

International School Leadership Development Network Study Summary

We would like to collect information about the research studies being conducted as part of the International School Leadership Development Network. For each study you have conducted (or are conducting), please provide the following information:

1. Research team members' names and affiliations.

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Notes:

- *All co-authors are listed in alphabetical order.
- This case study was developed as part of the Palmetto Priority School Project, a multi-case study of successful school leadership in South Carolina conducted by faculty and graduate students at Clemson University and the University of South Carolina.

2. Which project area does your research study address?

Leadership for social justice

Leadership in high-need schools

3. Briefly describe the study setting, participants, data collection instruments, and dates of the investigation.

In the spring and summer of 2018 we selected a public, high-needs elementary school which had once been designated as a Priority School due to a prolonged period of low academic achievement, Peach Tree Elementary School (PTES).¹ After a period of three years, the school improved its academic performance enough to be removed from priority status. The school is situated in a small, rural community in South Carolina. The student population, which mirrored the community population, was predominantly African American. The school had a poverty index above the state median. The period of study included two principals. Robert Xander was principal of PTES prior to it going on priority status, and remained the principal until the year after it came off the priority list. Tina Fuller, was Xander's assistant principal for two years, and became principal when Xander left to become the principal of another elementary school in the district.

We primarily drew on data collected from semi-structured interviews with school leaders, teachers, parents and community members, students, and a district-level leader to develop the case study. Interview questions focused on learning, leadership, and context in accordance with the ISLDN research questions and interview protocols. Additional data was collected through observations and relevant document analysis.

4. List key findings of the study.

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

What fostered student learning?

Through our analysis, we identified five main ways learning was fostered at this school: a strong re-focus on teaching; literacy; teacher professional learning; small-group instruction; and high expectations for student learning.

How did principals and other school leaders enhance individual and organizational performance?

We identified two main, but different, ways Principal Xander and Principal Fuller enacted instructional leadership, suggesting that the phase of change and leaders' professional backgrounds influenced their approaches. Principal Xander implemented the Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) System, which led to a refocusing on teaching, increased the use of data to inform instruction, and provided for structured professional development based on weekly classroom observations. This refocusing laid the groundwork for Principal Fuller to utilize her experiences as an instructional coach and adopt a coaching approach to instructional leadership, which included modeling and personalized feedback. In addition, Principal Fuller worked to create a culture of high expectations and care for students.

How did internal and external school contexts impact individual and organizational performance?

Our analysis yielded four major ways that context impacted individual and organizational performance at PTES. Positive influences included the culture of high expectations for both students and teachers and support from the district, state, and community. Negative influences included the effects of poverty and a culture of low expectations.

5. Presentations and publications reporting the study.

Andreoli, P. M, Buskey, F. C., Dou, J. T., Hardie, S., Harrington, K., Klar, H. W., Moyi, P., Roper, C., Ylimaki, R. (2018). *Sociocultural interactions of leaders and students from marginalized communities in Southeastern United States*. Paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration Convention, Houston, Texas.

Note, this presentation also includes a case study completed by faculty and students at the University of South Carolina.