks they are responsible for	5
Data Analysis	References activities that involve analysis of data	3
Discipline	References situations or activities performed that involve discipline	3
Leadership	Involvement in leadership activities	3
Motivation	Immediate addressing of activities that require correction and/or conversations to encourage staff/students	3

The process revealed similarities from the interview responses and uncovered differences in participants' perceptions. The themes that surfaced from the data's initial analysis included communication, time management, responsibility, collaboration, support, open communication, professional development, responsibilities, challenges, and mentoring. After a second analysis of the data, the themes were recategorized into the following: challenges, collaboration, communication, mentoring/leadership development, relationship building, and support. Finally, after thoroughly evaluating and analyzing the data, the researcher categorized the findings into three themes and subthemes. Table 3 (See Below) shows the themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis.

**Table 3**

*Themes and Sub-Themes*

Themes	Subthemes
Collaboration and Communication skills are vital to the AP role	Informing Stakeholders Stakeholder Recognition
Challenges of Being an Assistant Principal	Time Management & Prioritization of Tasks Balance of Multiple Responsibilities
Seeking Multiple forms of support	Colleague Feedback/Networking Coaching/Mentoring

**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that the researcher continuously assesses the plausibility of his growing insights, disputing the narratives and interpretations he puts forward to address the credibility of this study. Trustworthiness is the degree of assurance in data, interpretation, and procedures used to ensure a study's quality (Connelly, 2016). The researcher examines their observations very closely for bias and interpretations so as not to simply find the answers to

exactly what they were looking for in their question. Comparing the feasibility of themes and interpretations and examining them against data to check whether collecting more data is warranted if there is disparate data is a method to ensure trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 228). The researcher tests the data for negative occurrences of themes, typologies, and patterns, which may guide the researcher to new data collection if needed or an analysis enhancement as the researcher incorporates negative occurrences into expanded constructs (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 229).

Furthermore, the researcher should critically challenge the patterns apparent in the analysis's findings; however, it should search for other plausible explanations as other reasons inevitably exist. The researcher's job is to discern and depict why their explanation is the most plausible. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are the four truth values of trustworthiness.

### **Credibility**

Credibility in qualitative research denotes the ability of the researcher to accurately synthesize and convey the participants' points of view while applying specific techniques, including member verification, rich, extensive descriptions, and reflexivity. This study employed member checking and transcript validation to ensure credibility. Member verification was used to determine whether the qualitative findings were accurate by sending participants' final reports for confirmation. To use member checking before coding the papers, the transcript was sent through email to the appropriate participant. If any corrections or additions needed to be made to the transcript, the participants were asked to email the researcher. None of the participants responded to the email requesting revisions to their transcripts by expressing that none were needed.



**Dependability**

Dependability denotes how repeatable, reliable, and consistent the research findings are. Methods for systematic data collecting and analysis can be used to accomplish this. To establish dependability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a strategy known as an inquiry audit, in which a researcher who was not involved in the research process examines the methodology, the process, and the study's findings. The simple-to-repeat steps for data analysis recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018) were employed in this study.

**Confirmability**

The degree to which the research findings can be independently validated is referred to as confirmability. By asking participants a series of demographic questions, such as their age, marital status, number of years spent working in education, number of years spent as an assistant principal, what instructional leadership meant to them, and whether they were interested in becoming principals, it was possible to validate the transcription and thicken the description. Transcript validation was used for member-checking; participants received the transcript via email to validate the veracity of their interview responses. To provide an honest and open narrative for the readers, the researcher used reflexivity for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 222). This meant outlining the bias the researcher brought to the study.

**Transferability**

The extent to which study findings can be related to different people, circumstances, or settings is referred to as transferability. The nature of transferability, according to Polit & Beck (2014), is the degree to which research findings may be duplicated and used in new contexts. Rich, thick descriptions will be utilized in the study to establish transferability. Rich, thick descriptions involve the researcher providing detailed descriptions of the setting and many

perspectives about a theme, portraying an element of shared experiences within their findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 222). Additionally, purposeful sampling was utilized to obtain various perspectives from the participants within the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Overview of Chapter**

This case study's aim was to examine the instructional leadership practices employed by assistant principals, the support they require to be effective instructional leaders, and the interactions amongst the assistant principal and the principal that supported the development of instructional leadership. Utilizing a qualitative method, the researcher gained a thorough grasp of the leadership techniques employed by assistant principals in their current roles. The adoption of a case study design was prompted by the need for a broad explanation of the behaviors of the current assistant principals working in small schools in South Texas' Region 1 area. In this chapter, the study's credibility procedures, such as member checking and transcript validation, were detailed along with the research design. Transferability will be addressed in the findings using rich, thick descriptions. Dependability was addressed through a thorough data plan based on Creswell & Creswell (2018), which described how data was arranged and analyzed into themes. The study's conclusions, including a data analysis, are presented in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter presents the data analysis's findings. This qualitative case study aimed to explore the instructional leadership practices of assistant principals and contribute to the literature by examining the difficulties assistant principals face as instructional leaders and investigating ways to support the leadership development of assistant principals in the South Texas Region 1 school districts. This study specifically considered the assistant principals' duties for leading instruction, the challenges they face, and the assistance they need to be successful.

#### **Research Questions**

Three research questions were formulated for this study to explore the instructional leadership practices enacted by assistant principals in their current positions. The following are the research questions:

1. What instructional leadership behaviors are assistant principals in Region 1 engaged in?
2. What support is needed for assistant principals in Region 1 as instructional leaders?
3. What relationship between the principal and assistant principal fosters the instructional leadership development of the assistant principal in Region 1?

#### **Demographic Analysis**

Small schools in Region 1—more specifically, the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), located in deep South Texas—were the subject of this case study. At the southernmost tip of South Texas, this region straddles the Texas-Mexico border. The majority of the people in this area self-identify as Hispanic and speak both English and Spanish fluently. This study aimed to provide

awareness into assistant principals' challenges as instructional leaders and identify strategies to help them in their jobs by investigating the practices and experiences of assistant principals from two small school systems in the RGV. Assistant principals can contribute to this field of research to influence district and school-level practices addressing assistant principal leadership development by sharing their life and professional experiences.

### **Participants**

Assistant principals currently working in two local school districts in the Region 1 area under study served as the pool from which participants for this study were drawn. Every assistant principal met the requirements for participation in this study with a minimum of one year of experience. Participants in the study were four assistant principals who met the criteria.

Each participant had five to fifteen years of overall teaching experience and at least one year of experience as an assistant principal. Mr. John Baca has been an assistant principal for five years and has been in his current position for about a year, all years, as an elementary assistant principal. Mr. Aaron Palacio, Ms. Jennifer Long, and Ms. Annette Dominguez are all in their first year as assistant principals. Three participants were in their first year as assistant principals, and one had prior experience as an assistant principal.

The participant descriptions in the table below do not provide specific demographic information about the participants to protect their confidentiality. A summary of the demographic data is provided below in Table 4. The four participants from two different school districts provided a range of perspectives and experiences.

**Table 4***Participant Demographic Information*

Participant	Pseudonym District Name	Ethnicity	Gender	Years in Teaching	Years as an administrator	Total Years in Education
John Baca	Parrot Elementary	Hispanic	Male	9	5	14
Aaron Palacio	Parrot High School	Hispanic	Male	5	1	17
Annette Dominguez	Parrot Middle School	White	Female	7	1	13
Jennifer Long	Lark Middle School	Hispanic	Female	12	1	13

**Participant Profiles**

The participants for the study were chosen via the use of purposeful sampling; the requirements included being an assistant principal currently employed in a Region 1 K–12 small school district, having at least one year of experience as an assistant principal, and not being a specialized assistant principal (i.e., an AP of operations, an AP of instruction, or an AP of special programs). The participant profiles provided below aid the reader in thoroughly understanding each assistant principal who took part in the study via rich, thick descriptions of the participants.

**Participant 1: Mr. John Baca, Assistant Principal, Parrott Elementary**

The first interview conducted was with Mr. Baca in his office after school. When I walked into the office, I noticed that his office was filled with pictures of his family (wife and children) and photos of his previous school district students. He wore slacks and a polo shirt with the school district logo. We sat at the table in his office directly across from each other. Mr.

Baca serves as assistant principal at a Pk3-5<sup>th</sup> elementary school campus with a population of approximately 620 students. Ninety-eight percent of students on the campus are Hispanic. Parrot Elementary has 83% of its students classified as economically disadvantaged and 67% as at-risk. Parrot Elementary has 42 classroom teachers (TAPR, 2022).

At the time of the interview, Mr. Baca, a 37-year-old Hispanic male, was in his 14<sup>th</sup> year of education. He started his educational career as a pre-kindergarten teacher, eventually teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade for nine years before becoming an assistant principal. Mr. Baca has been an assistant principal at the elementary school level for five years on two campuses. When asked about the definition of instructional leadership, he noted that instructional leadership is being able to support classroom teachers and their instructional practice. Additionally, he indicated that being up to date with current applications regarding technology in the curriculum and ensuring students learn in the classroom are all elements of being an instructional leader. He further discussed that dissecting the components of the curriculum to support others is integral to instructional leadership. When asked about the school's mission and vision, Mr. Baca nervously noted that he did not know it by memory; however, he recalled that their mission and vision promote students' critical thinking as 21st-century independent learners.

Mr. Baca identified meeting the needs of each grade level or department, student population, academic and student programs, and the wants of the community as personal challenges to being an instructional leader. When probed about instructional leadership skills being underutilized, Mr. Baca noted that as an assistant principal, he primarily handles student discipline, attendance, and school safety and that a lot of his time is spent in these areas. He further mentioned that his associated responsibilities include student drop-offs, lunch duty, meetings, walkthroughs, observations, student discipline, attendance, investigations, returning

parent phone calls, responding to emails, and meeting with the admin team on a daily/weekly schedule. However, he did express that he is in the classroom, conducting walkthroughs and observations and providing support to teachers.

This aspiring principal is motivated by student success, relationship building, and continuing traditions for the school community. Additionally, he hopes to maintain a safe and welcoming environment for students, staff, parents, and the community.

### **Participant 2: Mr. Aaron Palacio, Assistant Principal, Parrott High School**

The second interview was with Mr. Palacio in a room across from my office after school. Mr. Palacio wore slacks, a button-down shirt, and dress shoes. We sat at the table directly across from each other for the interview. Mr. Palacio serves as assistant principal at a 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> comprehensive high school campus with a population of 460 students. Ninety-five percent of students within the campus are Hispanic, 72% of its students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 33% as at-risk. Parrot High School has 41 teachers (TAPR, 2022).

At the time of the interview, Mr. Palacios, a 38-year-old Hispanic male, was in his 17<sup>th</sup> year of education. He started his educational career as a middle school Social Studies teacher, which he taught for five years. He then worked as a Gear Up facilitator for several years and then as an instructional facilitator, all at the middle school level, before becoming an assistant principal. Mr. Palacios has just completed one year as an assistant principal at the high school level. When asked about the definition of instructional leadership, he described it as knowing precisely what is going on at your campus in the classrooms, knowing that teachers are supposed to follow a year at a glance and a schedule to include benchmarks and teaching critical areas of the TEKS. He further noted that it is ensuring teachers provide rigorous instruction to students daily via frequent teacher walkthroughs and conducting beginning-of-the-year conferences with

teachers. Additionally, he noted instructional leadership as having crucial conversations with teachers on things they are doing well or need improvement throughout the school year. He also stated that having crucial conversations with teachers regarding high-need students that have attendance and/or discipline issues is a component of instructional leadership.

When asked about the school's mission and vision, he stated that he was unsure of his campus's mission and vision. However, he thought it was similar to the district vision: to work hard, dream big, and conquer the future. He further elaborated that the mission is associated with building lifelong learners, ensuring our students are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century, including post-secondary readiness and preparation for joining the workforce.

Mr. Palacios identified the demands of discipline and attendance issues as challenges to being an instructional leader. When probed about instructional leadership skills being underutilized, he conveyed that he was not always provided the opportunity to participate in professional learning community (PLC) meetings. As a result of not always participating, Mr. Palacios felt he didn't know specifics about the curriculum or programs that the campus uses. Moreover, he expressed feeling out of the loop when training involves anything related to curriculum. He further noted that this being his first year, there was a huge amount to learn, and he is still learning. He added that he felt that not being involved in PLCs and curriculum discussion was on purpose since he was primarily in charge of discipline attendance and special education and that maybe being involved in instruction would have been overwhelming.

He further mentioned that his associated responsibilities include activities such as duty throughout the day, beginning with breakfast and commons duty, lunch duty, then afternoon duty, ensuring the entire day goes smoothly. His daily schedule involves calling parents back regarding discipline, attendance, dress code, student tardies, reviewing emails from the previous



night not addressed or seen, touching base with staff briefly as I do morning duty, and ensuring students follow the dress code. He further expressed that once the first period gets started, the day goes into a mix of meetings (and staff meetings), dealing with disciplinary issues and putting out fires throughout the day.

This novice administrator thought that as a former dean of instruction at the middle school, he was coming into the position with prior experience; however, he quickly learned that high school is a different ballgame in the educational world. He reported that he struggles daily to balance the demands of his position; however, after living in his position for one year, he feels more prepared for next year. Mr. Palacios is interested in pursuing the principalship. He is motivated by his servant leadership mentality and ability to motivate staff to perform at the levels needed to support and guide student instruction.

### **Participant 3: Mrs. Annette Dominguez, Assistant Principal, Parrott Middle School**

Mrs. Dominguez's interview was conducted via Zoom. Mrs. Dominguez's end-of-the-year schedule was hectic, so we met via Zoom on Saturday morning after her school year ended. Once we both logged into the session, we had introductory greetings. Mrs. Dominguez stated she was happy participating in this study as she often felt she was not an instructional leader. The description of the study intrigued her to participate. Mrs. Dominguez is the Parrot Middle School campus's assistant principal, serving about 350 students in grades 6th-8th. This campus serves a 95% Hispanic population, with 78% economically disadvantaged students and 66% at-risk students. There are 21 teachers at Parrot Middle School (TAPR, 2022).

Mrs. Dominguez, a 36-year-old White female, was in her 13<sup>th</sup> year of education at the time of the interview. She started her educational career as a paraprofessional for two years while she obtained her teaching degree. Her first teaching assignment was at the 1<sup>st</sup>-grade level,

which she did for two years before being moved into 5<sup>th</sup> grade as a Reading/Language Arts teacher for the next three years before she accepted a position as an instructional facilitator at another elementary school. Mrs. Dominguez was an instructional facilitator for three years before becoming assistant principal. When asked what instructional leadership means to her, Mrs. Dominguez stated that instructional leadership means collaborating with teachers to improve the academic success of all students. She further expressed that instructional leadership involves collaboration with teachers and students, whether it be data analysis, review of lesson plans, modeling for teachers as needed to help promote student success, and student engagement with lessons.

When discussing the school campus' mission and vision, Mrs. Dominguez stated that her school's mission includes promoting a collaborative environment that promotes high expectations for student success. She further noted that considering students' different learning styles is essential to students' success. She explained that the vision focuses on each child's uniqueness and creativity and that the campus staff promotes a caring, safe, and conducive learning environment. To sum it up, she expressed that it just focuses on each student as an individual and staff working to meet the individual student's needs.

Mrs. Dominguez expressed that her personal challenge as an instructional leader is being expected to always have answers. When asked about the underutilization of instructional leadership, Mrs. Dominguez expressed that playing the role of both assistant principal and dean of instruction has spread her very thin. She voiced her concern about being unable to perform many tasks as an instructional leader because she was doing “AP things,” as she called them. AP things are taking care of discipline, attendance, and safety tasks versus participating in PLCs and guiding instruction.

Mrs. Dominguez further conveyed her associated responsibilities and her daily schedule of duties, including tasks such as morning, lunch, and afternoon duty, making sure kids get to class on time with duty every 50-55 minutes when students switch classes being out in the hallway to monitor students, checking bathrooms to ensure no students are hiding in there. After morning duty, she explained that her routine includes checking in with front office clerks for phone call messages, returning the parent phone calls, or meeting with parents that have come in for the day. Additionally, she expressed that she speaks with teachers, parents, and students throughout the day for various matters, which consumes a lot of her time. She did convey that discipline takes up a great deal of her time and meetings (504, Language Proficiency Assessment Committee- LPAC and Admission, Review, and Dismissal-ARD) scheduled throughout the day.

As a first-year assistant principal, Mrs. Dominguez said she always wanted to be a teacher. Then once she was teaching, she knew she wanted to work in Educational Administration and become a principal. She would love one day to be the one that guides the decisions that will encourage student success and make a difference in children's lives.

**Participant 4: Ms. Jennifer Long, Assistant Principal, Lark Middle School**

The interview with Ms. Long was conducted via Zoom. There were two attempts to hold the meeting prior, but her schedule did not allow the meetings to occur. The interview was conducted on a Saturday morning, as that is when both our schedules worked best. When the interview began, we greeted each other and apologized for the previous conflicts, which prevented us from meeting as scheduled. Ms. Long expressed that she, too, was working on her dissertation and was happy to participate in a study that would contribute to much-needed research. Ms. Long works at Lark Middle School, which serves a population of approximately

480 students in grades 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>. Ninety-seven percent of students within the campus are Hispanic, 94% of its students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 55% are at-risk. Parrot High School has 31 classroom teachers (TAPR, 2022).

Ms. Long, a 37-year-old Hispanic female, was in her 13<sup>th</sup> year in education at the time of the interview. She began her educational career as a special education teacher at the elementary level and continued to serve in that capacity for 12 years. Ms. Long transitioned into the role of assistant principal this current school year. When prompted to express what instructional leadership meant to her, Ms. Long stated that it is ensuring teachers are good instructional teachers. Moving into the definition of instructional leadership, Ms. Long stated that an instructional leader is an administrator responsible for instruction that goes over instruction with teachers that know what the data is, where the students need to be, and how to get them there. Also, she noted that working with teachers one-on-one or in a small group basis to work on skills and planning instruction defines what instructional leadership is.

When prompted about the school's mission and vision, Ms. Long was a bit nervous, stating she did not know the mission/vision verbatim. She expressed that the mission had to do with excellence happening here, and the vision had to do with the phrase “better together.”

Ms. Long identified not having all the curriculum knowledge as a personal challenge of being an instructional leader. In the discussion regarding the underutilization of her instructional leadership skills, Ms. Long conveyed that other duties she performs often keep her away from working with instruction. She conveyed that handling discipline often takes up a lot of her time, sometimes the whole day; consequently, she cannot involve herself with instructional tasks. Ms. Long feels she is very competent in instructional leadership, yet not often able to work with instructional tasks. She expressed that her responsibilities involve morning, lunch, hallway, and

afternoon duties. She commented that "duties run the day." She noted that "in between" duties, she returns to her office to work on office work, reports, and disciplinary referrals. Making it into classrooms and PLCs are activities she can perform; however, not as often as she would like to.

Ms. Long conveyed that she would like to be a principal one day to guide and support instruction by aiding her campus in selecting appropriate curriculum materials to support student instruction and achievement.

### **Analysis of Mission and Vision**

All participants were unsure of the exact phrasing of their campus's mission and vision. Mr. Baca noted that his campus promotes students' critical thinking for 21st-century independent learners. Mr. Palacios tied his campus mission and vision to the district's mission and vision, which is associated with building lifelong learners and ensuring that the students are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including postsecondary readiness and preparing for the workforce. Mrs. Dominguez noted that the vision and mission promotes a collaborative environment with high expectations for success. She stated that the vision focuses on each child's uniqueness and creativity and that the campus is committed to promoting a caring, safe, conducive learning environment. Additionally, she expressed that the mission focuses on each student as an individual and how the school works to meet the needs of each individual student. Ms. Long was not very sure what her mission and vision stated, however, she noted that it fell along the lines of excellence happens here, and the vision is better together. This suggests that the AP needs to be more involved in drafting the campus mission and vision to articulate its purpose and meaning to stakeholders. Although the participants could articulate what they thought the school's mission and vision were, there was much uncertainty about how it was

written.

The participants provided data based on their individual experiences as assistant principals in addition to satisfying the demographic requirements established for the study, which included working as a non-specialized assistant principal in a small school's consortium school in the Region 1 area. They offered insight into the needs of local school districts in Region 1 due to their diverse experiences as assistant principals. To the extent that they related to being an instructional leader, each participant felt compelled to share their experiences as an assistant principal.

### Findings

Following multiple rounds of coding and analysis (see Chapter III), the participant data was utilized to achieve the following results. Three overarching themes emerged from the research about assistant principals' instructional leadership practices and the support they require is shown in Table 5. Some recurring patterns in the data indicate that assistant principals don't appear to be knowledgeable about all the facets of instructional leadership or to be actively involved in all of them. Direct quotations from the data supporting the conclusions are included in the discussion of each section.

**Table 5**

*Themes and Sub Themes*

Themes	Subthemes
Collaboration and Communication skills are vital to the AP role	Informing Multiple Stakeholders Stakeholder Recognition
Challenges of Being an Assistant Principal	Time Management & Prioritization of Tasks Balance of Multiple Responsibilities
Seeking Multiple forms of support	Colleague Feedback/Networking Coaching/Mentoring

### **Collaboration and Communication skills are vital to the AP Role**

One theme that emerged from the study was the importance of collaboration and communication skills of the AP as an instructional leader. Throughout this theme, participants noted in many of their responses that speaking and listening skills, informing stakeholders, and stakeholder recognition are essential to the instructional leadership practices of the assistant principal.

All participants conveyed participation in PLCs, where they communicated and collaborated with staff on various topics. The AP's participation in PLC discussions in which they collaborate with teachers, review specific strategies based on data, and discuss plans based on data require communication and collaboration skills to facilitate productive discussions in PLC meetings. Mr. Baca stated, "[I] participate in PLCs, [he] is a teacher appraiser, [he] provides strategies in the classroom to go with school goals and conducts teacher post conferences in which suggestions and recommendations are provided based on what he saw in his observation. Looking at data, reviewing and analyzing the data, then creating a plan to meet student's needs and goals as a campus" (p. 2). This quote conveys collaboration and communication skills utilized by Mr. Baca as he guided staff through creating a plan based on data in PLC meetings. Like Mr. Baca, Mrs. Dominguez said, "Some days she can meet with teachers and go to all PLCs or department meetings collaborating with them" (p. 2). This suggests that Mrs. Dominguez is aware of the collaboration in a PLC meeting. Along the same lines as Mr. Baca and Mrs. Dominguez, Ms. Long expressed that she is "in charge of PLCs, in charge of curriculum and data and reviews specific strategies that teachers can implement" (p. 1). Ms. Long noted, "She knows where the campus wants to get the students and what teachers need to do; it's just a matter of teachers doing what they are asked to do" (p. 1). This statement

suggests that communication and collaboration skills are vital for the AP to facilitate teachers' acceptance of the assistance they are provided.

When APs were queried about framing and communicating school goals, communication and collaboration with stakeholders were common themes among the participant responses. Mr. Baca referenced a conversation with his principal; he mentioned “collaborating with our school principal and what we want for our school academically, socially, behaviorally. moving into PBIS and we look at what we want for each child” (p. 1). This demonstrates that Mr. Baca realizes that collaboration between himself and the principal is vital in working together towards a common goal. Additionally, Mr. Baca stated, “As far as our students, we do have more morning announcements here messages are given on a daily weekly basis to our students, and we kind of remind them, what our expectations are for them” (p. 1). This suggests Mr. Baca is aware that it is important to communicate clear and concise messages as a leader. Moreover, Mr. Baca noted parent-teacher conferences as a way to communicate school goals; he stated, “We do have school compacts that are handed out, that includes what is expected, what they can expect from the district, what they can expect from the school, and what they can do to help us meet those goals” (p. 1). This statement implies that Mr. Baca is aware that parents are partners in their children's education and communication of expectations, and collaboration with them is vital to forming a partnership.

Like Mr. Baca, Mr. Palacio expressed that “students and teachers feel comfortable popping into his office if they have a question or need clarification on something they come in to speak to me about that” (p. 1). This suggests that Mr. Palacios recognizes rapport with staff and students through an ‘open door policy’ is an effective method of communication. Additionally, he conveyed communication with parents through “parent meetings, such as those held



periodically throughout the year, like open house” (p. 1). Furthermore, he noted individual parent meetings “regarding attendance concerns in which he communicated the school's goal of 90% attendance and discipline meetings informing parents of the intent to follow the student code of conduct with consistency” (p. 1). This quote conveyed that Mr. Palacios intentionally established a communication system to be a collaborative partner with parents in a proactive rather than reactive manner.

The reality is that APs must be good communicators and possess the ability to facilitate collaboration amongst stakeholders. Mrs. Dominguez noted that “students and teachers feel comfortable popping into her office if they had a question or need clarification on something they'd come in to speak to her about it” (p. 1). This suggests that Mrs. Dominguez established rapport and built relationships with staff and students, which is vital to the AP's role in building culture. Additionally, Mrs. Dominguez referenced communicating school goals as “a collaborative effort amongst our admin team, which includes the principal and counselor; we kind of sit down and look at all the data, then we meet with the teachers to go over that and gather their input, what they think” (p.1). This suggests that Mrs. Dominguez is aware of collaboration, which is integral in gathering input into the organization's goals. This is another example of building relationships within the organization. Similar to Mrs. Dominguez, Ms. Long referenced collaboration and communication in the form of working with staff on the campus improvement plan; specifically, she noted “working with staff to draft a revised mission and vision to communicate our school goals, draft up the campus improvement plan, then we share it with teachers so that everybody knows where we're at and where we need to be” (p. 1). This suggests that Mrs. Long is also aware of the importance of gathering input from stakeholders in school goals, as this will forge a partnership amongst all for the betterment of the organization.

## **Informing Stakeholders**

Informing stakeholders was a subtheme that emerged from the data analysis. The ability to inform stakeholders requires effective and varied communication skills from the assistant principal. Each of the participants revealed ways in which they informed various stakeholders of school goals. Mr. Baca referenced the "campus-based committees at school and how he can communicate with staff in that manner" (p. 1). He also referenced morning announcements, where messages are shared daily and weekly to communicate expectations to students. Additionally, Mr. Baca referenced "school compacts that are utilized during parent/teacher conferences to inform parents what they can expect from the campus and what they, as parents, can do to help the campus meet their goals" (p. 1). This suggests that communication skills are vital to the role of the AP. Like Mr. Baca, Mr. Palacio referenced "parent meetings to inform parents via individual parent conferences such as discipline or attendance plan parent meetings to inform parents of their child's expectations for attendance and discipline" (p. 1). Additionally, Mr. Palacio referenced that "this year they had site-based decision-making (SBDM) meetings that involved parents and community members" (p. 1).

Like Mr. Palacio, Mrs. Dominguez referenced site-based decision-making (SBDM) committee meetings involving parents and community members to inform stakeholders of school goals (p. 1). Ms. Long referenced the campus improvement plan shared with campus staff to inform them where the campus is and where they would like to be at the end of the school year (p. 1). Communication and collaboration skills are necessary when meeting with parents and conducting meetings. All the meetings and committees referenced by all the participants suggest that communication skills are vital to the role of the assistant principal. To lead and guide

committees or convey messages to parents and students, one must possess the skills of communication and collaboration to be utilized across various stakeholders.

Ms. Long conveyed that “the social communication aspect is the most challenging part of her job” (p. 2). She expressed that “dealing with people and all their different personalities is a challenge” (p. 2). She noted that “figuring out how to communicate with all stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, and community members) is difficult” (p. 2). She noted that “everyone is different and takes things differently” (p. 2). Additionally, she referenced “students in this aspect, noting that not everything or how you communicate works for all students” (p. 2). This conveys that various communication skills are essential to the role of an assistant principal. As an AP, you must always be aware of all your audiences and be intentional in communicating information to all stakeholders.

### **Stakeholder Recognition**

Each participant noted various forms of stakeholder recognition they encourage as forms of communication and collaboration with stakeholders. Mr. Baca expressed that a sunshine committee was started on his campus to promote staff accomplishments, such as graduating from college, earning certificates, and coordinating family celebrations, pregnancies, and marriages. Mr. Baca noted, “We have tried to increase that this year. This suggests that Mr. Baca is aware that activities such as those mentioned above are important to promote a positive culture amongst staff within the organization. He also noted the planning of student events that help students feel welcome. Ho expressed that some of their things were doing little barbecue events for them during field days. Doing the Spring and Winter Festivals, and I think a combination of all helps us promote our school culture” (p. 1). These activities require communication and collaboration

skills and suggest that Mr. Baca is aware that activities to promote culture are for both staff and students.

Mr. Palacios stated, “he encouraged staff and students to participate in "theme weeks" and ensured that he recognized the staff and students” (p. 2). This suggests that Mr. Palacios is aware of culture-driven activities and coordinates them to ensure staff and students build relationships within the campus. Additionally, he noted that “during teacher appreciation, he coordinated activities that made the staff feel appreciated and that they were looked out for” (p. 2). Like Mr. Palacios, Mrs. Dominguez said, “She also coordinated teacher incentive activities throughout the school year to make them feel appreciated” (p. 2). She stated, “They had a 'theme' for teacher appreciation week, which she collaborated on with her administrative team and then communicated with staff daily as they handed out the appreciation gifts to the staff” (p. 2). This suggests that Mrs. Dominguez, as part of promoting school culture, advocates for an environment where staff feels appreciated and supported. Communication and collaboration skills are vital to the promotion of school culture.

Additionally, Mrs. Dominguez noted that “she coordinated student incentives for attendance recognition every six weeks” (p. 2). This required collaboration with her administrative team and outside agencies like the inflatable slides they brought in and Kona ice as rewards for the students. This further suggests the awareness and knowledge of school culture an AP must possess to be intentional in communication and collaboration skills to coordinate activities that build culture within their organizations. Arguably, APs play an integral role in encouraging and curating a positive school culture.

## Challenges of Being an Assistant Principal

Another theme that emerged in the study was the challenge of being an assistant principal. All four participants discussed various challenges they experienced in their roles. The sub-themes that emerged are time management and prioritization of tasks, and balance of multiple job responsibilities. All participants conveyed the challenge of the various responsibilities they were asked to engage in daily. Table 6 (shown below) conveys responsibilities APs conveyed they engage in.

**Table 6**

### *Responsibilities of Assistant Principals*

Responsibilities of Assistant Principals	
Instructional	Curriculum Development Evaluation of Teachers PLC Participation
Managerial	Safety Procedures Attendance Oversight Discipline Oversight

### **Balance of Multiple Job Responsibilities**

A sub-theme that emerged from the theme challenges assistant principals experience is the balance of multiple job responsibilities. While the responsibilities mentioned above are not exhaustive (See Table 5), they convey some of the various responsibilities the participants expressed they perform in their roles. Among the multiple responsibilities, Mr. Baca shared "his participation in PLCs, his role as a teacher appraiser, how he provides strategies to teachers, as well as looking at data, and creating a plan to meet student's needs and campus goals" (p. 2) as ways he is an instructional leader. Like Mr. Baca, Mr. Palacio expressed that he is "...a teacher appraiser and knowing what is going on in the classroom, what the needs of teachers are,

expectations of teachers, that they are on par with rigorous instruction, and that they teach bell to bell instruction" (p. 2) as examples of how he is an instructional leader. This suggests that Mr. Palacios is aware of his role as a 'coach' for teachers as an instructional leader. For Mrs. Dominguez, attending PLCs, department meetings, and collaborating with staff are examples of her instructional leadership. Ms. Long stated, "She is in charge of PLCs, where she discusses curriculum and data" (p. 2). She further voiced that "she reviews specific strategies teachers can implement in their classrooms during PLCs" (p. 2). This suggests that, like Mr. Palacios, Mrs. Dominguez and Ms. Long understand and engage in tasks as a 'coach' for instruction on their campuses, a critical skill as an instructional leader. It is important to note that Mr. Baca highlighted the multiple and often competing responsibilities of APs as he shared that "instructional leadership doesn't just go with academics" (p. 1). He stated, "It also encompasses behavior and classroom management" (p. 1).

All four participants discussed their management duties and instructional leadership duties. Mr. Baca referenced student discipline and investigations, dealing with attendance matters, before school, lunch, and after-school duties as responsibilities he performs throughout the day. Mr. Baca stated, "I think it is one of the most challenging parts as an assistant principal because you are asked to go into the classroom support with discipline"(p. 2). He further stated that "this takes up a lot of his time" (p. 2). This suggests that the multiple duties APs are asked to perform are somewhat impractical for one person to accomplish and deters from their time engaging as instructional leaders.

Like Mr. Baca, Mr. Palacios referenced dealing with discipline and attendance issues and overseeing all daily duties, breakfast, lunch, hallway, and after-school duty, as duties he is tasked with ensuring the day runs smoothly. Additionally, Mr. Palacios noted that duties such as safety

are a large part of his managerial duties. He noted, “being responsible for locked door checks, taking care of anything that is broken immediately, and supervising all extracurricular activities” (p. 1). This suggests the critical role the AP plays in the success of the school; within their various responsibilities, they ensure smooth operations of the school, enhancing the education of the students.

Mrs. Dominguez, like Mr. Baca and Mr. Palacios, noted overseeing all campus duties before, during, and after school supervision. Mrs. Dominguez added that she is responsible for bathroom/hallway duty between each class every 50-55 minutes to ensure students make it to class on time and do not hide in the restroom (p. 1). This suggests an AP must be aware of the importance of students being in class learning and be intentional in supervising them. Like all the other participants, Ms. Long noted morning, lunch, and afternoon duty as part of her managerial role. She commented that “duties run your day” (p. 1). This suggests that APs must learn how to manage their competing responsibilities. Ms. Long also referenced working on discipline referrals and the paperwork associated with the referrals. Moreover, Mr. Baca noted, “Instructional leadership doesn’t just go with academics. It encompasses behavior and classroom management. Often, it is left out, but there is a big umbrella to ensure TEKS are being covered” (p. 2). Additionally, Mrs. Dominguez conveyed that some days attendance, deadlines, or major campus issues that require an investigation take up my time” (p. 1). This suggests that carrying out multiple roles and duties does not allow her to focus on the instructional aspects of leadership.

All four participants noted different managerial duties as challenges they experience that prevent them from engaging in instructional leadership tasks. This suggests that the APs face many challenges within their roles; juggling multiple responsibilities ranging from administrative

tasks to managing staff and addressing student behavior poses significant difficulties for the AP. To be effective instructional leaders, they must find ways to manage the competing tasks.

### **Time Management and Prioritization of Tasks**

Another sub-theme that emerged as part of the challenges APs face in their roles is time management and prioritization of tasks. The participants shared that they had too much to do and insufficient time to do it all. They conveyed that they know they are supposed to be instructional leaders. However, their managerial duties often take up so much time they cannot engage in instructional tasks. This suggests that the AP must take the initiative to implement strategies to manage their time so that they can engage in instructional leadership tasks.

Mr. Baca noted that “prioritizing your role and determining which takes the priority of that day is, I think, the most challenging part” (p. 3). Additionally, he referenced, “Being able to juggle all the tasks that are assigned sometimes can take you away from being visible and present” (p. 3). Mr. Baca’s competing priorities are further complicated with student investigations into discipline, special populations meetings make it very difficult to keep to a schedule. This suggests that as an AP, you must ensure you do not lose sight of your role and establish a system to determine what takes priority and can wait.

The multiple and competing priorities noted by Mr. Baca were also echoed by Mrs. Dominguez, who echoed that “she does the job of two people” (p. 2), so there is not enough time to complete everything. She referenced special education admission, review, dismissal (ard), Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) meetings, Response to Intervention (RtI) meetings, and Section 504 meetings that took up a lot of her time (p. 2). This suggests the importance of organization and prioritization of tasks that can be controlled, such as meetings. Like the other participants, Ms. Long also expressed that “duties run your day,” which suggests



that there must be intentionality when scheduling duties and who assists with them so that you do not allow the duties that need to be completed to take over.

### **Seeking Multiple Forms of Support**

Another theme from the study was that assistant principals seek multiple forms of support in their roles. The participants referenced seeking feedback from colleagues, central office personnel, and their principal to request assistance or professional development. The sub-themes that emerged are colleague feedback/networking, professional development, and coaching/mentoring. All four participants expressed a need for various forms of support as an instructional leader.

### **Colleague Feedback/Networking**

Feedback and networking are sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. Mr. Baca noted that he seeks feedback from his colleagues. If he sees that other administrators perform well in certain areas, he will ask them how they do it (p. 4). This suggests that Mr. Baca is reaching out himself to gain ideas from others instead of receiving ongoing guidance. Like Mr. Baca, Mrs. Dominguez contacts other district members. She noted that she works in a small district that does not have content specialists like larger districts, so she depends on collaboration with colleagues (p. 4). This suggests the need for content support; however, Mrs. Dominguez depends on colleague collaboration versus seeking out professional development at the campus level. Mr. Palacios noted that he also contacted colleagues for support and confirmation that he was "doing the right thing" (pg. 4). Additionally, Mr. Palacios referenced that he would "rather ask the question than make a mistake" (p. 4). He noted, "There were often times he misunderstood information or understood things differently than they were explained, so he'd reach out to make sure he understood things correctly" (p. 4). This suggests the uncertainty an

AP feels and the need for affirmation. This speaks to the multiple responsibilities associated with this role and, arguably, a culture that suggests that there is a “correct” way to do tasks on campus.

### **Coaching/Mentoring**

Coaching and mentoring were other sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. When queried about what the principal does to support their leadership development, assistant principals conveyed varied forms of coaching/mentoring by their principals. Mr. Baca expressed the following:

My principal let me take the lead, especially within assigned responsibilities (attendance and behavior incentives). She allows for autonomy, a term used a lot in building my capacity, and prompts me with phrases such as ‘If I were in her role (principal), what would I do, what would my approach be? Or says here’s what I’m thinking of doing, what do I think? This has supported my leadership development. (p.4)

This suggests that coaching is in place for Mr. Baca as he participates in open dialogue with his principal. For Mr. Baca, his principal affords him the autonomy to build his capacity, which suggests that she (the principal) trusts him and believes in his professional development. This further indicates that coaching and mentoring by the principal are vital to the development of the assistant principal. Mr. Baca also conveyed a level of comfort, asking for help from his principal. He stated “that a follow-up occurs, and he knows how the other person is feeling; he noted that lines of communication are open and that he feels comfortable asking for help from his principal” (p. 4). This suggests that open lines of communication are a vital part of the principal-assistant principal mentoring relationship.

Like Mr. Baca, Mrs. Dominguez's principal was also invested in her professional development and career aspirations. Mrs. Dominguez expressed that she and her principal had a conversation at the beginning of the school year regarding her goal of becoming a principal one day (p. 3). She shared that after that conversation, her principal took that information, ran with it, and ensured to include Mrs. Dominguez in many things and asked her to sit in on meetings when she could not (p. 3). She shared:

Whenever I need help with something, she (her principal) coaches me through it a lot of the time, it was just having crucial conversations because, in my previous role, I did not have to do that with teachers or adults. So, this year, my job required that of me, so she (her principal) would coach me through how to be supportive so that we could all be on the same page. (p. 3)

This suggests that coaching and mentoring are crucial to the assistant principal, so that the principal and the assistant principal are on the same page and convey the same information to stakeholders.

Like Mr. Baca and Mrs. Dominguez, Ms. Long expressed that she and her principal have an excellent relationship. She stated that he is very approachable and that she feels comfortable asking for help from him (p. 3). In the form of coaching and mentoring, she stated that her principal has check-ins with her to ask how she is doing and what she needs; she expressed that they work together (p. 3). Ms. Long further expressed that her principal is very supportive of anything she needs and that he made it clear to her that he is there to help her (p.3). This suggests that a good relationship with your principal is a critical component of coaching/mentoring to ensure that the AP is professionally developed. The more developed the AP becomes, the more efficient the AP becomes in their role to one day become the principal.

Unlike the other participants, Mr. Palacios shares a different experience regarding the support he received from his principal. He conveys that “due to the rapport or lack thereof with my principal, I didn't always feel like I could ask for help and that responses to his requests for assistance from his principal were not always positive or constructive” (p. 3). He adds that central office staff was always there to help him when needed (p. 3). This suggests a lack of open communication and trust between the AP and the principal. Therefore, the AP had to reach beyond his immediate supervisor to central office for assistance.

The coaching that Mr. Palacios received was to reach out to people who could answer the questions in the areas he oversaw: discipline, attendance, and special education. He learned not to bypass the principal but to get answers before he spoke to her so that he could present the issue and the guidance received and provide a recommendation based on the guidance. Mr. Palacios expressed, “I didn't understand she wanted me to find the answers and felt like she wanted me to find answers for myself” (p. 3). He struggled with this because he wanted to ensure he was making the right decision because he knows we have to do what's best for kids (p. 3). Mr. Palacios' experience suggests a lack of coaching and mentoring from his principal. He sought guidance and confirmation that he was doing things right and was redirected to look elsewhere. This suggests that the principal is not invested in his professional development and does not support Mr. Palacios's leadership growth.

### **Overview of Chapter**

The themes that emerged from the data analysis for the case study were examined in this chapter. Four assistant principals participated in the study and were asked to discuss instructional leadership in the context of their experiences as assistant principals. The three themes that emerged from this study are (a) Collaboration and Communication Skills Are Vital

to the AP Role, (b) Challenges of Being an Assistant Principal, and (c) Seeking Multiple Forms of Support. They summarize the instructional leadership practices conveyed by assistant principals and the support required in their roles. Ultimately, the three themes that emerged from the data analysis gave insight into the ideas the participants shared. The results confirm previous studies that assistant principals require assistance as instructional leaders.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### **Purpose of Study**

A qualitative case study was conducted in two small South Texas Region 1 area school districts, investigating the instructional leadership practices of assistant principals (APs). This study expands on current literature and adds to the body of knowledge on assistant principals as instructional leaders. Four APs took part in a semi-structured interview to gather information. Each participant's demographic profile, job description, and campus mission and vision were examined. This chapter discusses the results of the research on assistant principals as instructional leaders, the difficulties they encounter, and an exploration of support strategies for assistant principals in their positions.

This study is significant in educational leadership because the findings contribute to the body of knowledge regarding assistant principals and helps to identify whether there is a deliberate pipeline from assistant principal to principal. Assistant principals contribute to this field of research by sharing their experiences to help district and school-level practices on assistant principal leadership development.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

According to research, instructional leadership entails the qualities, actions, and practices necessary to manage a school successfully. Models of instructional leadership started to appear as the term grew more strongly linked to effective principals (Searby et al., 2017). The significance of instructional leadership in accomplishing an organization's goals is underscored by Hallinger's (1985) model. The approach advises instructional leaders to seek to foster a culture of cooperation and support among staff members as well as a common vision (Hallinger,

2010). Additionally, it highlights how crucial instructional leadership is in fostering and upholding a sense of accountability and ownership among staff members, as well as in coming up with novel ways to meet students' educational requirements (Hallinger, 2010). Further, this model emphasizes the need for continual professional growth for all staff members and the necessity of ongoing evaluation to guarantee that instructional objectives are reached (Hallinger, 2010).

The framework separates the practice of instructional leadership into three categories: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and fostering a supportive school environment (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, p. 5). The model suggests that instructional leaders must work to foster a collaborative culture, staff members must share a common vision, support (Hallinger, 2010). This is evident in this study of assistant principals who conveyed a culture of communication and collaboration amongst the stakeholders they serve.

### **Methods**

The case study method of inquiry was used in this study's qualitative methodology (Yin, 2014). An issue-specific case study selects one bounded case to investigate the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The APs frame the single-bounded scenario for this study. A case study was selected for this study to gain insight into instructional leadership practices employed by APs in their roles and the support needed for their leadership development as future principals. Semi-structured interviews with current APs from small school districts in the Region 1 area of South Texas gave insight into how APs carry out their responsibilities as instructional leaders, the challenges they face in these roles, and the support that is provided to them. This information could be used to develop best practices in the future.

A semi-structured protocol interview technique was utilized with participants during the study to allow them to voice their opinions and viewpoints. Region 1 area school districts in South Texas supplied the context for selecting best practices through deliberate sampling. The Regional Service Center's small school consortium helped identify small school districts. Site selection was limited to the small school consortium of Region 1 area-identified schools. Fourteen school districts met the requirements for classification. To choose participants for the study's interviews, the researcher used purposeful sampling and predetermined criteria. As part of the data collection and analysis process, APs who monitor instruction as part of their assigned duties were selected and interviewed to describe their practice.

### **Participants**

Two female and two male assistant principals from elementary, middle, and high schools currently employed in two small school districts in the Region 1 area signed up to take part in the study. They were all qualified to take part in the study since they were non-specialized assistant principals (i.e., assistant principals of teaching or assistant principals of operations). A demographic profile and a one-on-one in-person or Zoom interview were required of each participant.

All participants had five to fifteen years of experience in education and at least one year of experience working as an assistant principal. Mr. John Baca has been an assistant principal for five years and has been in his current position for about a year. Mr. Aaron Palacio, Mrs. Annette Dominguez, and Ms. Jennifer Long are all serving in their first year as assistant principals. The four participants represented two school districts from all grade levels and offered a variety of viewpoints and experiences. In chapter IV, a summary of the demographic information is given.



## **Findings**

This section presents the research questions, findings, and summarizes the data collection. Three research questions were formulated for this study to explore the instructional leadership practices enacted by assistant principals in their current positions. The following are the research questions:

1. What instructional leadership behaviors are assistant principals in Region 1 engaged in?
2. What support is needed for assistant principals in Region 1 as instructional leaders?
3. What relationship between the principal and assistant principal fosters the instructional leadership practices of the assistant principal in Region 1?

The study's assistant principals displayed a range of experiences in their capacities as instructional leaders. The findings showed that while each assistant principal has a different background in instructional leadership practices, they also have some things in common. The study also revealed that assistant principals face many challenges as instructional leaders and require assistance.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

Three themes emerged after an analysis of the study's data that revealed how assistant principals enact instructional leadership duties in their positions. The three themes that emerged from this study are (a) Collaboration and Communication Skills Are Vital to the AP Role, (b) Challenges of Being an Assistant Principal, and (c) Seeking Multiple Forms of Support. They summarize the instructional leadership practices conveyed by assistant principals and the support required in their roles. The study's assistant principals define instructional leadership broadly as providing assistance for classroom teachers, overseeing curriculum and instruction, and coming up with a plan. The following information looks at the leadership behaviors assistant principals

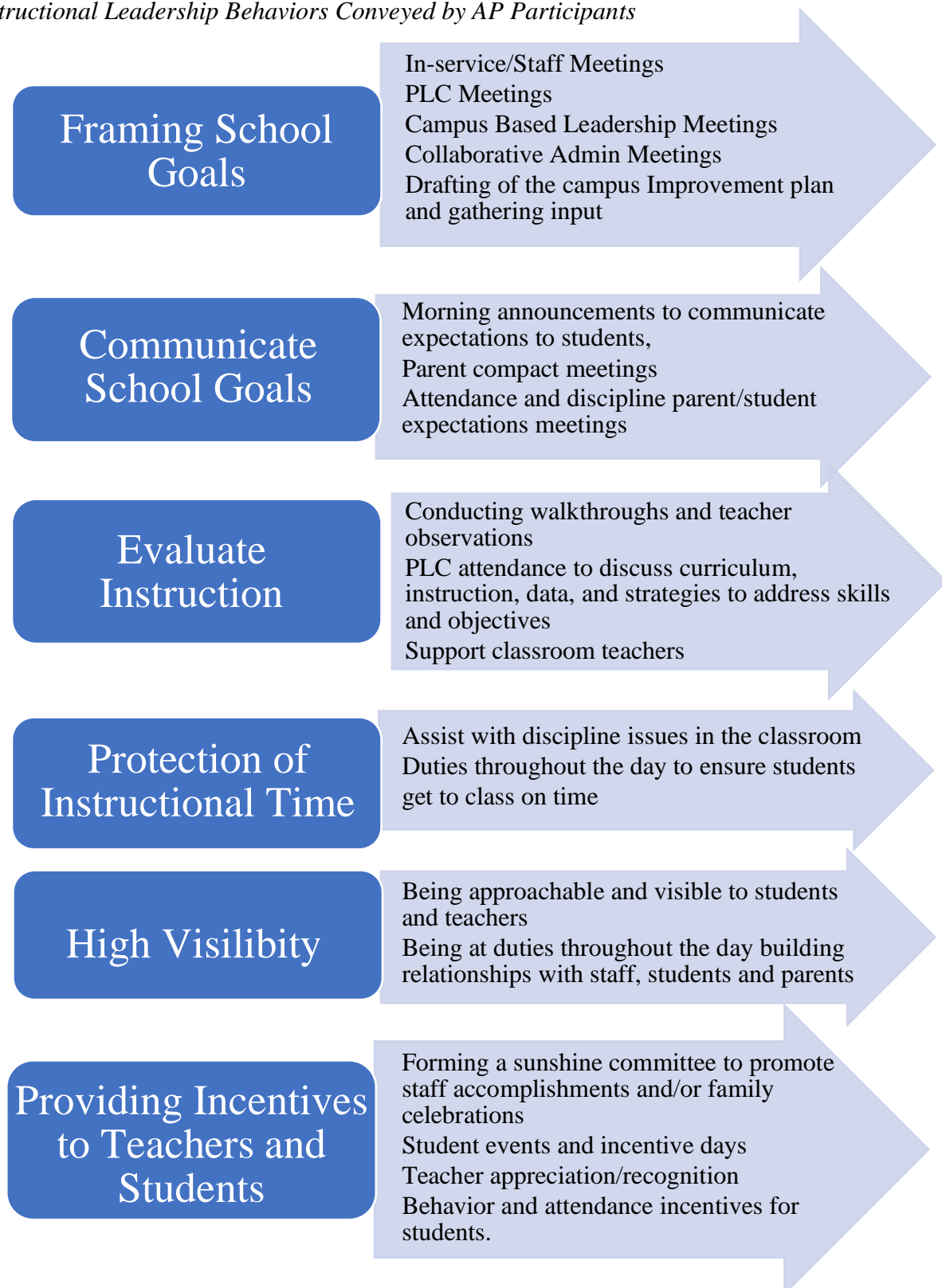
in Region 1 engage in, the support that is needed in their positions and the relationship between them and their principals and how the principal supports their leadership development.

***Q1: What instructional leadership behaviors are assistant principals in Region 1 engaged in?***

According to the conceptual framework of instructional leadership based on Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model, the four assistant principals provided evidence of instructional leadership behaviors that support those behaviors, including but not limited to the following, as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Instructional Leadership Behaviors Conveyed by AP Participants*



More specifically, the value of instructional leadership in furthering organizational goals was stressed by Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model of instructional leadership. The results of this study are consistent with the model's advice that instructional leaders create staff collaboration and support by creating a common vision (Hallinger, 2010). According to Peter Dewitt, "It is never too late for principals and assistant principals to learn how to be instructional leaders and work collaboratively, and quite honestly, there is no longer a choice" (NAESP, 2020, page 4). The rising theme clarifies that collaboration and communication abilities are essential for the AP function.

All four assistant principal participants conveyed a culture of communication and collaboration amongst themselves and the stakeholders they serve. They expressed ways they framed school goals as evidenced in the behaviors they described they engaged in (See Figure 4). Mr. Baca referenced a conversation with his principal; he mentioned "collaborating with our school principal and what we want for our school academically, socially, behaviorally moving into PBIS, and we look at what we want for each child" (p. 1). Additionally, Mr. Baca noted parent-teacher conferences as a way to communicate school goals; he stated, "We do have school compacts that are handed out, that includes what is expected, what they can expect from the district, what they can expect from the school, and what they can do to help us meet those goals" (p. 1). This aligns with existing research by Brooks and Niewenhuizen (2013), which stated that communication skills and the ability to collaborate with various stakeholders characterize the AP job and that APs have a unique role in building positive school climates and developing relationships with students, parents, and teachers. Mr. Palacio expressed that "students and teachers feel comfortable popping into his office if they have a question or need clarification on something they come in to speak to me about that" (p. 1). Additionally, Mrs. Dominguez noted that "students and teachers feel comfortable popping into her office if they had a question or

need clarification on something they would come in to speak to her about it" (p. 1). Ms. Long referenced collaboration and communication in the form of working with staff on the campus improvement plan; she noted, "working with staff to draft a revised mission and vision to communicate our school goals, draft up the campus improvement plan, then we share it with teachers so that everybody knows where we are at and where we need to be" (p. 1).

All four participants expressed ways they evaluate instruction and protect instructional time, as evidenced in the behaviors they described they engage in (See Figure 4). Mr. Baca stated, "[I] participate in PLCs, [he] is a teacher appraiser, [he] provides strategies in the classroom to go with school goals and conducts teacher post conferences in which suggestions and recommendations are provided based on what he saw in his observation. Looking at data, reviewing and analyzing the data, then creating a plan to meet student's needs and goals as a campus" (p. 2).

Also, Ms. Long said she is "in charge of PLCs, of curriculum and data and reviews specific strategies that teachers can implement" (p. 1). She further noted, "She knows where the campus wants to get the students and what teachers need to do; it is just a matter of teachers doing what they are asked to do" (p. 1). Existing research conducted by Harris and Lowery (2014) noted the leadership of the instructional program could involve responsibilities such as monitoring curriculum and instruction, providing feedback to teachers, fostering a school climate conducive to learning, and promoting a culture of collaboration, respect, and excellence. This research supported what was expressed by all study participants.

Furthermore, the study's sub-theme of informing stakeholders (staff, students, parents) in which all participants conveyed how APs communicate school goals to stakeholders (staff, parents, and students). Mr. Baca referenced the "campus-based committees at school and how he

can communicate with staff in that manner" (p. 1). Mr. Palacios and Mrs. Dominguez referenced site-based decision-making committee (SBDM) meetings involving parents and community members as ways that they inform and collaborate with staff and parents for input into the school goals. Additionally, Ms. Long referenced the campus improvement plan and how it is shared with campus staff to inform them where the campus is and where they would like to be at the end of the school year (p. 1). This supports research from Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglan (2014), which provided empirical evidence of the assistant principal role as an instructional leader, effectively communicating goals to teachers, providing feedback and support, and fostering a collaborative learning environment.

Ms. Long conveyed that the social communication aspect of informing stakeholders is "the most challenging part of her job" (p. 2). She expressed that dealing with people and all their different personalities is a challenge, noting that figuring out how to communicate with all stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, and community members) is difficult (p. 2). She emphasized that everyone is different and takes things differently (p. 2). Additionally, she referenced students in this aspect, noting that not everything or how you communicate works for all students (p. 2). This aligns with the research conducted by Clayton and Bingham (2018), who assert that the assistant principal position is unusually stressful. Leaders must acknowledge mistakes as learning opportunities and utilize the mistakes of others as teaching moments. They should provide feedback to both staff and students in a constructive manner and help uncover the underlying reasons behind the error. This conveys that communication skills are essential to the role of an assistant principal. As an AP, one must always be aware of all their audiences and be intentional in communicating information to all stakeholders.

In the study's subtheme, stakeholder recognition, three participants noted various forms of recognition they enact with their stakeholders as forms of communication and collaboration. Mr. Baca noted committees he started on his campus to promote staff accomplishments and events that he planned to ensure students feel welcome, like winter and spring festivals and field days. Mr. Palacios referenced "theme weeks" to encourage school culture and made it a point to recognize both staff and students who participated. Additionally, he noted coordinating activities that made the staff feel extra appreciated.

Mrs. Dominguez said she coordinated staff and student recognition activities to ensure they felt appreciated. The activities referenced suggest that the APs recognize that advocating for staff and student recognition is vital to promoting school culture. This further suggests an AP's awareness of school culture and intentional communication and collaboration skills to coordinate activities that build a culture within their organizations. Brooks and Niewenhuizen's (2013) research found that assistant principals play a unique role in fostering positive school climates and building relationships with students, parents, and teachers. Participants' experiences engaging with stakeholders are consistent with the research executed by Jenkins (2009), which argues that instructional leaders should actively engage with students, teachers, and staff to create an environment of trust, respect, and collaboration.

Stricter standards and accountability lead to the expansion of the AP's responsibilities to incorporate instructional leadership (Browne-Ferrigno, 2017; Sun & Shoho, 2017). The U. S. Secretary of Education published a report in 1982 on the state of education indicating that nation was "at risk" due to deteriorating educational standards marking the beginning of the education reform in the US; this research quickly shifted policymakers attention from effective schools to principal instructional leadership growing the market for research in this area (Hallinger &

Wang, 2015). Additionally, the NASSP bulletin published articles that urged principals to be "instructional leaders" as opposed to just "administrators" (Corey et al., 1951; Spears, 1941; Willey, 1942, as cited in Hallinger et al., 2020). These articles laid the foundation for future research on principal instructional leadership. Moreover, according to Hallinger & Wimpelberg (1992), this led to redesigning the curriculum for principal preparation and establishing "Principal Leadership Academies."

Oversight of the instructional program is now a component of the assistant principal's duties and responsibilities, which Harris and Lowery (2014) claim has evolved to reflect how complex the role of the principal has become. The AP's role in overseeing the instructional program may include duties like supervising curriculum and instruction, evaluating and choosing instructional materials, assessing student learning, giving teachers feedback, fostering a learning-friendly environment in the school, and encouraging a culture of cooperation, respect, and excellence (Harris & Lowery, 2014).

According to Harris and Lowery (2014), the addition of oversight of the instructional program to the assistant principal's duties and responsibilities reflects how complex the principal's function has become. Oversight of the instructional program is now part of the AP's responsibility. Duties include supervising curriculum and instruction, selecting instructional materials, evaluating student learning, providing teachers with feedback, fostering a learning-friendly environment in the classroom, and promoting a cooperative, respectful, and excellent culture in the school (Harris & Lowery, 2014). Mr. Baca, Mrs. Dominguez, and Ms. Long conveyed that they participate in PLCs. Additionally, all four assistant principals indicated ways to foster a school climate conducive to learning via their daily duties, redirecting students to class. As Mrs. Dominguez states, she ensures that students do not hide in the restrooms between



classes. Mrs. Dominguez and Mr. Baca reference collaboration with teachers during PLCs via data analysis, going through lesson plans, and modeling lessons for teachers. Mr. Baca further referenced collaborating with his principal on what they want for each student academically, socially, and behaviorally to promote excellence in each of their students. Ms. Long references a review of the campus improvement plan, creating a draft to review with staff and gather input on where they are as a campus and where they want to be. This study's results align with previous research on instructional leadership practices when considering the conceptual framework of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

***Q2: What support is needed for assistant principals in Region 1 as instructional leaders?***

According to the study, participants look for various kinds of assistance. In one way or another, every participant indicated the need for help. The following sub-themes were used to group the supports mentioned by the participants: coaching/mentoring and peer feedback/networking.

According to several researchers, assistant principals should seek assistance in skill development to develop their instructional leadership knowledge and skills (Petrides et al., 2014; Oliver, 2005; Searby et al., 2016; Barnett et al., 2017). This finding is corroborated by other research. The findings of this study, which showed that assistant principals acknowledged a need for support and training, are also confirmed by a study by Hunt (2011), which suggested that assistant principals need additional help and training to become effective instructional leaders. Ms. Long expressed looking for professional development and noted that her principal never told her no; she would ask him, and he would allow her to go. Mrs. Dominguez and Mr. Palacios expressed that they would reach out to central office personnel for guidance when they were unsure of their decisions. Mr. Baca expressed that when the district administration came

together, he would ask questions and ask for feedback on how they were implementing things at their campuses to obtain ideas on refining his practice. As assistant principals become more involved in instructional leadership, they must understand the skills and strategies to effectively support and lead their schools. Effective instructional leadership requires the assistant principal to serve as an instructional specialist, teacher coach, curriculum director, and instructional leader (Armstrong, 2010). This refutes what most participants shared as forms of support they require, as most participants conveyed colleague feedback and networking as their primary outreach for professional development. Participants expressed that seeking feedback from colleagues and obtaining feedback on how they address their issues are ways they seek support. Mr. Baca expressed that if other administrators perform well in an area, he asked how they can assist him with any issues (p. 4).

Mrs. Dominguez expressed, "We are a small district, so we do not have in comparison to other districts where there are specialists in certain subject areas, and we kind of just collaborate with one another" (p. 3). Mr. Palacios expressed that he reached out for assistance from colleagues to help or improve his practice (p. 4). Ms. Long was the only AP to express that if she needs professional development in a particular area, she looks for it (p. 3). This supports Oliver's (2005) findings that assistant principals' professional development should address identified areas of need.

Job-embedded professional development (PD) is another area of the literature review consistent with the study's findings. The literature revealed that school administrators should incorporate various strategies that can be built into the assistant principal's daily duties via job-embedded professional development to ensure that assistant principals can engage in professional development (Oliver 2005; Hutton 2020). Hutton (2020) asserts that it is imperative

to embed professional growth into the AP's daily responsibilities, which is also corroborated in the findings of the study as the participants conveyed a need for professional development; however, consumed with the competing responsibilities of their roles, does not leave time to attend professional development. Additionally, he notes that job-embedded professional development has been proven to improve instructional practices and make sustainable changes. Assistant principals can mentor new teachers, offer feedback, and serve on committees to develop policies, procedures, and educational programs. These strategies help assistant principals stay updated on instructional practices and curriculum standards, enabling them to engage in meaningful job-embedded professional development without leaving the school. By implementing these strategies, principals can ensure that assistant principals engage in meaningful professional development without leaving the school. Mr. Baca's principal utilized various strategies to embed PD within the school and the scope of his duties. Mr. Baca conveyed "that his principal lets him take the lead, especially within assigned responsibilities (attendance and behavior incentives) (p. 4). He also expressed that his principal allowed for his autonomy and frequently used the term building his capacity and prompted him with phrases such as "If I were in her role (principal), what would I do, what would my approach be, or says here is what I am thinking of doing, what do I think?" (p. 4). Mr. Baca expressed that this approach supported his leadership development (p. 4). Mrs. Dominguez expressed that her principal allowed her to attend district-offered PD (p. 3).

The study's participants emphasized the value of mentoring as a tool to help them in their positions. This outcome is consistent with other studies showing that mentorship is a popular strategy for assisting school administrators. (Zepeda et al., 2012, as quoted in Barnett et al.,

2017, p. 288). O'Mahony (2008), Daresh (2004), Fuller & Young (2009), Marshall & Davidson (2016), Rhodes & Fletcher (2013), and Zepeda et al. (2012).

The study's theme, challenges of being an assistant principal, and the corresponding sub-themes of management and prioritization of tasks and balance of multiple job responsibilities convey additional support that the AP may need. All four participants discussed various challenges they experienced in their roles, particularly as they relate to competing responsibilities. While participants recognized their role as instructional leaders, they were aware of how managerial duties consumed much of their time and did not allow them to engage in instructional tasks. Without a sense of clarity and direction, APs can become overwhelmed by the job's complexity and be unable to perform to the best of their ability.

The results of this study corroborate earlier studies that found assistant principals frequently struggled to prioritize their workload and strike a balance between it and other duties (McCarthy & Hoover, 2016). They manage student discipline, coordinate curriculum and instruction, evaluate teachers, and create a safe, nurturing student environment. The participants' experiences support research that notes assistant principals are also expected to mentor faculty and students, drive professional development, and offer leadership chances (McCarthy & Hoover, 2016). The assistant principal's position is intricate and difficult to handle. Although assistant principals are supposed to perform a variety of tasks, this is not often the case in practice. According to Glanz (2004), assistant principals frequently struggled to balance their administrative and teaching responsibilities, which resulted in role conflict and decreased job satisfaction.

The aforementioned research corroborates the experiences of the four participants who detailed the multiple and competing responsibilities they perform in their roles. Mr. Baca

conveyed his participation in PLCs, his role as a teacher appraiser, the strategies he provides to teachers, and the creation of a plan as ways that he is an instructional leader. Additionally, he referenced student discipline and investigations dealing with attendance matters, before-school, lunch, and after-school duties as responsibilities he performs throughout the day. Mr. Baca stated, " I think it is one of the most challenging parts as an assistant principal because you are asked to go into the classroom support with discipline," stating, "this takes up a lot of his time" (p. 2). Mr. Palacios expressed that he is "...a teacher appraiser and knowing what is going on in the classroom, what the needs of teachers are, expectations of teachers, that they are on par with rigorous instruction, and that they teach bell-to-bell instruction" (p. 2) as examples of how he is an instructional leader.

Mr. Palacios referenced dealing with discipline and attendance issues and overseeing all daily duties, breakfast, lunch, hallway, and after-school duty, as duties he is tasked with ensuring the day runs smoothly. Additionally, he noted that safety is a large part of his managerial duties; "being responsible for locked door checks, taking care of anything that is broken immediately, and supervising all extracurricular activities" (p. 1). Mrs. Dominguez, attending PLCs, department meetings, and collaborating with staff were given as examples of her instructional leadership. She further noted overseeing all campus duties before, during, and after school supervision, adding that she is responsible for bathroom/hallway duty in between each class every 50-55 minutes to ensure students make it to class on time and do not hide in the restroom (p. 1). Ms. Long stated that "she is in charge of PLCs, where she discusses curriculum and data, that she reviews specific strategies teachers can implement in their classrooms during PLCs" (p. 2). Ms. Long, like all the other participants, noted morning, lunch, and afternoon duty as part of

her managerial role, similar to all the other participants. She commented that "duties run your day" (p. 1).

The sub-theme that emerged as part of the challenges APs face in their roles is time management and prioritization of tasks. The participants shared that they had too much to do and insufficient time to do it all. Mr. Baca conveyed that "prioritizing your role and determining what takes priority" was referenced as "most challenging" (p. 3). He further referenced that student investigations for discipline special populations meetings "make it very difficult to keep to a schedule" (p. 3). The multiple and competing priorities noted by Mr. Baca were echoed by Mrs. Dominguez, who noted that 'she does the job of two people' (p. 2). Like the other participants, Ms. Long also expressed that "duties run your day" (p. 1).

These results confirm previous research that contends that school leaders struggle to balance what instructional leaders desire to achieve and what they have time to do (Walker, 2009). According to the study's findings, additional responsibilities like managing student discipline, budget monitoring, building and facility issues, and paperwork completion all prevent administrators from attending to their duties as instructional leaders (McBrayer et al., 2018).

The researcher identified several role-related issues in the literature review, including role ambiguity (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Austin & Brown, 1970; Fulton, 1987; Kahn et al., 1964; Kelly, 1987; Norton & Kriekard, 1987); role conflict (Glanz, 2004; Weller & Weller, 2002; Marshall, 1992; Tanner & Tanner, 1987; Marshall & Hooley, 2006); stress-related burnout. None of the participants mentioned role ambiguity or conflict, stress-related burnout, or role clarity as issues they faced; therefore, this finding does not corroborate their experiences.

***Q3: What relationship between the principal and assistant principal fosters the instructional leadership practices of the assistant principal in Region 1?***

Three of the study's participants noted a positive relationship with their principals. Mr. Baca expressed that lines of communication are open between him and his principal, and he felt very comfortable asking for help (p. 4). Mrs. Dominguez also conveyed that the relationship between her and her principal is excellent; she shared that "our personalities are the same" (p. 3). Additionally, she noted that they get along very well and is one hundred percent comfortable asking her principal for help with anything she needs (p. 3). Ms. Long stated that her principal is very approachable. She was comfortable asking him for help with whatever she needed (p. 3). These three participants' experiences corroborate the findings of earlier studies (Retelle, 2010; Barnett et al., 2017) that show how an effective principal-assistant-principal relationship promotes the assistant principal's growth and readiness to take over the principalship. The trust and advice from Mr. Baca, Mrs. Domingez, and Ms. Long's principals served as a form of mentorship for them, which is in line with earlier research that claims that the mentor-mentee relationship thrives when there is mutual respect, openness, honesty, and trust established; when mentors engage in reflective, thought-provoking, and non-judgmental conversations; and when mentors make mentoring a priority with numerous opportunities for face-to-face contact (Corwin et al., 2016; Schechter, 2014 as cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 289).

Further research notes that mentors are recommended to include in-depth conversations regarding career planning. When implementing change in schools, it's crucial to consider the current organizational structures. Likewise, when assisting instructors in changing their instructional practices, it's crucial to employ non-intrusive techniques that respect their autonomy and let them go at their own pace. (Armstrong 2014; Marshall & Davidson 2016; Petrides et al.

2014, quoted in Barnett et al. 2017, p. 289). In accordance with the literature, Mrs. Dominguez expressed that her conversation with her principal at the beginning of the year was about goals, and she shared that she wanted to be a principal one day. Additionally, she stated that whenever she needed help with something, her principal coached her through it. For instance, her principal coached her about having crucial conversations with staff and parents. In her previous role, Mrs. Dominguez noted that she did not have to do that with teachers or adults; however, this year, her job did require that of her.

Many principals depart or announce their intention to quit their jobs each year, necessitating the need for a pipeline of capable APs to fill the void. According to Goldring & Taie (2018), as reported in Goldring et al. 2021, "18% of public school system principals nationwide left their institution the following year of 2015–2016" (p. 2). This indicates that there are roughly 18,000 principal vacancies annually (p. 2). Furthermore, according to a survey, "42% of secondary principals are thinking about departing their position or transferring to a different institution" (Levin et al., 2020 as cited in Goldring et al., 2021, p. 2). To make certain APs are prepared to undertake the principal role when the time comes, we must ensure they are exposed to and actively participate in instructional leadership duties.

Some research notes the asset for assistant principals to be mentored by their principals; however, Marshall and Hooley (2006) caution that new assistant principals frequently adopt behaviors modeled by their principals that may or may not be appropriate; this can lead to maintaining the status quo in schools that need to be changed (Searby et al., 2017). Some research notes the asset for assistant principals to be mentored by their principals. Unlike the other participants' experiences, Mr. Palacios did not appear to be mentored by his principal, which can arguably support Searby et al.'s (2017) argument that some behaviors of principals



should not be adopted. Mr. Palacios shared that he did not always feel like he could ask for help from his principal, and when he did, the responses he received were not always positive or constructive (p. 4). Mr. Palacios shared that he was encouraged to reach out to others—not the principal—for answers in his supervision areas, such as discipline, attendance, and special education. After having experienced a lack of assistance or guidance from the principal, he learned to bypass the principal to get answers before asking the principal to present her with the guidance he had received and what he was recommending based on the guidance (p. 4). He said that he did not understand that the principal wanted him to find the answers before speaking to her about it, which made him feel like he was left to get answers for himself (p. 4).

In their study, Searby et al. (2017) asked assistant principals to identify the mentoring they thought they would likely get to develop as instructional leaders and in what circumstances. The study's key finding was that the most fruitful coaching for prepared principals came through one-on-one mentorship sessions with experienced principals and casual get-togethers with fellow assistant principals. Three participants, Mr. Baca, Mrs. Dominguez, and Ms. Long noted receiving one-on-one time with their principals.

Barnett et al. (2017) discovered in his study that assistant principals greatly appreciate mentors' insights on decision-making, interpersonal and communication skills, self-reflection, and clarifying values, which supports the findings of this study. Working with former and present administrators they trusted and respected was another favored method for professional improvement (Barnett et al., 2017), which is also supported by the results. Regardless of who they sought guidance from, all participants looked to people (whether it was their principal or other colleagues) whom they trusted to grow as professionals.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

The study's findings corroborated recent literature on instructional leadership practices for assistant principals. The findings showed that despite the wide range of duties, assistant principals still experience challenges with instructional leadership in their positions. The study also discovered that APs seek support from school principals or other leaders via coaching and feedback from their peers. Additionally, this study emphasized the significance of teamwork and communication abilities in the AP function. The following recommendations for practice are offered:

1. There is a need for assistant principals to be mentored by their principals and/or other school leaders. Many researchers contend that Mentoring is a common approach for supporting school leaders. (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2008; Daresh, 2004, 2010; Fuller & Young, 2009; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013; Zepeda et al., 2012, as cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 288). This study found that while most participants received mentorship from their principals, there is an ongoing need to be supported in the multiple roles associated with being an AP. This is particularly important given that most APs, like all the participants, aspire to the principalship. Intentional mentoring of assistant principals is an investment in the future leaders of our schools.
2. Networking opportunities must be curated for assistant principals in small schools. There is a need for school districts to facilitate networking opportunities for assistant principals. The assistant principal in a small school plays multiple roles and is the only one in the position at their respective school districts. School districts should pursue purposeful networking opportunities within or beyond the region. Providing

- intentional time for assistant principals to meet (via PLCs) to share ideas or struggles and discuss solutions would be beneficial. It also reassures them that they are not the only ones who struggle in their roles.
3. School districts and principals should consider restructuring the duties of assistant principals, placing more emphasis on instructional duties. All participants conveyed that they struggle with time management and prioritization of tasks, and this prevents them from accomplishing the instructional leadership aspect of their roles. According to Walker (2009), school leaders have significant difficulties balancing what they desire to achieve and what they really have time to do (Walker, 2009). According to Walker (2009), school administrators face significant difficulties in striking a balance between their desire to carry out their desired activities and their available time. Walker (2009) asserted (p. 214, as cited in McBrayer et al., 2018) that "the growth in the principal's responsibilities and the incongruence between what instructional leaders want to do and have time to create serious consequences for school leaders and their work in making a difference in schools." It is recommended that school districts revisit the duties assigned to the AP to ensure that what they are asked to do is reasonable. Additionally, school districts should engage in discussions and possible professional development regarding task management and the prioritization of tasks.
  4. There is a need for strategic professional development to support assistant principals in preparation for the principalship. A "grow your own" program for small school districts could train APs as principal apprentices, ensuring thorough familiarity of district operations, regulations, and procedures. (Lovely, 2001, p. 7, cited in Barnett et al., 2017, p. 288). School districts can facilitate assistant principals in their pursuit

of becoming principals by providing explicit mentoring and professional development via grow-your-own programs.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The following suggestions for further research are offered to add to the body of literature on this subject:

1. This was a single case study; examining multiple case studies could render replication of the study and offer additional results. Specifically, future research is warranted in other contexts and settings with a larger sample size to include APs across all elementary, middle, and high school levels. The varied responsibilities of the different grade levels would yield different perspectives. The obligations and duties that take time away from instructional leadership tasks differ at the elementary and secondary grade levels.
2. Further research is warranted to understand the influence of principals on assistant principals and how principals facilitate their development through mentoring. The role of mentorship of AP advancement to principalship is key. A better understanding of how and if principals mentor APs is important, given that the AP position provides a training ground for leadership. Exploring how the principal decides what responsibilities to assign to the assistant principal and the approach they take in coaching their APs could provide additional insight into the support APs require.
3. Future research should examine the perspective of district leaders and how they decide what professional development to offer assistant principals in their leadership development. This would provide insight into the strategic utilization of the assistant principalship as future principals. The decisions district leaders make regarding the

experiences, responsibilities, and professional development the assistant principal is exposed to contribute to the assistant principal's preparedness to take on the principal role.

### **Final Thoughts**

Research has shown that the number of principals exiting the profession continues to increase yearly, and the need for successors equipped to lead a school through instructional leadership is paramount (Barnett, 2012). The study's findings shed light on the instructional leadership practices used by assistant principals, highlighting the need for a more thorough understanding of their leadership development and the support they require as instructional leaders. To encourage the leadership development of our future principals, educators must seek to provide the assistant principal with resources, support, and investments in their professional development. This study also emphasized the mentorship of the principal in the assistant principal's development as a leader. Principals must be aware of their vital role in developing the AP's leadership qualities through targeted mentoring. Three participants discussed how having a good relationship with their principal helped them become better leaders. One participant hinted that a tense relationship with their principal hindered their job performance. Furthermore, this study enhanced the knowledge of the challenges assistant principals encounter in their roles. All four assistant principal participants expressed competing responsibilities they perform that prevent them from engaging in instructional leadership tasks. They noted that what they want and have time to do are very different. The findings of this study will broaden the body of knowledge and offer insightful data that can be applied in district practices to enhance the assistant principal's role.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB OUTCOME LETTER



Date: May 25, 2023  
To: Guang Zeng  
CC: Rosa Banda, Veronica Larrea  
From: Office of Research Compliance  
Subject: Exempt Determination

Dear Guang Zeng,

On 05/23/2023, the Texas A&M University Corpus Christi IRB Institutional Review Board reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Exploring Instructional Leadership Practices of Assistant Principals in South Texas Region 1 School Districts: A Case Study
Principal Investigator:	Guang Zeng
IRB Number:	TAMU-CC-IRB-2023-0793
Submission Outcome:	Exempt Determination
Approval Date:	05/23/2023

Texas A&M University Corpus Christi IRB Institutional Review Board has reviewed the above-referenced submission and has determined the project is exempt. This submission was approved by the review process in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Human Research Protection Program. Therefore, this project has been determined to be exempt under the following category:

**Exempt Category:** Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: i. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; ii. Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or iii. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by .111(a)(7).

**You may proceed with this project.**

This approval corresponds with the versions of the application and attachments in the electronic system most recently approved as of the date of this letter.

**A Reminder of Investigator Responsibilities:** As principal investigator, you must ensure:

1. **Informed Consent:** Ensure informed consent processes are followed and information presented enables individuals to voluntarily decide whether to participate in research.
2. **Amendments:** This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. Any planned changes require an amendment to be



## RESEARCH & INNOVATION

submitted to the IRB to ensure that the research continues to meet the criteria for exemption. The Amendment must be approved before being implemented.

3. **Completion Report:** Upon completion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Completion Report must be submitted.
4. **Records Retention:** All research-related records must be retained for three (3) years beyond the completion date of the study in a secure location. At a minimum, these documents include the research protocol, all questionnaires, survey instruments, interview questions and/or data collection instruments associated with this research protocol, recruiting or advertising materials, any consent forms or information sheets given to participants, all correspondence to or from the IRB or, and any other pertinent documents.
5. **Adverse Events:** Adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately.
6. **Post-approval monitoring:** Requested materials for post-approval monitoring must be provided by the dates requested.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact us at [irb@tamucc.edu](mailto:irb@tamucc.edu).

Sincerely,

Rebecca Ballard, JD  
Office of Research Compliance

## APPENDIX B: IRB STUDY INFORMATION SHEET



### STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

#### Exploring Instructional Leadership Practices of Assistant Principals in South Texas Region 1 School Districts: A Case Study

##### Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information to help to make the decision on whether to participate in this research study.

##### Why is this research being done?

The goal of this research study is to understand the support assistant principals need to be successful in their positions as instructional leaders and learn how we, as educators, can prepare assistant principals for the principalship in South Texas schools in Region 1. This study will provide research-based data to improve the position of the assistant principal, as the assistant principalship serves as a stepping-stone to the principalship and as a source of principal replacement.

##### Who can be in this study?

We are asking you to be a part of this research study because you are a current assistant principal in the small school consortium in Region One in South Texas. To be eligible to be in this study, you must:

- Be over the age of 18 and
- Currently serving in the capacity of assistant principal
- Serve in a k-12 public school in Region 1
- Be a non-specialized assistant principal (i.e. assistant principal of instruction, assistant principal of operations)

##### What will I be asked to do?

Being in this study involves being interviewed by the researcher on your perspective on your role as an assistant principal and the challenges you've faced in your role. This will involve an email with a link to a google form with a fifteen-minute demographic profile to complete, a 1-hour 15 min open-ended interview with questions learning about your views and experiences as a current assistant principal and the support you've been provided or require to be successful in your position. It will also involve a review of your current job description. If you agree to be in this study, you will be in this study for two and a half hours maximum over the course of four to six weeks. Scheduling of the interview(s) will be completed with the assistant principal's schedule and duties in mind.

If you choose to be in this study, the following things will happen:

- Your participation will involve collecting information about you from an initial short google survey.
- You will be asked to answer questions during an interview of 1 hour 15 min in length during one session. Interviews will be conducted in person or over Zoom depending on the participant's choice of location.
- You will be asked to answer open-ended questions related to your role as a current assistant principal and the challenges you face being an instructional leader balancing management duties as well.



- Your description will be analyzed to compare job duties listed to job duties actually performed.

**What are the risks involved in this study?**

This research involves minimal risks or risks that are no more than what you may experience in everyday life. The main risk may include:

- You will be asked questions about your professional and personal life as you feel comfortable in sharing.
- Your participation will involve collecting information about you. There is a slight risk of loss of confidentiality. Your confidentiality will be protected to the greatest extent possible. You do not have to give any information to the study that you do not want to share.
- Some questions may be embarrassing or uncomfortable to answer. Sample questions that you may be asked are: Tell me a little bit about yourself personally and professionally to include your professional path. You do not have to answer questions you do not want to.
- If you choose to participate in this study, your interview will be audio or video recorded. Any audio or video recordings will be stored securely in a password-protected file. Any recordings will be kept until it has been transcribed and de-identified. After transcription, the recording will be permanently deleted.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study?**

Instead of being in this study, you may choose not to participate in this research study.

**What are the possible benefits of this study?**

There may be no direct benefit to you from being in this research study. By choosing to be in this study, you may help researchers learn more about assistant principals and job and challenges you face, and/or the support you may need to be successful in your position.

**Do I have to participate?**

No. **Being in a research study is voluntary.** If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**What if I change my mind?**

You may quit at any time. You may decide not to participate or quit at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi or any cooperating institution being affected.

**What about protecting my information?**

This study is confidential. The information collected about you includes identifiers such as the district you serve, your name, email, and phone number; your information will be protected.

Methods of protecting your confidentiality include:

- Restricting access to only authorized research team members.
- Storing data in a password-protected secured location.
- The interview, once transcribed, will be anonymized (a process by which identifying information is removed). This is a process by which identifying information is removed by using pseudonyms (a fictitious name).



## APPENDIX C: IRB RECRUITMENT LETTER



05/29/2023

Dear Assistant Principals,

Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi is conducting a study within Region 1 titled "*Exploring Instructional Leadership Practices of Assistant Principals in South Texas Region 1 School Districts: A Case Study*". This study focuses on assistant principals in K-12 public school districts through the Department of Education and Human Development under the supervision of Dr. Guang Zeng.

Because you are currently employed as an assistant principal in a K-12 public school district in South Texas Region 1, your opinions are important to this study. Thus, I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about this.

**Participation in this study is voluntary** and would involve a brief fifteen minute demographic profile survey, one-hour interview in either in-person or virtual meeting at your specific campus or preferred location and a one-hour observation. This research involves minimal risks (risks that you may experience in everyday life even if you do not participate in this study). The questions are quite general. Sample questions that you may be asked are:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself personally.
2. Share with me the challenges you've faced as an assistant principal.
3. Share with me how you have overcome such challenges.

You may decline to answer any questions you feel you do not wish to answer. All information you provide will be considered confidential and grouped with responses from other participants. You will not be identified by name in any report or publication resulting from this study. The data collected through this study will be kept for a period of three years.

**You may withdraw from the study at any time** without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. This study has been reviewed and approved through the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Research Board (IRB). If you have questions, you can contact them at 361-825-2497 or irb@tamucc.edu.

For all other questions, or if you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact principal investigator Dr. Guang Zeng at 361-825-2175 or email at guang.zeng@tamucc.edu, Veronica Lerma at 956-357-7571 or email vlerma1@islander.tamucc.edu. Thank you for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

Veronica Y. Lerma  
Investigator

## APPENDIX D: STUDY CONSENT

### Study Consent and Interview Scheduling

This form serves as consent to participate in the study **Exploring Instructional Leadership Practices of Assistant Principals in South Texas Region 1 School Districts: A Case Study**

*\* Indicates required question*

---

1. Email \*

---

2. Type your name below \*

---

3. By filling out this survey, you are agreeing to participate in the study. By participating in this study, you are also certifying that you are 18 years of age or older. The purposes, procedures, and risks of this research study have been explained to me. I have had a chance to read this form and ask questions about the study. Any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction. \*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ I agree to participate in the study  
☐ I do not wish to participate in the study

4. Please select a date for your interview \*

---

*Example: January 7, 2019*

5. Please select a time for your interview \*

---

*Example: 8:30 AM*



6. How would you prefer to meet \*

*Check all that apply.*

☐ Face to Face

☐ Zoom

7. If you'd like to meet Face to Face please indicate the location you'd like to meet \*

---

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Google Forms

## APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

### Demographic Profile Survey

*Please check off or fill in your answers for each question*



**Name**

Your answer

**How old are you?**

Your answer

**What gender do you identify as?**

Your answer

Ethnicity

*Check all that apply*

- ☐ White
- ☐ African American
- ☐ Latino or Hispanic
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ American Indian

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Your answer

Employment status, please specify the type of hours you work

Your answer

How many years did you work as a teacher?

Your answer

How many years have you worked as an assistant principal?

Your answer

How many years have you worked in education?

Your answer

## Demographic Profile Survey



### Survey Questions

What does the term instructional leadership mean to you?

Your answer

What would you identify as a personal challenge of being an instructional leader?

Your answer

Are you interested in pursuing the principalship? Explain the factors that motivate or deter you from pursuing the principalship.

Your answer

## APPENDIX F: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### Interview Protocol Questions

1. Can you describe a typical day at school and your associated responsibilities?
2. What is your school's mission and vision?
3. As an assistant principal, do you see yourself as an instructional leader on campus? Why or why not?
4. Do you feel that your skills as an instructional leader are being underutilized? Why or why not?
5. Can you provide a definition of instructional leadership?
6. What roles and responsibilities do you perform to manage the instructional program at your school?
7. In your role as assistant principal, what is your involvement in framing your school goals? How do you communicate school goals to staff, students, parents, and community members?
8. What duties or responsibilities do you perform to promote school culture?
9. What is the most challenging part of your role as an assistant principal?
10. What do you do when support is needed to improve your practice as an instructional leader?
11. Do you feel comfortable asking for help from your principal?
12. How does your building principal support your leadership development?
13. Is there anything else you want to share with me about your experience as an AP regarding instructional leadership that I perhaps did not ask?

APPENDIX G: VITA

**Professional Experience**

<b>Special Education Support Services Cooperative</b>	Region One Education Service Center
2023-Current	Edinburg, Tx
<b>Special Programs Coordinator</b>	Lyford CISD
2022-2023	Lyford, Tx
<b>High School At Risk/Testing Coordinator</b>	Lyford CISD
2019-2022	Lyford, Tx
<b>Elementary Principal</b>	Lyford CISD
2016-2019	Lyford, Tx
<b>District Instructional/Testing Coordinator</b>	Lyford CISD
2013-2016	Lyford, Tx
<b>Elementary Assistant Principal</b>	Lyford CISD
2012-2013	Lyford, Tx
<b>Elementary Instructional Facilitator</b>	Lyford CISD
2010-2012	Lyford, Tx
<b>Response to Intervention/Dyslexia/504</b>	Raymondville ISD
<b>Coordinator</b>	Raymondville, Tx
2007-2010	
<b>Educational Diagnostician</b>	Raymondville ISD
2005-2007	Raymondville, Tx
<b>Assessment Teacher</b>	Raymondville ISD
2003-2005	Raymondville, Tx

**Elementary Teacher**

2001-2003

Lyford CISD

Lyford, Tx

**Education**

Doctorate of Educational Leadership

Texas A&M University Corpus Christi

Completion 2023

Principal Certification

University of Texas at Brownsville

Completion 2010

Master of Education in Special Education

University of Texas at Brownsville

Completion 2006

Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies

University of Texas at Pan American

Completion 2001

**State Certifications**

Superintendent (EC-12)

Generic Special Education (EC-12)

Principal (EC-12)

Classroom Teacher Reading (1<sup>st</sup> -8<sup>th</sup>)

Educational Diagnostician (EC-12)

Classroom Teacher Self Contained (1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>)

**Professional Memberships**

Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education (TCASE)

## **Presentations**

Lerma, V, Escamilla, J. & Ramon, V. (2017). Implementing a One-to-One Technology Program in a Small Rural School District. Presented at the 20th Annual Winter Governance & Legal Seminar. Corpus Christi, Texas. March.