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Streamlining Educational Administration: A Process Improvement
Methodology to Free Schools from Administrative Burdens

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Abstract

Within K–12 schools, teachers can be affected by administrative activities that overwhelm administrative staff. Schools struggle with the need to deliver administrative activities on time, within the roles of the central office, and without impacting educators in the classrooms. This study identified how a school can reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks. Discovered in literature, there is a need for school administrators to more focused work, with less resources leveraging an effective workforce, to complete all the administrative burdens placed on them. Through a conceptual leadership framework blending project management, lean organization and systems engineering methodologies, the Education Focused Initiative of Resources and Strategic Thinking (FIRST) framework leverages the best characteristics that each has to offer. Using the program evaluation design, an assessment on the usefulness of Education FIRST was conducted. Data collected through the four phases and the program evaluation tool provided insights to whether the Education FIRST leadership framework can reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks. This new paradigm following the less with less strategy in managing the administrative activities that overwhelm schools will be challenged by the fact that most, if not all, activities are required to be completed. Some administrative activities have funding attached to them, while others are mandated by regulations. These activities need to be completed, but as interpreted from these results, implementing a formalized prioritization and management process, like Education FIRST, school administrators can optimize the way in which the work is done.

Keywords: administrative burdens, transformational leader, leadership framework, leadership components, procedures, processes, protocols, process improvement methodology, efficiencies

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Administrators in K–12 schools strive to be effective centers of learning for the youth of the United States. Within each K–12 school, there are staff members that perform targeted activities allowing them to contribute to the educational goals of each student. These school staff members perform the functions of their roles to aid in improving student outcomes and increase student proficiency. While each role contributes, in one way or another, to a student’s academic outcome, Hirsch, Emerick, Church, and Fuller (2007) noted that “research has consistently demonstrated that teachers make a greater difference in student achievement than any other single school factor” (p. 1). By engaging teachers in the classroom and as Hirsch, et al. (2007) discussed, “improving teacher working conditions – time, leadership, empowerment, and resources – will improve student learning conditions,” (p. 1) allows students to improve their subject level proficiency. When teachers are affected by administrative activities that overwhelm and become burdensome to administrative staff members, teachers are unable to perform their critical role of teaching students.

Administrative activities reach a burdensome level when schools are asked to provide data and information requests from a variety of entities, like the United States Department of Education, an individual state’s Department of Education, the intermediate school district, and the school district itself. Each of these requests, sometimes asked for multiple times throughout the school year, are typically not coordinated but are unique requests that each school is required to respond to and provide data for financial monitoring compliance or based on law. As identified by Messelt (2004), these numerous requests become a burden to the administrators in schools since they are required to collect “a vast array of student and institutional information,

including such items as test scores, enrollment data, budget and finance information, and human resource information” (p. 2). As the years pass, more requests get added to the list with few coming off the list. Messelt (2004) noted that “administrators have been dealing with continuously expanding data reporting requirements for years” (p. 2). This trend of an increasing workload of administrative tasks continued to persist as acknowledged in Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, and Vanroelen’s (2014) examination of “Burnout Among Senior Teachers: Investigating the Role of Workload and Interpersonal Relationships at Work.” They noted that “working conditions of teachers changed significantly during the last decades, teachers experienced a noticeable increase in administrative tasks, external pressures, and demands from policymakers, supervisors, and experts” (p. 106).

K–12 school administrative staff members are overwhelmed by all of the administrative activities that they are required to complete. School administrative staff members are challenged by the sheer number of activities that include the regulatory reporting requirements where staff members must complete a myriad of forms and data reports to satisfy federal, state, and local reporting needs. Identified in the article, “All Work and Low Pay; Teacher Workload” (2016), “teachers are overwhelmed by government tinkering, poor-quality data-collection activities, and bad management” (p. 25) decisions. As these requested activities continue to grow, they become overwhelming for school administrative staff to complete. With administrative staff overwhelmed by these requests, they have little to no choice but to pull teachers out of the classroom to help out. When that occurs, these activities distract educators from providing effective instructional practices that lead to student learning. Crotwell (2011) identified that “providing effective instruction to students declines when teachers spend time away from the classroom due to non-instructional activities and duties” (p. 3). As a State of Michigan,

Department of Education employee supporting the Office of Strategic Research, Planning, and Implementation, I have been exposed to the burdensome practices enacted on schools related to all of the administrative activities that school administrative staff members are required to complete and the declining level of student proficiency within the state over the last 10 years. Identified by Reichardt, Snow, Schlang, and Hupfeld (2008), “those who shape policy, from principals through state policymakers, need to minimize distractions by minimizing the burdens to support teachers as they work to educate children” (p. 2). As these distractions continue to flow into the K–12 schools from federal, state, and local origins, Reichardt, et al. (2008) further discovered that “district central offices often failed to coordinate their own activities, which in turn, affected teachers” (p. 10). Whether the administrative burdens placed on these schools are from federal, state, or local origins to help those entities perform their functions, their requests still distract the school from accomplishing their main goal—to educate students.

As a result of the potential connection that burdensome administrative activities may have on distracting teachers from being effective educators, this research study attempts to identify how a school can refine and reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks and activities. This important reduction in overall effort allows school administrative staff to finish these tasks timely, efficiently, and accurately while hopefully eliminating the need to involve teachers in the completion of these activities. My work at the Michigan Department of Education focuses on building processes and procedures by using a leadership framework that concentrates on improving efficiencies. In extending the context of this work to the administrative burdens K–12 schools face, it is my hope that in using a transformational leadership framework, where a leader focuses on organizational change to help the team be

successful, a school will be able to streamline educational administration and free school staff from administrative burdens that cause these distractions.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

Challenges presented to K–12 school leaders in today’s educational environment place increased demands on their skills as leaders. In order to face these challenges, K–12 school leaders must be transformational with focused attention on what McElroy (2005) describes as “supporting teachers to do their best work by listening to their concerns and responding accordingly” (p. 1). A transformational leader facilitates success by serving others, reflecting on completed actions, and focusing on organizational changes. Working collaboratively, the leader will make improvements to processes and procedures. Nash (2012) identified the “direct relationship between student achievement and school leadership—improving educational leadership by one standard deviation will improve student achievement by ten percentile points on average” (p. 22) but this cannot be accomplished if the teacher is not in front of the classroom, teaching students.

No longer can an organization just address the issues and concerns that arise as part of their daily work since addressing them only treats the symptoms and not the root cause of the problem. School administrators must focus on improving their administrative staff member’s efficiencies that allow a school to learn from their previous experiences and focuses their efforts on the specific activities that can be improved upon. Reichardt, et al. (2008) also noted that changes “that ease teachers’ burdens increase retention, and those that add to teachers’ burdens increase attrition” (p. 5).

Within the work that I perform at the Michigan Department of Education and based on my years of management consulting experience leading organizations in process improvement, I

strive to positively impact administrative activities by streamlining them as much as possible. Working collaboratively to provide actionable improvements and ways that can be incorporated into daily routines, I contribute my skills and abilities to enhance the school administrative environment. I provide feedback to clarify complexities, identify untapped opportunities, and anticipate challenges while thinking innovatively about adjustments which can positively impact schools. This is achieved by following a process improvement methodology that helps to focus schools on their highest priority—the student.

As early as the mid-1990s, concerns were raised that teachers were getting pulled out of the classroom and spending too much of their time on administrative tasks. Reichardt, et al. (2008) discussed these concerns in their article, “Overwhelmed and Out: Principals, District Policy and Teacher Retention”, when they noted as “one teacher complained, there are lots of repetition, four different forms for everything, and burdens of paperwork that required recording, and recording again, students’ results” (p. 10). Teachers, when pulled out of the classroom to help school administrators and their staff with their administrative activities, reach a point of frustration when they continually get selected to help complete these tasks. Reichardt, et al. (2008) identified that “these repeated requests for information added to teachers’ duties, but teachers did not perceive any links to either instructional improvement or student achievement” (p. 10). Teachers feel overwhelmed since they are being asked to perform activities beyond the teaching activities they were hired to perform. This leads to increased obstructions encountered by the teachers which results in preventing students from learning and improving outcomes.

Schools are challenged by the demands placed on them, demands that I am acutely aware of as an employee of the Michigan Department of Education. It is through the implementation of streamlined processes and procedures that efficiency is improved. These improvements, as

documented by Kruse (2001) in a three-year study demonstrates that “carefully orchestrated continuous improvement efforts can succeed in creating conditions that provide for greater focus on student learning” (p. 359). By examining the challenges presented to school administrators and teachers as they take on the important role of instructing the youth of America, they are faced with an ever-growing problem of administrative burdens that continue to grow in number and size every day. Sunderman and Kim (2004) noted that “considerable administrative and managerial oversight, with no additional resources, place enormous administrative burdens on schools” (p. 4). There is an overwhelming need for schools to be able to do less, in the form of more focused work, with less resources, by leveraging an effective and efficient workforce, to complete all of the administrative burdens placed on schools. Thibodeaux, Labat, Lee, and Labat (2015) expressed this need in their article, “The Effects of Leadership and High-Stakes Testing on Teacher Retention”, when they noted “teachers felt that policy makers made decisions that affected educators, and it bothered teachers that so many mandates had been placed on them to fulfill those obligations that sometimes felt unattainable” (p. 247). Further examination of this problem divided this premise into four separate and distinct topics. They include schools are overburdened by administrative activities; key staff members are overworked; school administrators do the best they can to complete the assigned tasks; and successful schools utilize a carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable set of implementation procedures.

Statement of the Problem

Schools have continued to struggle with the need to deliver administrative tasks and activities on time, within the roles of the central office, and without impacting educators in the classrooms. Rudenstine (2002) noted “teams struggle with the essential question of its own capacity, and the range of diversity of beliefs it is competent to handle: how much is too much

when attempting to work as a team?” (p. 122). With the overwhelming need to provide data and information throughout the various levels of the educational system, schools have to rein in these efforts more closely than ever. Jennings and Diane (2006) proposed that “the lack of capacity could undercut effective administration since these agencies must rely on local schools to assist in these tasks, yet they are under great strain with little relief in sight” (p. 113).

In order for educators to teach with proven instructional practices, they need to be supported by reliable procedures and protocols that allow them to freely concentrate on teaching. Fixsen, Blase, Metz, and Van Dyke (2013) identified the benefits of teachers being supported by reliable procedures and protocols, “staff functions are repurposed, system units are redefined, and structures are realigned to support, so that student outcomes are improved” (p. 227). The purpose of these efforts is to create internal strategies to improve the interaction within schools. Metz (2016) stated that schools “are often unable to use existing manualized programs to address complex and emerging challenges” (p. 1) and school administrative staff must look beyond stale and outdated ways of completing tasks; they must be innovative. When that innovative way to accomplish a task is created, “effective implementation methods can be applied to develop the competency of staff to do the new way of work” (Metz, 2016, p. 1). This new way of work requires decisions to be made that necessitates team input or consensus, which are better reached when diverse perspectives representing the community of stakeholders are included in the discussion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify how a school can refine and reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks and activities. This important reduction in overall effort will allow school administrative staff to finish these tasks timely, efficiently, and

accurately. Fixsen, et al. (2013) noted that “without the people in place, capacity cannot occur since it resides in people who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to do this new kind of work” (p. 222). By having the right people focus on the right kind of work, no longer will teachers need to be taken away from their classrooms to aid in the completion of administrative activities. These activities will no longer require additional staff members to spend time to finish them.

Following a consistent and repeatable construct of leadership that allows for variations in decision-making, leadership style, and techniques, this research study gathers information about improving efficiency by implementing proper procedures that may make a meaningful impact. Fixsen, et al. (2013) identifies a solution by “establishing a framework that develops implementation capacity that provides ongoing support for teachers in their interactions with students to produce intended benefits” (pp. 214–215). This research study introduces the Education Focused Initiative of Resources and Strategic Thinking (FIRST) leadership framework, found in Appendix A, that will be applied in K–12 schools as a construct of logical, collaborative, problem-solving set of procedures, processes, and protocols that supports school administrative staff members in their efforts to complete administrative activities efficiently.

The actions contained with this leadership framework are based on creating internal strategies to improve efficiency and effectiveness of staff members in completing the administrative burdens placed on schools. According to Weller and Weller (1997), “implementing a framework allows administrators and staff in the school to look for and test new approaches to resolve those difficulties” (p. 62) and challenges. In order for educators to deliver instructional practices that impact students, they need to be supported by efficient administrative staff. Support that staff, when distracted by an overwhelming series of burdensome

administrative activities, cannot provide. Based on these efforts, an examination of the use of these standardized internal strategies sees if the K–12 school can improve the interaction within the school but also in completing the federal, state, and local administrative activities that have become burdensome over the years.

Managing the critical effort workload and minimizing or eliminating distractions can be accomplished by using a leadership framework that clearly and methodically provides procedures and protocols that streamline the administrative burdens placed on schools from every level of the educational system. A leadership framework, as noted by Herman and Herman (1992) “fundamentally changes functions in the larger context of empowerment and improvement” (p. 262) and can help propel these changes throughout the school. While the creation of these procedures does not typically evolve overnight, collaboration between administrative and nonadministrative staff helps bring innovative thinking to resolve this problem. This allows efficient and effective schools to use a procedural framework to streamline the completion of administrative burdens and free up teachers to remain in the classroom, teaching. Once these processes are developed, they should always be examined for ways to improve upon them.

School administrators must make efficient use of administrative staff resources by focusing their efforts on implementing a leadership framework that clearly and methodically provides procedures and protocols that streamline the administrative burdens placed on schools. In using a set of standardized internal strategies, a school benefits from its focus on providing a process improvement methodology that allows a school to gain efficiencies in their protocols and processes. Davenport (2005) stated that “organizations need a set of standards for process activities so that they can communicate easily and efficiently” (p. 2). Applying the practical

steps involved, a school administrator can leverage the use of deliverables and templates to capture and evaluate processes and procedures. The leadership framework chosen should encourage conversations around administrative staff's routines and their way of work. These conversations can help to identify how a school can reduce the amount of time spent on administrative burdens and how they can refine and reduce the level of effort needed to complete them. This important reduction in overall effort will allow school administrative staff to finish these tasks timely, efficiently, and accurately. In having school administrators concentrate their administrative resources on activities that make the most efficient use of their time, teachers are able to remain in the classrooms teaching.

Research Questions

Through a school's adoption of a leadership framework, it is premised that administrative staff will become more efficient and effective. However, to accomplish this, the school's staff will need to change their focus on the way in which work is done. By using the Education FIRST leadership framework and embracing the idea of transforming into a learning organization, an evaluation of current processes and procedures can be conducted to resolve the problems of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. As described by Betts (1992), the value derived from systems thinking in education, allows a school to "become an organizational learning system, capable of differentiating among situations where maintaining the organization by adjustments and corrections is appropriate and it develops increased capacity for self-correction, self-direction, and self-renewal" (p. 40). As a result of becoming more efficient and effective, teachers will be freed up from being assigned administrative burdens and allow them to focus on teaching and improving student outcomes. Supporting this concept, Messelt (2004) stated that when "schools enable key decision makers with data and information to facilitate more informed

decision-making, overall school performance receives a boost and student achievement improves” (p. 2). Within the research study’s results, an understanding on how following an implementation methodology that is guided by a systematically structured approach to effectively integrate the components of the Education FIRST leadership framework can aid K–12 schools and provide insights in answering the research questions that form the basis of this study:

- Main Research Question—In what ways can a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks implemented in a school impact student outcomes?
 - What implementation methodologies are currently in use by effective (high performing) schools?
 - In what ways do the components of the Education FIRST leadership framework currently exist in other implementation methodologies in use by schools?
 - How do the components of Education FIRST compare to other leadership frameworks in use by schools?
 - What issues experienced in schools, contributes to the breakdown of consistent processes and procedures, like Education FIRST, and in what ways can a school avoid those breakdowns?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Today’s K–12 schools have fallen behind the times by relying on what has worked well in the past when there were less administrative activities imposed on the schools. As identified by Bloomberg (2008), the American “education system has been stuck in neutral for several decades, while other countries have had their foot on the accelerator” (p. 3). By using things that worked well in the past, Bloomberg (2008) stated that “we are using an outdated and inefficient model that, like the American auto industry in the 1970s, is largely driven by the power of

unions, rather than the needs of consumers (students)” (p. 3). School leaders and staff must embrace change and “move past being an understanding organization where the organizational culture and its values dominate decision-making” (Giesecke & McNeil, 2004, p. 54), and become a learning organization that transforms them into a flexible and nimble team that possesses the ability to respond to these administrative demands quickly and efficiently. To do this, organizations must transform themselves into learning organizations. Senge (2003) stated that to become a learning organization, “it requires both personal willingness to detect and correct the errors in one’s own behaviors, as well as continual improvement in the processes, practices, metrics, and governance structures—it is both, not one or the other” (p. 48). A learning organization, as described by Giesecke and McNeil (2004), possesses a “climate that fosters learning, experimenting, and risk taking” (pp. 54–55). By becoming a learning organization, a fresh look at processes and procedures can be taken.

The significance of this research study is that the application of the Education FIRST leadership framework may allow staff to focus on their particular role within the school resulting in teachers being able to provide more dedicated teaching time for students to learn and improve their subject level proficiency. The desired outcome of this research study is to gather information that contributes to the scholarly research on this topic and be used to improve efficiency of administrative staff members while preventing teachers from being taken away from their classrooms to aid in the completion of burdensome administrative activities. In allowing for school administrative staff to complete these activities without additional assistance, specifically the assistance from teachers, these activities may no longer require additional staff members to spend time finishing them. Teachers will continue to participate as teacher-leaders by focusing on collaborative learning, contributing to school-wide improvement, and impacting

educational system performance. But it is my hope, that by administrative staff members using the Education FIRST leadership framework, schools will be provided with a consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of completed high-quality administrative activities with a clear direction from start to finish.

Definition of Terms

As part of this research, there are certain terms and references that are identified and discussed throughout the study.

Administrative burdens: This term identifies as the administrative activities that have built up over time that overwhelm the school's administrative staff members based on the large number and depth of information being requested. Reichardt, et al. (2008) described administrative burdens as “the sheer number of initiatives and reforms that shower down on schools to collect data on the outcomes of their efforts” (p. 2). The Education FIRST leadership framework refers to the collection of various leadership components included within the appendices that provide schools with a consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of high-quality output following a prescribed and clear direction from start to finish. The Project Management Institute (2008) identified that a leadership framework is a way to ensure that the “performance of the processes will be efficient and coordinated” (p. 168).

Transformational leader: This term refers to the school's administrator that is implementing the Education FIRST leadership framework. As identified by Anthony and Schwartz (2017), transformational leaders focus on three things: “they strategically pursue two separate journeys by repositioning and actively investing in new growth; they use culture change to drive engagement; communicate powerful narratives about the future with a road map before disruption takes hold” (pp. 5–8).

Teacher leaders: This term refers to those teachers that have taken on a leadership role and the additional responsibilities of leading other teachers. Harrison and Killion (2007) stated that “teacher leaders assume a wide range of roles to support school and student success to build the entire school's capacity to improve” (p. 1).

Learning organization: This term identifies organizations where staff are continually learning and improving the culture and climate within their organization. Senge (1996) identified “the promise of learning organizations is, at least in part, the promise that this power will become deeply and widely embedded in a way that rarely, if ever, happens in traditional authoritarian organizations” (p. 37).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

As with every research study, there are assumptions, delimitations, and limitations that every researcher must contend with and acknowledge. Simon (2011) stated that “assumptions are somewhat out of your control, but if they disappear the study would become irrelevant” (p. 1). I am assuming that the need to streamline administrative burdens is an important issue for K–12 schools due to the stagnant growth of student proficiency and teacher retention levels. Reichardt, et al. (2008) identified “that teacher attrition is often the result of factors directly under the control of school and district leaders and can be improved through minimizing the burdens on teachers” (p. 2). There may also be a lack of awareness or even an indifference if the problem being discussed does not significantly impact them or their administrative staff members. In today’s society, one must pull together with others to succeed beyond the capabilities of themselves and to achieve the vision for the common good. Nowhere is that more prevalent than in today’s educational system. Yet, when faced with overwhelming administrative burdens and late submissions of required progress reports, school administrators

do not always want the truth to come out. The truth is they might be overwhelmed and cannot keep up with all of the demands being placed upon them. I assume that the research study participants are providing honest and open feedback identifying this as a problem, if this is the case.

In addition to the assumptions that was made for this research study, there are delimitations that have been chosen to establish boundaries for this research study. Simon (2011) defined “delimitations as those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of your study and are in your control” (p. 2). A significant delimitation for this research study is the selection of the participants and the 12-week timeframe associated with this study. Respondents are purposefully restricted as a way to monitor and control the length of time it takes to gather feedback and insights. Another delimitation that was established is the way in which the research findings will be published. Data gathered and analyzed are interpreted through an analysis process that categorizes and topic codes the information. A summary of responses is reported in the research study’s findings at the conclusion of the study instead of reporting these findings in detail. Furthermore, this research study is not an in-depth, deep reaching research study but a study that helps describe the situation being faced by school administrators. As identified by Hale (2011), “descriptive research methods are pretty much as they sound—they describe situations and they do not make accurate predictions or determine cause and effect” (p. 2).

When examining the limitations within this research study, there are several that need to be identified. According to Simon (2011), “limitations are potential weaknesses in your study and are out of your control” (p. 2). This research study is no different. For instance, a validation limitation being faced by this research study is that participants may have a personal bias that

impacts the study. As identified by Sanchez (2007), “a person’s environment and the nuances of a person’s job often produces biases that influence individuals over time” (p. 2). Within this research study, the participants are selected partly due to their job responsibilities. Yet, Sanchez (2007) continues to inform us that “the workplace often produces some of the stronger biases that humans develop” (p. 2).

Chapter 1 Summary

Within Chapter 1, the introduction of this dissertation, a discussion around the need for schools to reduce the amount of time spent on administrative activities was introduced. As school administrators grapple with all of the regulatory reporting requirements, where they must complete a myriad of forms and data reports, schools are challenged by the administrative burdens placed on them that distracts educators from providing effective instructional practices that results in students learning. Based on a teacher’s workload study, MacDonald (2011) described how “teachers are spending more time on administrative tasks and less time interacting with students” (p. 1). There is an overwhelming need for schools to be able to do less, in the form of more focused work, with less resources, by leveraging an effective and efficient workforce, to complete all of the administrative burdens placed on them. Whether the administrative burdens that are placed on these schools are from federal, state, or local origins to help those entities perform their functions, their requests still distract the school from accomplishing their main goal—to educate students.

By examining the challenges facing school administrators and teachers as they take on the important role of instructing the youth of America, they are faced with an ever-growing problem of administrative burdens that continue to grow in number and size every day. Further examination of this problem divided this premise into four separate and distinct topics. They

include schools are overburdened by administrative activities; key staff members are overworked; school administrators do the best they can to complete the assigned tasks; and successful schools utilize a carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable set of implementation procedures. No longer can an organization just address the issues and concerns that arise as part of their daily work. School leaders and staff must embrace change and “move past being an understanding organization where the organizational culture and its values dominate decision-making” (Giesecke & McNeil, 2004, p. 54) and become a learning organization that transforms them into a flexible and nimble team that possesses the ability to respond to these administrative demands quickly and efficiently. School administrators must focus on improving their administrative staff members’ efficiencies that allow a school to learn from their previous experiences and focuses their efforts on the specific activities that can be improved upon. This is achieved by following a process improvement methodology that helps to focus schools on their highest priority—the student.

Following a consistent and repeatable construct of leadership that allows for variations in decision-making, leadership style, and techniques, this research study determines if a K–12 school can construct a logical, collaborative, problem-solving set of procedures, processes, and protocols that support teachers in their efforts to improve outcomes for students. The actions contained with this leadership framework are based on creating internal strategies to improve efficiency and effectiveness of staff members in completing the administrative burdens placed on schools. Described by Meyers, et al. (2012), “a team-based approach to implementation should involve matching team members’ unique talents and expertise with documented roles and responsibilities” (p. 486). Tying members’ skills to roles that match them will allow each staff member to accomplish great things while improving efficiency and effectiveness of the team.

For educators to deliver instructional practices that impact students, they need to be supported by efficient administrative staff. Support that staff, when distracted by an overwhelming series of burdensome administrative activities, cannot provide. Based on these efforts, an examination of the use of standardized internal strategies will see if the K–12 school can improve the interaction within the school but also in completing the federal, state, and local administrative activities that have become burdensome. Within the upcoming chapters of this dissertation, an identification of how a school can reduce the amount of time spent on administrative burdens will be examined, compared, and contrasted by conducting a literature examination in Chapter 2, the literature review and by describing the processes and procedures involved to conduct the research study in Chapter 3, methodology. Chapter 4, data analysis and results will describe the conducted research study and give an overview of the findings while presenting the data and results. Chapter 5, discussion and conclusions, discusses the results of the research study and contrasts the results with the findings in the literature review of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

Challenges presented to K–12 school leaders in today’s educational environment place increased demands on their skills as leaders. These challenges come from many sources: the U.S. Department of Education, a state’s Department of Education, (in this research study) the Michigan Department of Education, and throughout the various levels of the educational system including school districts and the school buildings themselves. Challenges faced by K–12 schools include the regulatory reporting requirements in which schools must complete numerous forms and data reports to satisfy the reporting needs of each oversight layer of the educational system. Van Droogenbroeck, et al. (2014) identified increases in school administrative activities as “excessive paperwork demands” (p. 107). As these reporting requests continue to grow, they become overwhelming for school administrative staff to complete. With administrative staff overwhelmed by these requests, they have little to no choice but to pull teachers out of the classroom to help out. This overreach of administrative activities was described by Van Droogenbroeck, et al. (2014) when in the course of their research study they noted that teachers were assigned more than their fair share of administrative tasks that added to their stress levels (p. 106).

McElroy (2005) identified “teachers’ most important factors affecting school success as: having time for students; and a supportive and effective school leadership” team (p. 1). Faced with these challenges, greater emphasis on student proficiency demanding leaders to perform or be replaced by someone who does have the skills to improve student outcomes becomes necessary. In order to face these challenges and meet these demands, K–12 school leaders must be transformational. Transformational in ways that McElroy (2005) describes as actively

listening to teacher's concerns and working collaboratively to identify solutions (p. 1). A transformational leader facilitates success by serving others, reflecting on completed actions and focusing on organizational change. Nash (2012) noted that "transformational leadership is an inspirational and caring process in which both the leader and the follower learn from each other as they progress in their moral development" (p. 4). Working collaboratively, they make improvements to processes and procedures. Leveraging these leadership skills, the transformational leader possesses the ability to complete the overwhelming administrative tasks and activities freeing teachers to remain in the classroom to drive student proficiency and improve student outcomes. McElroy (2005) suggested that when teachers are supported and remain in the classroom, the "results will be evident in both student performance and teacher satisfaction, after all—teachers want what students need" (p. 1).

In order to develop individual staff members into high performing team members, the transformational leader considers various perspectives and experiences to aid in the transformation. In understanding experiences, leaders need to see the value in the knowledge that individuals bring with them. Within the study conducted by Du Plessis, Carroll, and Gillies (2015), the authors found that teachers are valued when principals work together with them and provide opportunities for them to grow and by empowering them (p. 18). As a transformational leader contemplates the path toward building an empowered team, they investigate the role and position in which each member is responsible. In establishing an empowered team, each member is permitted to accomplish the goals and objectives in a way that the member develops and then shares with the team, so that each member has the ability to learn from one another. Argyris (1998) noted that a leader establishing an empowered team facilitates personal buy-in by the employees, provides a clearly defined set of guidelines that engages staff members in

identifying work objectives and gives staff the freedom to develop how an objective can be attained, including stretch targets that may require new innovative ways to complete them (pp. 3–4). A transformational leader inspires people to be who they are and embraces each member’s uniqueness as they come together to learn from each other and find better and more efficient ways to perform. By leveraging each of the employee’s unique abilities and approaches, greater efficiencies may be discovered and better ways to accomplish the school’s goals may be found.

As the transformational leader defines the path the team needs to take, this leader interprets personal experiences and considers the experiences of others as they transform a group of individuals into one cohesive and consistent team. Nash (2012) noted that leaders must examine and understand their own experiences to fully develop their transformational leadership skills (p. 14). The educational leader then, in turn, examines the experiences of the team and each member to gain a better understanding of what each member can contribute. By understanding the individual member’s real-world experiences, leaders build relationships that contribute to the transformation process by implementing changes that help each of the members accept changes in the way they work. Nash (2012) identifies a key aspect of transformational leadership as “a form of leadership that transforms followers into leaders” (p. 3) and incorporates the principles of servant leadership by serving others before self. The leader, by leveraging these principles, adapts the leadership style being used by focusing on the instrumental and communicative domains of learning to help the team member fully grasp and understand the context of the content. Mezirow (2003) noted that “instrumental learning is about controlling and manipulating the environment, with emphasis on improving prediction and performance while communicative learning refers to understanding what someone means when they communicate with you” (p. 59). Considering how to best serve the team members, a

transformational leader must reflect on academic and life experiences of all team members in conjunction with the team's specific completed actions as a way to help broaden the team's understanding of the overall work they are being asked to complete.

School administrators and their staff members today face more administrative burdens than ever before. Sanchez (2007) identified that schools are facing a higher number of accountability tasks with limited resources and tracking systems that require time intensive clerical activities (p. 186). Demands placed on school administrators are expected to be produced and turned around quickly in today's highly connected, computerized environment to provide this information for compliance and performance evaluations. As noted by Covington (2010), there are "an insuperable amount of responsibilities and duties from increased federal, state, and local demands" (p. ii). In order for all of these activities to be completed, school administrators must be transformational leaders that empower administrative staff within the school to help resolve these challenges. Discussed in Leithwood and Poplin's (1992) article, "The Move Toward Transformational Leadership", there are essential goals that transformational leaders are consistently pursuing: "helping staff develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; encouraging teacher development; and problem solving" (pp. 9–10). Each of these pursuits helps to build a culture and workforce that can come together and accomplish great things.

Yet, in order to accomplish great things, teachers must be able to focus on their purpose—to teach students. As early as the mid-1990s, concerns were raised that teachers were spending too much time on administrative tasks. The National Review (1994) published an article, "Do not Blame Johnny", that revealed "seventy-seven percent of public-school teachers say they spend too much time on administrative duties" (p. 17). These teacher duties described

by Sanchez (2007) as time-consuming administrative activities that impedes on classroom preparation time (p. 171) include regulatory reporting requirements and compiling student performance metrics. While based on a teacher's workload study, MacDonald (2011) described how "teachers are spending more time on administrative tasks and less time interacting with students" (p. 1).

Additionally, an examination of how much time teachers spend teaching their students was conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2014) and captured the results in the "Education at a Glance 2014" publication. As identified in their findings, within the United States, the "percentage of total working time spent teaching was fifty-six percent" (p. 480), this leaves the remaining 44% absorbed in administrative tasks. These findings help to corroborate the results of a thorough investigation by Sheppard (2008) that studied the effects of non-instructional workload tasks upon instructional time. Sheppard (2008) revealed that on average, a teacher's involvement in "administrative tasks account for approximately fourteen hours of each week, which has the potential to impact the instruction of students" (p. 37). School administrators, as transformational leaders, need to find ways to free up teachers from having to complete administrative activities and allow them to focus on teaching students.

Within this chapter, an examination of how a school can reduce the amount of time spent on administrative burdens will be examined, compared, and contrasted by implementing the Education FIRST leadership framework that I created. K-12 schools are challenged by the administrative burdens that distract educators from providing effective instructional practices that lead to students learning. This problem will be investigated through a comprehensive and relevant review of literature to help build on the framework of previous research on the topic.

The Education FIRST leadership framework components are identified and examined in this chapter along with the aspects of administrative burdens and school administration coupled with process improvement and business process management. This examination helps to reveal that schools need to do less, by having more focused work, with less resources, a highly efficient and effective workforce, to complete all of the administrative burdens placed upon them. Analysis of the discovered literature helps identify the four main concepts that support the examination findings: schools are overburdened with administrative activities; key staff are overworked; school administrators do the best they can; and successful schools utilize a carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable set of implementation procedures. The results of the literature review will help inform the design of the research study and help define how a school can reduce the amount of time spent on administrative burdens.

Streamlining Educational Administration

Transformational leaders come in many shapes and sizes, with different concepts, styles, and techniques originating from a variety of background perspectives. As Northouse (2013) described, “transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower” (p. 186). Whether it is through one-on-one coaching and mentoring or through charismatic convincing, a leader can motivate and drive people to accomplish great things. Great things that on their own, these people would never believe they would be able to accomplish - accomplishments that help change the world and allow us as humans to make improvements and learn from our prior experiences. Nash (2012) linked leadership with student outcomes and identified how an enhancement in leadership skills can improve student outcomes (p. 4). Yet, these changes require leaders that follow a consistent and repeatable construct of leadership that

allows for variations in decision-making, leadership style, and techniques to motivate followers in accomplishing those great things. As noted by Davenport (2005), process and procedure “standardization can facilitate better communications, more efficient handoffs, and performance benchmarking” (p. 2).

When leading others, a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach is required to help move an organization forward. Davenport (2005) stated that “organizations need a set of standards for process activities so that they can communicate easily and efficiently” (p. 2). In developing the new leadership framework presented in the current study, I used a blending of project management, lean organization, and systems engineering methodologies. Today’s leaders need to implement a new model of leadership framework that is consistent and repeatable across any educational organization throughout the nation. This leadership framework is the Education Focused Initiative of Resources and Strategic Thinking (Education FIRST) that I created (see Appendix A). The use of the Education FIRST leadership framework provides a methodical approach toward leading followers through conducting and aligning the work needing to be completed to get each level of the academic infrastructure collaborating together and improving student outcomes.

The Education FIRST leadership framework provides the various levels of the educational system with a consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. Foundationally based on the Project Management Institute’s (2008), “A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge” and my 30 years of management consulting experience, Education FIRST provides streamlined management attention on the critical areas that affect school administrators in their completion of administrative activities. The framework consists of seven major components: governance,

communication, quality standards, professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, monitoring and controlling, and data. These components are modeled after “the standards that establish guidelines for project management processes, tools, and techniques” (Project Management Institute, 2008, p. 4) and Education FIRST provides a comprehensive framework to improve processes and procedures.

Education FIRST’s leadership components focus attention on the things that matter most. It requires that the leader, the school administrator, to embrace and utilize the principles of transformational leadership by helping build the construct that shifts the leader’s attention to followers, enabling them into reaching their fullest potential. Not only do the followers change themselves but the organization changes as a whole. The Education FIRST leader is a person that strives to encompass servant leader qualities being consumed by the need to motivate followers to move beyond focusing on themselves and getting them to work in ways that sets the needs of others first. Encompassing the use of all of the Education FIRST leadership components, both the leader and the staff fulfill the needs of the organization with a self-satisfaction that working cohesively as a team can provide.

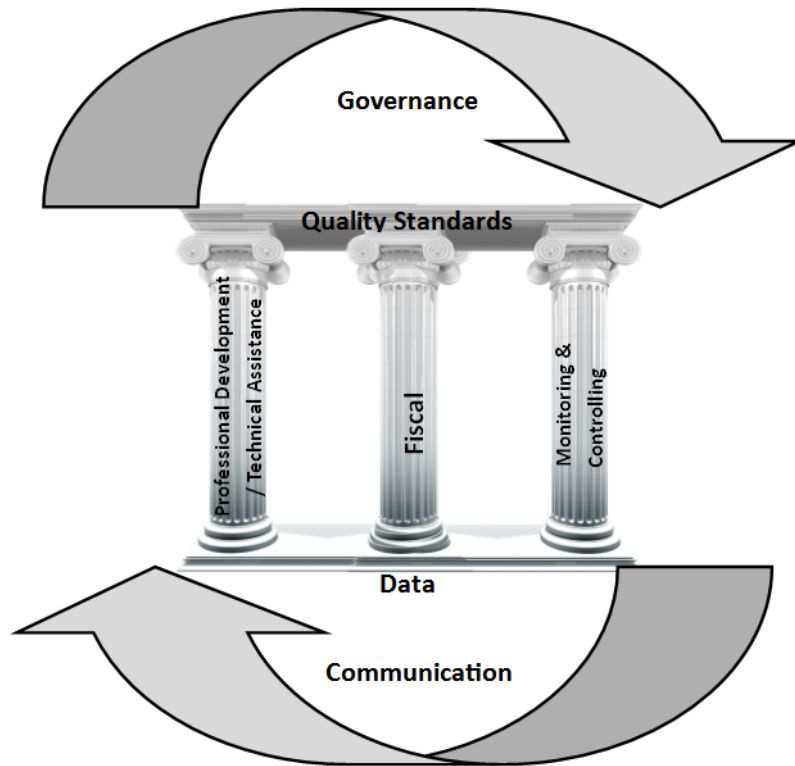


Figure 1. Education FIRST component interaction. This figure displays a visual representation of the Education FIRST leadership framework components.

The visual representation of Education FIRST leadership components in Figure 1 represents the interactive nature of the seven components that leads an effort to successful completion. As demonstrated by the circling arrows, governance and communications are provided as wrap around services that are critical components in the overall completion of the effort. Quality standards are supported by the three pillars of professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, and monitoring and controlling components. All of these components are based on a firm foundation of data that helps support, define and validate the determination of the assigned effort to the team. Each component works in harmony as the Education FIRST leader and the administrative support team work to complete the tasks and activities of an effort. The Education FIRST leadership framework requires the dedication and commitment to the

prescribed process, so that the framework can accomplish the goals and objectives of the school by accomplishing great things and reducing the administrative burdens faced on a daily basis.

Frame of Context

Within a school, the transformational leader uses data to assess and evaluate the efforts of the team. Assessing data on the performance of the team is a critical step in determining the path of change or adjustment that may be needed to improve the team's performance in completing administrative activities. Gann (2003) stated that "performance management may well be the single most important element in continuous school improvement" (p. 1). Improving team efficiency allows a school to learn from prior outcomes and focus their efforts on specific activities that can be improved upon. In order to determine what adjustments are required to improve efficiency, the assessment of reliable data to make informed decisions on the effectiveness of the team is required. Blankstein (1993) noted that in order to improve the system, data must be collected and analyzed to determine where the deficiencies are in the process (p. 30). Some of the data includes workflows and the evaluation of how effective they were in performing the job function. Workflows define a sequence of events or actions that complete tasks and assignments.

Following this need of structured workflows, Hirsch, et al. (2007) recommended that there should be "structured guidance in engaging in appropriate school-based decision making" (p. viii). Structured guidance provides logical steps to follow once this data is collected and analyzed which leads into the art and science of decision making. Russell (2003) noted that leaders must "develop a strong skill set, techniques, and methods with which to apply the art and science of decision-making" (p. 3). Utilizing the constructs of art and science, as defined by Russell (2003), "the art is the theory and the science is the process" (p. 3), the Education FIRST

leader focuses on both. The art of decision making is theorizing and interpreting captured data points ensuring that the decision being made is reasonable and applicable. The science of decision making is the procedural use of reliable data to provide tangible results that support the decision and make it defensible. When needed, additional research is used to allow the transformational leader to interpret the data and to make informed decisions.

In the work that is performed by these teams, strategically placed reflection milestones in the work schedules allow for review of lessons learned from the past to help guide future efforts. As identified by Sanchez (2007), administrators can gain insights by using reflection and should use this technique on a regular basis as they encourage and motivate their staff members (p. 182). This permits the transformational leader and the team to pause and reflect on the situations that were encountered and review how they were handled. The establishment of reflective questions can help the team learn how to become more effective in the future. Some examples include: Are there improvements that we can make to become more efficient and effective? Are there better choices that we were unable to make and why were we unable to make them? Once the reflective questions have been answered, adjustments can be made. Blankstein (1993) stated that adjustments to the system provides an opportunity to increase system effectiveness but should be controlled by administrators overseeing the system and with input/feedback from those that work within the system (p. 30). Additionally, leaders need to continuously reflect after major decisions are made. This includes decisions that affect the team and the school as a whole. As these decisions are made, reflection on these decisions will need to occur as the team plans how to properly implement processes or procedures to support those decisions. As noted by Mezirow (1997), throughout the reflection process, the team will need to have discussions that focus on evaluating staff interpretations, looking at supporting evidence, and alternative viewpoints (p. 6).

It will be through this discourse that the team will reflect on previous experiences, challenges or difficulties to help influence the way in which the team overcomes new problems or roadblocks in their quest to reduce the amount of time spent on completing administrative activities.

By evaluating and assessing the current working environment in which school administrative staff perform duties, an understanding can be derived of where process improvements can be made. This captured baseline information provides a starting point for the Education FIRST leadership framework to begin. Capturing data related to how the administrative activities are completed and reflecting on the information permits the school administrator to identify where changes are needed and how much effort will be needed to make those changes. Collaborative staff member involvement allows for innovative ideas to flow and to highlight thoughts and ideas that help to gain efficiencies.

Significance

Organizations must transform themselves into learning organizations that, as described by Giesecke and McNeil (2004), possesses a “climate that fosters learning, experimenting, and risk taking” (pp. 54–55). No longer can an organization just address the issues and concerns that arise as part of their daily work. The competitive market that exists in today’s society requires nothing less. This is especially true for schools responsible for the education of America’s youth. By becoming a learning organization, a fresh look at processes and procedures can be taken. Senge (1996) identified “three roles played by leaders: designer, teacher, and steward” (p. 36). The Education FIRST leader, through the Education FIRST leadership framework, can play each of those roles and as identified by Senge (1996), become an active participant in testing different scenarios that may lead to greater efficiencies and better ways to complete tasks and activities (p. 36).

Today's schools have fallen behind the times by relying on what has worked well in the past when there were less administrative activities imposed on them. As identified by Bloomberg (2008), the American "education system is a broken system that needs to have a top-to-bottom change made" (p. 3) to be successful. Bloomberg (2008) also stated that this comprehensive approach can use ideas from all over the country to reduce the demands placed on all schools (p. 3). Schools are faced with an increasing demand of administrative activities and data needs of those organizations providing funding and technical assistance resources, which they continue to struggle with or are unable to keep up with. School leaders and staff must embrace change and "move past being an understanding organization where the organizational culture and its values dominate decision-making" (Giesecke & McNeil, 2004, p. 54), and become a learning organization that transforms them into a flexible and nimble team that possesses the ability to respond to these administrative demands quickly and efficiently.

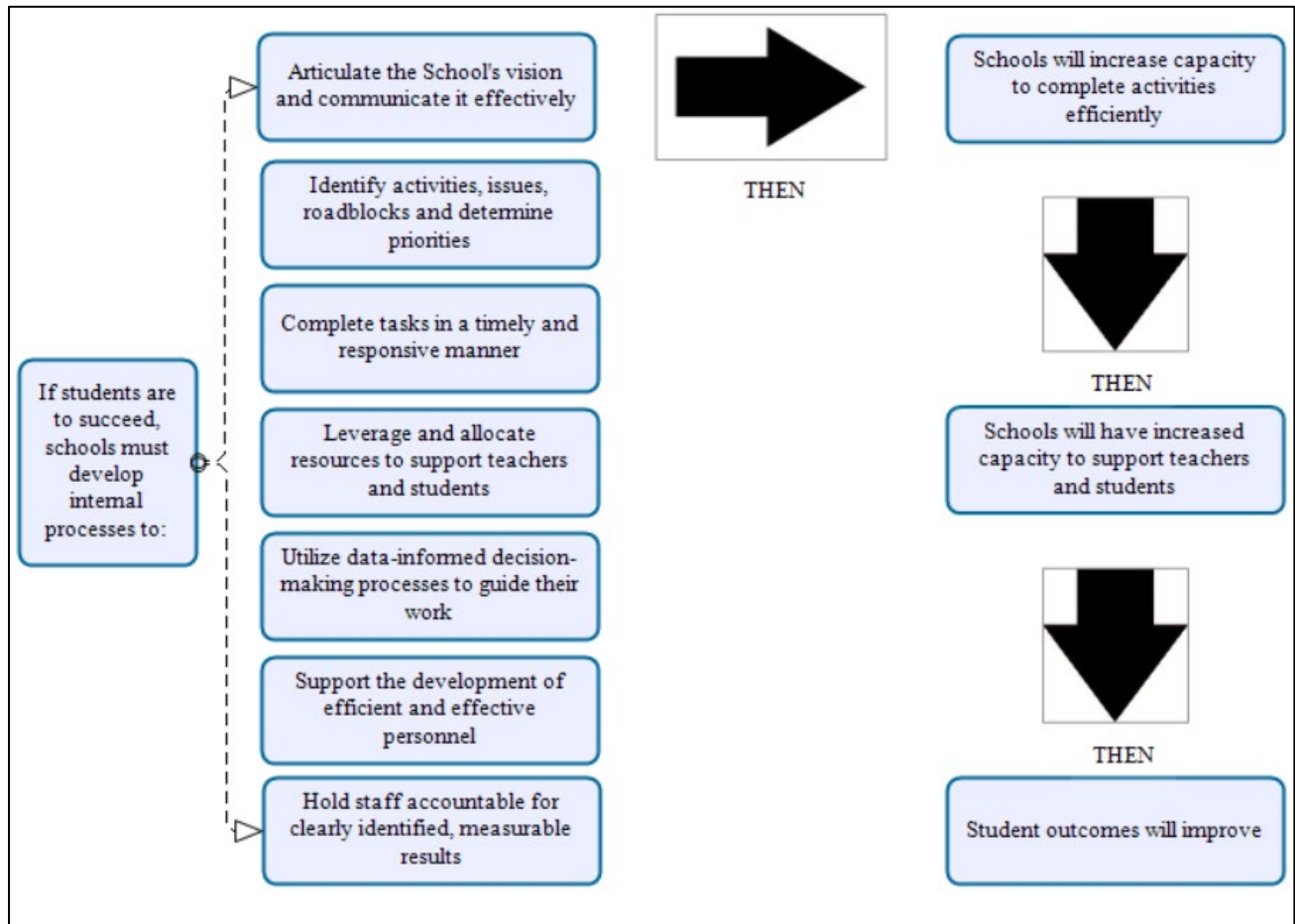


Figure 2. The Education FIRST theory of action. This figure demonstrates how internal process development contributes to improving student outcomes.

In order to become flexible and nimble, a school must look to methods that help facilitate significant change. Bloomberg (2008) stated that education policy-makers have “tinkered around the edges of a broken system and fallen short, but this can be different, only if you pursue change” (p. 3). I created the theory of action in figure 2 to help describe the significance that streamlining the administrative burdens of schools can make and the resulting impact it has on students. In general, a theory of action focuses on how and why the school will produce change resulting in the accomplishment of a school’s ultimate goal of improving student outcomes.

Fixsen, et al. (2013) discussed the need for change, “past and current efforts have not been

successful for the last few decades” (p. 213). Something needs to be done differently. Fixsen, et al. (2013) proposed that the results speak for themselves, if people want a good return on the school funding investment, implementation science and best practices must be used (p. 214).

The Education FIRST theory of action is created using a series of if-then statements to form an explanation of how, following an implementation methodology, the administrative activities, identified as the effort, will be accomplished by disclosing tactics that will be used by school staff. The actions contained with the Education FIRST leadership framework are focused on creating internal strategies to improve efficiency and effectiveness of staff members in completing the administrative burdens placed on schools. In order for educators to deliver instructional practices that impact students, they need to be supported by efficient administrative staff. Support that staff, when distracted by an overwhelming series of burdensome administrative activities, cannot provide. Through Education FIRST, schools can construct a logical, collaborative, problem-solving set of procedures, processes, and protocols that support teachers in their efforts to improve outcomes for students. Fixsen, et al. (2013) identified a solution by the use of a leadership framework that increases staff capacity and supports teachers focusing their attention on students to improve student outcomes (pp. 214–215).

Within this research study, identification of how a school can reduce the amount of time spent on administrative burdens was examined, compared, and contrasted. The anticipated results of what developed as the research study progressed helps to inform school administrators as to how they can refine and reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks and activities. This important reduction in overall effort allows school administrative staff to finish these tasks timely, efficiently, and accurately. Fixsen, et al. (2013) noted that “without the people in place, capacity cannot occur since it resides in people who have the knowledge, skills,

and abilities to do this new kind of work” (p. 222). By having the right people focus on the right kind of work, no longer do teachers need to be taken away from their classrooms to help in the completion of administrative activities. These activities no longer require additional staff members to spend time to finish them. The Education FIRST leader, in order to realign the work surrounding the administrative activities, applies their transformational leadership skills to implement and support this new way of work. The overall significance of this research study is that by allowing staff to focus on their particular role within the school, more dedicated teaching time is available for students to learn and the students can improve their subject level proficiency.

Problem Statement

K–12 schools are challenged by the administrative burdens that distract educators from providing effective instructional practices that lead to students learning. As identified by Reichardt, et al. (2008), “those who shape policy, from principals through state policymakers, need to minimize distractions by minimizing the burdens to support teachers as they work to educate children” (p. 2). But it is more than that. Administrative activities to support policy changes and efforts to improve student outcomes continues to be a high-priority placed on schools. School administrators who are unable to manage the workload associated with these critical efforts continue to propagate the distraction of educators from instructing students. Reichardt, et al. (2008) further discovered that “district central offices often failed to coordinate their own activities, which in turn, affected teachers by causing fear that their best efforts will be lost in the chaos of the central office” (p. 10). To prevent this from occurring and to stop distracting teachers from their intended role, establishment of standard procedures on handling administrative activities must be implemented. Through the adoption of the Education FIRST

leadership framework, a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach by blending project management, lean organizational concepts, and system engineering methodologies, educators are freed up from those restrictive administrative burdens to allow them to focus on improving student outcomes.

The basis of adopting the Education FIRST leadership framework, as defined within the Education FIRST theory of action, is to have successful students, who need to be taught by teachers following proven instructional practices. In order for educators to teach with proven instructional practices, they need to be supported by reliable procedures and protocols that allow them to freely concentrate on teaching. Fixsen, et al. (2013) identifies the value of the premises defined within the Education FIRST theory of action, “staff functions are repurposed, system units are redefined, and structures are realigned to support, so that student outcomes are improved” (p. 227). The purpose of these efforts is to create internal strategies to improve the interaction within schools. Metz (2016) stated that schools cannot use old and outdated processes to resolve today’s complex challenges, they must look beyond stale and outdated ways of completing tasks; they must be innovative (p. 1). When that innovative way to accomplish a task is created, Metz (2016) believes that staff can be trained to use these new and effective processes resulting in creating a new way of work. This new way of work requires decisions to be made that requires team input or consensus, which are better reached when diverse perspectives representing the community of stakeholders are included in the discussion. The components of the Education FIRST leadership framework provide for that interaction and information sharing while developing the best solution for any effort taken on by the school.

Following the Education FIRST leadership framework allows schools to truly practice leadership that leads to followers that are greater than themselves. As identified by Farber,

Lencioni, and Kelly (2009), “shifting perspectives to focus on connection, interdependence, and us” (p. 164) in a global sense contributes to the overall success of each staff member and the school as a whole. It is through this sense of commitment that demonstrates the virtues of the Education FIRST leadership framework as a new, multi-faceted approach to leading groups toward greater service collaboration, support, and decision making. Leadership that focuses on the seven components of the framework allows for greater transparency and collaboration to the benefit of the entire educational system. The Education FIRST leader uses the artifacts and information produced by each component to “better understand themselves and strengthen their own leadership” (Northouse, 2013, p. 439). As one implements the Education FIRST leadership framework, they are exposed to experiences that incorporate many facets of the leadership process. Yet, it requires commitment and perseverance that allows a leader to strive to achieve the goals and objectives by modeling the behavior and being inclusive of other’s opinions, thoughts and ideas.

Systems science indicates that work focused on improving individual parts of a system separately cannot improve the overall performance of the system. Absent a coordinated, cohesive, and collaborative system, work to support schools in their goal to increase student achievement will ultimately fail. Johnson, Chung, Schroeder, and Meyers (2012) indicated that “systems-building is a dynamic process of improving how the parts of a system or set of systems operate and interact with one another to achieve long-term, sustained change” (p. 84). By leveraging the Education FIRST leadership framework, schools can make this system change and achieve its goal of supporting educators in improving student outcomes.

Schools have continued to struggle with the need to deliver administrative tasks and activities on time, within the roles of the central office, and without impacting educators in the

classrooms. Rudenstine (2002) noted “teams struggle with the essential question of its own capacity, and the range of diversity of beliefs it is competent to handle: how much is too much when attempting to work as a team?” (p. 122). With the overwhelming need to provide data and information to the U.S. Department of Education, a state’s Department of Education, and throughout the various levels of the educational system including school districts and the individual schools, schools have to rein in these efforts more closely than ever. Jennings and Diane (2006) believe that “the lack of capacity could undercut effective administration since these agencies must rely on local schools to assist in these tasks, yet they are under great strain with little relief in sight” (p. 113). Chapter 5 of this dissertation helps guide schools through the Education Focused Initiative of Resources and Strategic Thinking (FIRST) leadership framework that provides schools with a consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish.

Organization of the Literature Research Review

In examining the literature surrounding streamlining educational administration: a process improvement methodology to free schools from administrative burdens, a research approach that focuses the scope of scholarly literature was conducted. The foundation of this focused research deals with the overwhelming need for schools to be able to do less, in the form of more focused work, with less resources, by leveraging an effective and efficient workforce, to complete all of the administrative burdens placed on them. Further refinement of this research approach divided that premise into four separate and distinct topics for consideration. They include schools are overburdened by administrative activities; key staff members are overworked; school administrators do they best they can to complete the assigned tasks; and

successful schools utilize a carefully crafted, structured and repeatable set of implementation procedures.

In an effort to ensure that the review of literature was deep enough to reveal a rich perspective of previously conducted research, I utilized library resources and the vast availability of research databases contained therein. With full access to many valuable resources of scholarly research at my disposal, I focused on discovering published research that would address the problem identified for this study: K–12 schools are challenged by the administrative burdens placed on them that distracts educators from providing effective instructional practices that leads to students learning. Discovery efforts focused on literature that embodied the premise of schools need to do less, with less resources by using primary search parameters including administrative burdens; process improvement; school administration; and business process management. As literature surrounding these main search parameters revealed themselves, additional deeper probing helped to uncover the content discussed in the following sections of this study.

Within the content of the current chapter, the results of the literature research review provide insights on how each of these topics help to answer the research questions that formed the basis of this study:

- Main Research Question—In what ways can a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks implemented in a school impact student outcomes?
 - What implementation methodologies are currently in use by effective (high performing) schools?
 - In what ways do the components of the Education FIRST leadership framework currently exist in other implementation methodologies in use by schools?

- How do the components of Education FIRST compare to other leadership frameworks in use by schools?
- What issues experienced in schools, contributes to the breakdown of consistent processes and procedures, like Education FIRST, and in what ways can a school avoid those breakdowns?

Conceptual Framework

Working at a state department of education, I hope to build processes and procedures to implement the department’s vision, priorities, and various cross-office initiatives. Within the work that I perform and based on my years of experience as a management consultant, leading organizations in process improvement, I strive to positively impact administrative activities by streamlining them as much as possible. This is achieved by following a process improvement methodology that helps to focus schools on their highest priority—the student.

Yet, schools are challenged by the demands placed on them, demands that I am acutely aware of as an employee of Michigan Department of Education. In having schools implement streamlined processes and procedures, efficiencies are improved, and the unintended consequences of greater administrative demands tend to be reduced from the school’s administrative staff as these efficiencies are optimized. In examining the challenges facing school administrators and teachers as they take on the important role of instructing the youth of America, they are faced with an ever-growing problem of administrative burdens that continue to grow in number and size every day. Sunderman and Kim (2004) noted that “considerable administrative and managerial oversight with no additional resources place enormous administrative burdens on schools” (p. 4). Whether the administrative burdens that are placed on these schools are from federal, state, or local origins to help those entities perform their

functions, the requests still distract the school from accomplishing their main goal—to educate students.

Through a conceptual leadership framework that blends project management, lean organization, and systems engineering methodologies, the Education Focused Initiative of Resources and Strategic Thinking (FIRST) framework leverages the best characteristics that each methodology has to offer. As identified by Alexander (2016), “recognizing what the priorities are, what the methodologies are, and when, where, and how each methodology creates the greatest positive impact is a key to success, this is where project managers are able to assist” (p. 1). Education FIRST is a leadership framework that clearly and methodically provides procedures and protocols that streamline the administrative burdens placed on schools from every level of the educational system. Alexander (2016) noted that project managers focus their efforts on implementation improvement through managing risks and continually looking for ways to improve processes and procedures (p. 1). Focused on continuous improvement, Education FIRST provides a common structure for all operational aspects of a school to function. Matthews and Marzec (2015) described “continuous improvement as an unceasing progressive improvement effort which may consist of not repeating errors and engaging in cumulative improvement” (pp. 5–6). Yet, these efforts cannot be successful without an organizationally minded implementation plan and defined procedures that support the continuous improvement effort to lessen the administrative burdens placed on schools.

Education FIRST Leadership Components

The Education FIRST leadership framework provides a consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. The framework consists of seven major components: governance, communication, quality

standards, professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, monitoring and controlling, and data. Education FIRST's leadership components focus attention on the things that matter most. It focuses on transformational leadership. As defined by Northouse (2013), "transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower" (p. 186). The Education FIRST leadership framework helps build the construct that allows for the shift in the leader's attention. Northouse (2013) also describes how the leader shifts their attention to focus on staff's needs and how they strive to motivate each staff member to reach their greatest potential and in turn makes changes in the leader as well (p. 186). The Education FIRST leader is a person that incorporates the leadership aspects identified by Northouse (2013), as someone that demonstrates values and ideals as they motivate staff members to act in ways that promote a greater good than focusing on themselves (p. 191). By encompassing the use of all the Education FIRST leadership components and the Northouse's (2013) leadership aspects, both the leader and the staff emerge with higher moral values and a sense of purpose (p. 187).

Governance. The first component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, governance, defines the teaming structure that leaders need to implement to ensure that all voices and perspectives are considered. The Project Management Institute (2008) identifies governance as a "comprehensive, consistent method of controlling and ensuring success" (p. 20) and to ensure success, leaders must have the capability to listen to their peers and their followers to ensure that they have all the pertinent information needed to make decisions and set direction. Northouse (2013) identified that leaders need to establish a collaborative climate that supports staff members through active listening (p. 193). While Fullen (2007) further clarifies the leader's role within this collaborative environment by sharing that the leader must help establish

context for the staff members to work within and not dictate how staff should perform their duties (pp. 111–112). Fullen (2007) also noted that empowering staff members with the ability to create their own solutions allows for personal buy-in and dedication to own the answer and come up with creative solutions that the leader may not have thought of before (p. 112). A summary of the governance component can be found in Appendix B.

Communication. The second component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, communication, helps facilitate the flow of information across the teams and to outside interested parties. As identified by the Project Management Institute (2008), “communication is the process involving in ensuring the timely and appropriate generation, collection, and dissemination of information” (p. xxv). The Education FIRST leader’s understanding of what the effort entails, and the progress being made on completing the task is dependent on a robust and open dialogue, which this component of leadership specifically focuses upon. While the Education FIRST leadership framework has a hierarchical structure that provides an authority structure, it is “organizations that have faster response capability because they rely on teams and new technologies to enable communications across time and space” (Northouse, 2013, p. 288). Well-designed, developed, and deployed communications help to manage expectations, minimize fear of the unknown, provide channels to gather feedback and keep stakeholders informed. Communication goals consider the following aspects: they provide honest, well-managed, and meaningful communication for the duration of the effort; they respect the influence the communication process has on the creation, management, and implementation of long-lasting change; and it recognizes that for each person, change is accepted at a unique pace. As identified by Bradford (2013), “research encourages taking change at a slow pace” (p. 33) to ensure that everyone is able to accept change in their own time. Communication needs to

provide each layer of the governance teaming structure and effort leaders with immediate input, letting target audiences know that they are heard. In addition, communications should offer the recipient an opportunity for related discussion. A summary of the communication component can be found in Appendix C.

Quality standards. The third component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, quality standards, forms the basis upon which the work that is produced will be judged. As defined by the Project Management Institute (2008), quality standards “assure that quality requirements are being achieved” (p. xxv). The Education FIRST leader always sets realistic quality standards that cause followers to reach a little beyond what they have accomplished before. As noted by Bradberry and Greaves (2012), “you cannot expect your organization to operate at a high level if you do not equip your people to be their best” (p. 233) and stretch them to achieve more. It is through the establishment of quality standards that an expected level of throughput can be attained by the team with an emphasis on maintaining a certain level of quality. As each effort is worked on, the Education FIRST leader can then readjust the quality standards to help the team achieve a higher quality level. Good quality standards are a critical component for an effort’s problem-solving needs. Northouse (2013) describes the conditions that lead to good problem solving is based on the thoughts and ideas that help bring the best solutions out (p. 53). As teams work on efforts and apply the defined quality standards to each effort, they apply that same quality to any issues or problems that arise. A summary of the quality standards component can be found in Appendix D.

Professional development/technical assistance. The fourth component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, professional development/technical assistance, helps to identify the team’s needed professional development to provide the greatest opportunity for the

team to be successful. The Project Management Institute (2008) identifies that professional development/technical assistance “is used to determine and identify necessary skills required for success” (p. 218). This component also covers the potential need to have technical assistance provided when the team runs into problems and requires assistance to resolve those problems. Northouse (2013) notes that after the leader observes the team’s performance, skills may be lacking and need to be improved upon through additional training (pp. 296–297). The Education FIRST leader can help themselves and their followers’ complete difficult tasks and activities by engaging with mentors and on-the-job experience in areas in which they may need additional professional development. By providing the essential training and professional development to the leader’s followers, the leader helps develop the skills of the followers and better prepares them for efforts in the future that may require those same skill sets. A summary of the professional development/technical assistance component can be found in Appendix E.

Fiscal. The fifth component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, fiscal, focuses on the funding issues that require continuous monitoring to ensure that the funding does not run out before the effort is completed. The Project Management Institute (2008) “describes the processes involved in planning, estimating, budgeting, and controlling costs” (p. xxv) as critical aspects of the fiscal component. Funding is a component that must be watched very closely, usually by someone on the team that specializes as a financial analyst or a budget person that can keep close tabs on the depletion of the funding model, or at least what is leftover. A key role for the Education FIRST leader is to identify ways to maximize resources on efforts. This could include evaluating current funding streams, building capacity to use funding sources effectively, and recommending how to close funding gaps. Claimed by Bradberry and Greaves (2012), “it is tempting to lay out a plan that runs lean on staffing and fiscal resources because

this creates efficiency, but this is only on paper, it is better to have a larger budget than you will use rather than create something that looks good on paper but ultimately fails” (p. 43). A summary of the fiscal component can be found in Appendix F.

Monitoring and controlling. The sixth component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, monitoring and controlling, provides the effort, the ability, and authority to make changes to the accepted timeline or other adjustments that best serves the needs of the organization. The Project Management Institute (2008) identifies monitoring and controlling as “the processes required to track, review, and regulate the progress and performance” (p. 39) of the effort. This component follows the tactics of project management and the need to ensure the deliverable documents are being produced within the anticipated timelines. Northouse (2013) identifies that leaders must be steadfast in their team’s goals and objectives, empowering staff to be creative in their approaches to attain those goals, whenever possible (pp. 302–303). Yet, when followers’ energies are unleashed, the Education FIRST leader must be able to monitor and control the tasks and activities to ensure that they are all working toward the common goal of the effort. Northouse (2013) further identified that leaders can increase their staff’s effectiveness by providing clear goals and objectives within a collaborative environment where positivity is encouraged, and performance is monitored (p. 303). Throughout this sixth component, “the goal must be involving or motivating so that the members believe it to be worthwhile and important, teams often fail because they let something else replace their goal” (Northouse, 2013, p. 300). A summary of the monitoring and controlling component can be found in Appendix G.

Data. The seventh and final component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, data, is the foundation upon which decisions are based. Northouse (2013) noted that “a supportive organizational context includes material resources, rewards for excellent

performance, and educational system to develop necessary team skills, and an information system to provide data needed to accomplish the task” (p. 302). Data that reflects the performance of the team or provides information in that solution soundness can be attained, provides the insights needed to propel the team forward. Data can be attained in a variety of ways and teams must learn to mine the data that correlates to the effort that they are working to complete. Northouse (2013) shares that “researchers have collected data in a variety of ways, including questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and content analysis of printed materials” (p. 387). Through these methods, an Education FIRST team can discover the data needed to help guide the direction of the effort. As Northouse (2013) outlines, the progress of the effort highlights the learning skills needed to gather, analyze and make decisions on data that helps the organization complete the effort on time and on budget (p. 303). The Project Management Institute (2008) recognizes the use of data through performance reporting by performing “the periodic collection and analysis of baseline versus actual data to understand and communication progress and performance” (p. 266). As the effort progresses toward completion, the Education FIRST leader utilizes the documented decisions and the supporting data to reach those decisions to provide rationale to stakeholders as validation that the decisions were made correctly. A summary of the data component can be found in Appendix H.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

Over the course of the last few decades, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has placed significant administrative burdens on each level of the educational system. “School districts and states that receive money from federal programs must complete a myriad of forms and data reports to comply with federal regulations” (Lusis, 2012, p. 1). Couple the federal regulations with a state’s laws and regulations plus any additional administrative tasks

assigned by intermediate school districts and school districts, the administrative burdens placed on schools become so overwhelming that it becomes much too much for administrative staff to complete all of the assigned activities in the time allotted for them to finish and submit them. Therefore, in an effort to get the administrative activities done, school administrators have no recourse but to involve teachers.

Within the review of research literature and methodological literature section, the aspects of administrative burdens and school administration coupled with process improvement and business process management is discussed. In the administrative burdens and school administration segment of this section, an in-depth review of the assigned administrative tasks and activities starts with a rundown of studies that have assessed the impact of these burdensome activities. The review continues with an overview of the findings in the discovered literature that demonstrates how school administrators have attempted to resolve this dilemma. Integration of the establishment of the transformational leadership's collaborative environments, implementation methodologies, and organizational change management are extrapolated from the discovered literature and these topics are considered for this research study. Continuing with the process improvement and business process management segment, the considerations of what schools should be doing is examined. Identification of the three facets of implementation are discussed and how schools have transformed into organizations that manage themselves with a particular focus on continuous improvement are reviewed.

Administrative burdens and school administration. Faced with a crushing amount of administrative activities to comply with the various regulations from across the spectrum of educational system levels, schools are forced to prioritize and involve all staff members in completing these activities. These administrative activity challenges are exacerbated by the

number of staff members assigned to the school, based on the type of school. As identified by McCracken and Barcinas (1991), “rural schools had an average of 24 teachers, no teacher aides, three certified support staff, and one administrator while urban schools had an average of 79 teachers, 2 teacher aides, 13 certified support staff, and five administrators” (p. 33). Staffing limitations strain school administrative staff and limits the capacity to complete the required administrative activities furthering the need for a leadership framework like Education FIRST.

No longer are schools able to simply pull simple demographic data and grade related data to comply with the requested information needs of each level of the educational system.

Reichardt, et al. (2008) called out this challenge specifically from a teacher’s perspective, there are “multiple uncoordinated initiatives burdening teachers by requiring repeated requests for the same information, but on different forms without any links to student achievement” (p. 10).

Complex assessment and evaluation needs are being requested as regulations and new programs aimed to improve student proficiency are being considered for implementation by policy makers.

Rudenshine (2002) describes from a fundamental perspective, that these administrative burdens “posed a problem for schools in the addition of new tasks placed on district administrators, burdens that perhaps unintentionally are passed directly to the teachers” (p. 42). Pettengell (2008) further confirms this in that schools are failing their students due to “administrative burdens getting in the way of teaching” (p. 12).

While there are some administrative activities that can help inform school administrators on how students are performing, there are many that are being completed just for the sake of completing them. Jennings and Diane (2006) examined the effects of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as updated by the No Child Left Behind Act on schools. They highlighted some of the benefits of these regulations, specifically: more time is being spent on

reading and math; use of test data and alignment of curriculum and instruction are examined more closely; and low-performing schools are being restructured to help improve student outcomes (p. 2). Yet, they also identified some material weaknesses that “are causing persistent problems and burdens with little evidence that they have raised student achievement” (p. 3). These weaknesses ultimately become administrative burdens that tend to distract from the core instructional practices that are so critical to a student’s learning and in fact, adversely impact their subject proficiency assessment ratings. Reichardt, et al. (2008) identified that “district- and school-level systems are sorely needed, they are clearly lacking” (p. 11) to handle these weaknesses.

There have been several studies that have examined the impact of administrative burdens on schools. In a study to examine the extent of administrative burdens experienced by school faculty, Wimsatt, Trice, and Langley (2009) noted that “faculty are spending large amounts of time on administrative duties that they could otherwise be devoting” (p. 77) to their assigned role within the school. Specifically, the role that tends to get pulled into assisting with completing administrative activities is the teacher. Reichardt, et al. (2008) reported that “over two-thirds of teachers reported being overwhelmed by their jobs due to district initiatives” (p. 6). The school administrator must demonstrate leadership traits by “ensuring that staff are not overwhelmed by district initiatives” (p. 6), not just managerial traits by delegating and assigning tasks to all staff members regardless of their role within the school. Roberts (2014) contrasts this delegation of tasks from administrator to faculty by identifying that while “key staff play critical leadership roles within schools, one of the major impediments of school leadership is trying to carry the burden alone” (pp. 182–183).

In both situations, administrative burdens being passed to faculty or administrators taking all of the burden on themselves, administrative burdens detract from the overall effort to perform the work at hand—educating students. Noted by Reichardt, et al. (2008), “given the pressure to reform, states and districts are producing multiple initiatives to improve student learning” (p. 6). This leads to the dilemma faced by most schools when teachers become frustrated by school administrators that act like managers not leaders, the teachers leave. Reichardt, et al. (2008) continued by identifying one of the main reasons why teachers leave schools, “the district was poorly organized, in that there were too many people in the main office who were not working” (p. 9). While that impression may or may not have been true, teacher frustration continues to increase when “district central offices fail to coordinate their own activities, which in turn affects teachers or if there are multiple, uncoordinated reform initiatives that burden teachers by requiring repeated requests for the same information” (p. 10). All of these distractions impact the amount and quality of time that teachers spend with their students, which in turn adversely impacts student proficiency. Reichardt, et al. (2008) confirms that “educational research has shown the single most important factor in student achievement is the quality of teaching and the ability to close the achievement gap depends on policies and practices that ensure equity in how these two fundamental factors—teacher quality and leadership—play out in schools” (p. i). There is a need to have collaboration between the administrative staff and faculty. They need to be coordinated, so each person regardless of role, can be successful.

To resolve this dilemma, a collaborative effort between the administrator and the faculty is needed to address the unbelievable amount of administrative burdens faced by schools. In overcoming this obstruction and interruption in educating students, a team must work together to perform the various roles needed to efficiently and effectively complete these activities in a

timely manner. “Teacher collaboration holds great promise for improving the quality of instruction for all students, but administrators are important and powerful team members” (Rea, 2005, p. 312). As noted by Rea (2005), collaborative environments can help transform a school (p. 315). In getting “adults working together, the chance of success increases” (p. 315) in accomplishing work faster, smarter, and more efficiently. But collaboration needs to extend beyond just school staff members. Collaboration with various stakeholders is critical to ensuring that all aspects of a topic are considered. Stakeholder engagement helps to build the path to success by providing a method to identify concerns and values across a variety of perspectives, developing consensus with a school’s partners, and developing well-organized and functional solutions through an engaging process.

In order to establish a collaborative stakeholder engagement session, school administrators must follow standardized procedures and protocols. Hines (2008) identifies the standard protocols that should be used. They include: “time to plan; openly communicating; sharing goals; and putting children first, these help to ensure that classrooms are transformed into a place where a broad range of needs is met pragmatically and thoroughly” (Hines, 2008, p. 282). Leading others through these processes requires the school administrator to pay attention to the logistics and synergies of diverse people and perspectives pursuing a common goal through innovative ideas.

Fullan (2003) observed that having many leaders is crucial to accomplishing “deeper continuous improvement” (p. 1) and achieving an overall reduction of the impact that administrative burdens place on schools. While collaboration amongst the administrators and the faculty helps bring innovative thinking, there is a need to have empowered leaders placed throughout the school. In order to create an environment of collaboration, McCarley, Peters, and

Decman (2016) stated that through “the utilization of transformational leadership, systematic change, and empowerment of teachers can be facilitated” (p. 325). Empowering teachers helps to increase capacity within the school itself and throughout the school’s culture and climate. McCarley, et al. (2016) continues to describe that the school administrator needs to “facilitate collaborative work while empowering” (p. 326) school staff and teachers. This helps to “build capacity for change, embrace teachers as leaders, encourage professional development, and provide opportunities for collaborative growth among the staff” (p. 328) through multiple layers of leaders. While establishing multiple layers of leaders within the culture of the school is a good start, “equally important is to change the conditions under which school leaders work” (Fullan, 2003, p. 2).

This is accomplished in using a leadership framework that clearly and methodically provides procedures and protocols that streamline the administrative burdens placed on schools from every level of the educational system. A leadership framework, as noted by Herman and Herman (1992) “fundamentally changes functions in the larger context of empowerment and improvement” (p. 262) and can help propel these changes throughout the school. The need for a leadership framework is also highlighted by Herman and Herman’s (1992) in their definition of school-based management, “a structure and process which allows greater decision-making power related to the areas of budget, policies, and all matters of governance with a process which involves a variety of stakeholders in the decisions related to the school” (p. 262). Using a comprehensive needs assessment to determine if a leadership framework is needed or needs to change, schools can start the process by “collecting and analyzing data better support valid and useful decision-making” (Watkins, 2014, p. 61). Nevertheless, the use of these procedures and protocols is only as good as the way in which they are implemented in the school environment.

Following a process to ensure a quality implementation, Meyers, et al. (2012) defined six steps that schools should use:

1. Develop an implementation team;
2. Foster supportive organizational/communitywide climate and conditions;
3. Develop an implementation plan;
4. Receive training and technical assistance;
5. Practitioner-developer collaboration in implementation; and
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation (p. 485).

Each of these steps are further broken down by Meyers, et al. (2012) into actionable tasks that help outline the specific activities that lead to the accomplishment of each step. As noted by Meyers, et al. (2012), “achievement of desired outcomes is contingent on quality implementation” (p. 493) and the lack of a quality implementation can cause the effort to fail. By using these steps to ensure a quality implementation, schools can safeguard themselves from failure and be successful in deploying a leadership framework’s procedures and protocols that help them reduce the administrative burdens placed on them.

While the use of the six quality implementation steps can help a school achieve a successful implementation of the building of a system of supports from a leadership framework, just using them does not guarantee success. Identified by Johnson, et al. (2012), by “increasing the availability and coordination for children, systems building is a central process for ensuring availability and sustainability of an effective system through the continuous improvement of cross-system relationships and a focus on a common outcome that benefits children” (p. 86). Ultimately, administrative staff and faculty must show the willingness and ability to accept and benefit from changes that are being implemented.

As one examines the overriding need for change, human nature counters that need by providing a desire to resist change and keep things consistent and familiar. Regardless of whether or not a change is needed, it must be deployed within the organization's culture and climate, which affects the staff. Johnson, et al. (2012) stated that "creating the conditions to pursue a systems approach requires a paradigm shift—moving from competition for resources to developing relationships that allow for planning, coordination, and integration" (p. 94) requires patience, strength, and perseverance. Staff members typically are accustomed to the ways in which things are done, helping them through a change path requires leadership that anticipates the questions that staff may ask. Being prepared with answers to staff's questions, results in people overcoming resistance to change and ensuring school success.

School administrators that are honest with themselves and truly strive toward continuous improvement, attempt to identify problems and determine how they can resolve them on a frequent basis. Through a process of discovery or self-reflection, a school can evaluate the processes that surround where the problem arises and define the root cause of the issue. As identified by the Project Management Institute (2008), "root cause analysis is specific technique to identify a problem, discover the underlying causes that lead to it, and develop preventative action" (p. 287). When the root cause is discovered, the problem, not the symptoms of the problem, can be resolved. As one endeavors toward reducing the administrative burdens schools are facing, implementing procedural changes allow a way for a school to rally together and engage in the continuous improvement initiative and work together to achieve their goals.

Change resistance to the organizational acceptance of procedures and protocols that reduce the administrative burdens schools face can be a substantial problem. This significant change in the way school staff performs their job functions requires the use of organizational

change management techniques to help facilitate their acceptance of these new norms. In Melville, Bartley and Weinburgh's (2012) article *Change Forces: Implementing Change in a Secondary School for the Common Good*, they propose "six change forces" (p. 2) to use to help foster change acceptance within a school:

1. Bureaucratic forces rely on rules, mandates and requirements to provide direct supervision, standardized work processes and or standardized outcomes to prescribe change;
2. Personal forces rely on personality, leadership style and interpersonal skills of change agents to motivate change;
3. Market forces rely on competition, incentives and individual choice to motivate change;
4. Professional forces rely on standards of expertise, codes of conduct, collegiality, felt obligations and other professional norms to build professional community;
5. Cultural forces rely on shared values, goals and ideas about pedagogy, relationships and politics to build covenantal community; and
6. Democratic forces rely on democratic social contracts and shared commitments to the common good to build democratic community (p. 2).

The use of these various change forces allows a school administrator to effect change on the various types of people that make up the school community. Yet, in the end, organizational change management must be built on a strategy that includes the required activities for schools that are changing to obtain the C's of change. McVerry, Zawilinski, and O'Byrne (2009) identified the "21st century Cs of change as: creativity; communication; collaboration; critical thinking; and comprehension" (p. 1). By engaging staff to obtain the C's of change, Argyris

(1998) noted that “the underlying pattern of change is consistent with what change researchers and practitioners have learned about effective implementation over the years, start with a clear framework and progressively make it operational” (p. 6). As staff become comfortable with the change concepts communicated to them, comprehension of the benefits that change can bring to them is attained. Argyris (1998) stated that “with management speaking with one voice, no one will have any doubts about how to align the parts of the process” (p. 6). Information must be provided to staff on a frequent basis, highlighting the value that change brings, and how the change helps each person and the school as a whole by reducing the administrative burdens the school faces. DeWitt (2016) noted “that leaders should want to be in collaboration as much as possible because it helps increase self-efficacy of staff and students, builds collective efficacy among staff, which increase growth and maximizes learning” (p. 2).

In order to best understand organizational change management, there are a series of predictable phases that people experience while going through change. The path through change is rarely smooth. People must acknowledge that a change is needed and engage in trying to make the change belong to themselves. Almost all people in change and transition follow the same path along the change curve, which is made up of the following four phases: denial; resistance; exploration; and commitment. Figure 3 is my graphical depiction of movement along the change curve as people transition through the four phases of change:

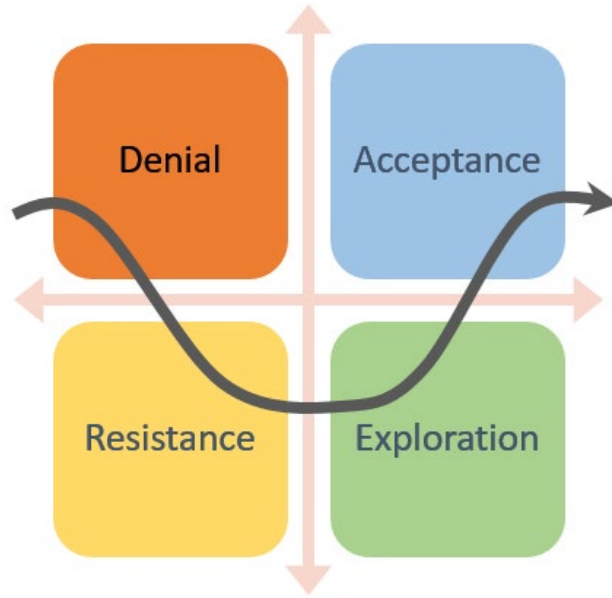


Figure 3. Change curve transition through the four phases of change. This figure displays the path of progression an individual takes along the four phases of change.

Proceeding through the phases of change, people start by struggling through a series of emotions. As noted by Austin (1996), “most go through periods of shock and feelings of incompetence and transitions in predictable and progressive” phases (p. 1). Starting with denial as the initial reaction to change. Denial starts as a kneejerk reaction to something new that has the possibility of impacting them personally when a change is planned or is being implemented. Staff can adversely react by not working while experiencing denial. Soon enough, the change is so obvious that a personal response is required. People in denial say, it will not happen rather than I do not like that it is happening. Typically, this phase does not last too long since it is hard to deny something that has started and may be impacting their personal work activities. Though, in a school that may have started and stopped improvement efforts in the past, sometimes with little or no communication on the reasons why efforts have started or stopped, people may take refuge in the denial phase longer, justifying the characteristics of this phase by pointing to past events.

As people resist change, things go from bad to worse. People internalized what is occurring and look to assign blame, or to grumble and complain to others about the changes. Austin (1996) suggested that as leaders, “managers are supposed to stay cool, point the way, and pace everybody through the overwhelming catalog of changes” (p. 1). Nonetheless, people’s reactions to these changes may make them doubt their ability to survive or last through the changes. People are mourning the past and trying to find reasons why this is happening to them, more than taking time to adjust the way in which they work. There are many people that will just disavow that the change is happening or try to reason that the changes will not affect how they do their work. In organizational-related change, resistant people tend to cause bottlenecks to hamper the forward movement of the effort as they struggle to hold onto the past. There will be missed and/or canceled meetings, prolonged discussions that prevent or slow down decision making, and conflict and friction between different groups of people. Resistant people will resort to saying that they cannot do something, much more often than saying that they can do something. This phase of organizational change is the costliest in terms of time, effort, and personal/group distress.

After a period of struggling, people embrace the changes and focus their attention to adaptation of their work activities in a phase called exploration. Austin (1996) highlighted that when encountering change within an environment, “people everywhere are scrambling to adjust, and that takes time” (p. 2). People start experimenting with the possibilities that the changes provide, not always getting it right the first time they try. If people remain in the exploration phase for too long a time, they may become frustrated by the often-chaotic nature of exploration and revert back to resistance with a justification that they tried to make it work but could not do so. Conversely, if they move too quickly through this phase, their impatience for progress may

cause them to compromise or settle for less than what can truly be achieved. People should resist moving through the exploration phase too quickly and try to fully understand the depth of possibility that change can bring and focus on the improved efficiencies and effectiveness that can be attained.

As they reach the final phase along the change curve, people have adapted to the new procedures and protocols, and begin to realize the benefits from the positive impacts that change has had on their work. This phase is called commitment. People move into commitment as a result of a successful exploration phase. The commitment phase begins by the person focusing on a new course of action and steps to complete their work activities. Committed people no longer spend time and energy focused on what cannot be done—they focus on what can be done and then set off to get it done. “Change is about real people with real work to do and real problems to fix” (Austin, 1996, p. 2). Real people with real problems like a school’s administrative staff that face the daunting task of completing the increased administrative burdens placed on them.

Process improvement and business process management. In facing the multitude of administrative activities that are assigned to schools, school administrators do the best that they can to complete these tasks. They follow processes and procedures that have been established, sometimes formally created and other times created in an ad hoc manner and are given to a staff member that has some time in their schedule to complete the task. In an effort to streamline these types of administrative activities, a consulting firm in Minnesota as reported by PR Newswire Association (2003), developed an information technology solution to reduce the amount of work facing school administrators. Leveraging technology to reduce the amount of time and effort to pull administrative reporting data, the Minnesota school is able to capitalize on

the time and money savings and refocus their workforce to concentrate on teaching the students instead of completing administrative tasks. These increased efficiencies benefit the school by allowing these resources to focus on other support efforts.

While the main focus of a school is based on providing instruction to students, federal and state regulations cause schools to distract their attention away from this and focus it on completing paperwork and performing data analysis. Sunderman and Kim (2004), as part of The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, investigated whether the No Child Left Behind Act actually assisted schools in providing instruction to students or if the bureaucratic red tape in the form of administrative tasks prevented them from it. Within their investigation, they found that an increased influx of administrative burdens was placed on those districts that employed supplemental instructional services to the detriment of students. As a result of the increased number of administrative burdens, coordination and collaboration between the school curriculum and the supplemental instructional programs was found lacking and there was no culpability for those that did not implement these programs well. Sunderman and Kim (2004) concluded that the basis in which the use of supplemental services is employed can actually provide benefits to disadvantaged students in the form of supplemental services. Yet, the way “they are provided is as important as their availability” (p. 5). Implementation with integrity, consistency and reliability is critical to the success of schools attaining their mission—to instruct and teach students.

In Ogden and Fixsen’s 2014 article “Implementation Science: A Brief Overview and a Look Ahead”, the authors identify the main point of an implementation effort is in identifying the “what, how, and who” (p. 4) of the implementation effort. Identifying these three critical components help drive the implementation effort and provide an outline of what is to be done,

how it is envisioned to be implemented, and who is responsible for completing the implementation effort. When schools are faced with time constraints and other activities that take precedence, the implementation effort may proceed slowly and take more time to complete than originally anticipated (p. 10). To be successful, schools must be able to engage in implementation efforts that have clear purpose and can produce valuable results. As identified by Shannon and Bylsma (2007), there are overarching characteristics that high-performing schools follow. Some of them include: “clear and shared focus; effective school leadership; and high levels of collaboration and communication” (p. 24). Each characteristic contributes to the successful implementation of an effort and the attaining the benefits that the effort brings.

Once these three facets of implementation are identified, the challenge that most school administrators face is the actual execution of the work. By examining high-performing education systems in Asia, Harris, Jones, Adams, Perera, and Sharma (2014) discovered that those schools in Asia are not the only ones that have great notions or educational strategies in the world. Yet, what sets them apart is that they do have a carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable implementation procedures in which they follow. These high performing educational systems deploy with a premise that “good ideas are of little use without the capacity and mechanics to deliver them” (p. 863) that brings success to the effort. As schools continue to work with incomplete or unclear implementation methodologies or strategies, they continue to get frustrated when expected results are not realized. It is through process improvement efforts that an evaluation of their current procedures can be refined, and the implementation methodology can be improved upon to ensure the anticipated results of the effort are the results they get. Implementation activities must be deployed following a consistent method that allows any staff member to join in and contribute to completing the activity. As demonstrated in high

performing educational systems in Asia, Harris, et al. (2014) identified that the schools use an “implementation science that informs, guides, and drives improvement” (p. 868) as they strive to achieve these advances.

Empowered by changes within the educational system, schools are being given more responsibilities in managing themselves. Over time, processes and procedures that were created to complete administrative activities as quickly as possible have evolved. With schools having limited experience in process improvement, school-based management as discovered by Herman and Herman (1992) is largely undefined. Herman and Herman (1992) highlight some consistent characteristics that are demonstrated by schools as they embark in implementing various school management structures. Management structures like distributed decision-making; refined reporting requirements from the federal, state, intermediate school district, and school district perspectives to reflect data points that are captured by the school; and inclusion of the various participant perspectives in the formation or reformation of processes and procedures. To capitalize on the formation or reformation of processes and procedures, roles and responsibilities must be mapped out for each position within the school. These clearly defined positions must be aligned with the various administrative activities as a way to improve efficiencies at the school and allow the overall focus of the school’s staff to concentrate on teaching students.

School administrators must implement a continuous improvement framework to allow for these changes to occur. At one time or another, a school may have developed processes and procedures that they have used to complete their administrative activities. While these processes and procedures may have served them well in the past, the increased number of tasks schools are assigned may have overburdened those procedures to a point where schools are scrambling to complete the administrative activities. Continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to enhance

a service or a process. As noted by Weller and Weller (1997), “continuous improvement calls for a framework that allows those closest to a situation or problem to work to improve it, since they know it best and they have ownership to implement the changes” (p. 63). Fox (2014) identified four questions that helps focus schools on having dialogue around continuous improvement:

1. Based on the evidence, what will I continue to do?
2. Based on the evidence, what will I continue to do, but do more consistently and/or more effectively?
3. Based on the evidence, what will I begin to do (that I have not done before)?
4. Based on the evidence, what will I stop doing? (pp. 9–10)

Each of these questions help form the evaluation assessment that leads to continuous improvement. They allow the conversation to grow organically and to help bring out organizational changes that can lead to improved processes and procedures that allow schools to reduce the administrative burden.

The use of a self-assessment to identify areas of improvement, helps to focus corrective action efforts on the procedures and protocols that require attention. An example of a self-assessment is the AdvancED (2012) “self-assessment which is designed to serve as a valuable tool that assists schools in reflecting upon their effectiveness” (p. 2). Examining the results of a self-assessment, a school’s culture and assessing the capabilities of the school’s ability to learn, helps to identify areas of improvement to make them efficient and effective. A school must focus on “three broad factors that are essential for organizational learning and adaptability: a supportive learning environment; concrete learning processes and practices; and leadership behavior that provides reinforcement” (Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008, p. 109). As a

school's culture is evaluated and the assessment for these broad factors are judged, areas for improvement can be identified and focused on to help a school become or improve themselves as a learning organization.

In order to determine what parts of the school are functioning properly and which ones are not, a full examination of all the efforts of the school needs to be assessed. Schools can start the process by using a comprehensive needs assessment to determine if a leadership framework is needed or needs to change. Noe (2013) identified three elements of a needs assessment: “organizational analysis, person analysis, and task analysis” (p. 121). Each of these components must be examined closely to get the full and accurate picture of the school's effectiveness and to identify developmental needs.

From an organizational perspective, the needs assessment technique of observation can be used. Observing the approach in which the school administrators engages staff members, speaks volumes on the effectiveness of this technique. As this interaction unfolds, observation of how the message is being received will also provide insights into how well the continuous improvement effort will or will not be successful. The observation needs assessment technique uncovers activities that are doing well and those activities that need adjustment. Implemented in a covert way to those being observed, this technique makes sure that behaviors are not affected by the people being observed (p. 118). From a person analysis element, the needs assessment technique of interviews can be used and from a task analysis perspective, the needs assessment of focus groups and documentation can be used. Specific and pointed questions can be asked of focus groups to further refine the findings of the discovery sessions. This, along with the culmination of documentation being produced as a result of the use of all of these self-assessment tools, an examination of the information captured in the various documents can occur

to identify the key areas of required improvement. By leveraging the various needs assessment tools and techniques, a complete, thorough, and accurate picture of the school can be attained.

Ultimately as each school performs their self-assessment, each of Senge's (1990) five disciplines of a learning organization needs to be evaluated and improved upon. The self-assessment helps to pinpoint the way in which a school performs its work and what areas may need to be improved. Working through collaborative information sharing, development of a shared vision can be created or reaffirmed. The use of stakeholder engagement provides some significant benefits to schools as they complete the self-assessment. The Center for the Study of Social Policy (2013) identified the "benefits of stakeholder engagement to include: 1) improved communication between schools and others; 2) access to critical information on the experiences of the community and families; and 3) the ability to consider the implications of policy initiatives" (p. 1). By participating in these efforts, the school is fulfilling the first discipline of a learning organization, shared vision. It is through work session involvement and in-depth communications to the staff that each member of the organization has the opportunity to contribute to the content and understand how this vision impacts them, personally.

The next discipline of a learning organization is personal mastery. As individual staff members of the school focus on their contributions to the overall strategic vision, personal mastery is one of the "three drives of needs/motives at work: autonomy (people want to have control over their work); mastery (people want to get better at what they do; purpose (people want to be part of something bigger than themselves)" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 120). Within the school, each person is responsible for functions that they must perform and perform well. Personal mastery is a driving force that internally motivates each person as they perform their

job function. School staff makes concerted efforts to consistently focus on building capacity to complete their jobs as best they can.

Continuing through the five disciplines, the next one to examine is mental models. Throughout the school, the mental model they attempt to embrace is that of efficiency. While proceeding through this transition is a challenging one, the communication channels used by school staff can help provide the details that lead the school through this transformation.

The next discipline is group learning. It is through professional development that school staff can receive training on new technologies, techniques, and procedures. Training that occurs on a frequent basis provides the learning necessary to help achieve the completion of tasks and activities. The fifth and final discipline is systems thinking. To support the vision, the school's staff must change their focus on the way in which work is done. This is accomplished by taking a step back and evaluating their processes and procedures holistically to solve the problems of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. As identified by Betts (1992), the value derived from systems thinking in education, allows a school to embrace the concept of a learning community with the ability to adjust as the situation unfolds increasing capacity for self-directed and autonomous decision making (p. 40).

Based on the review of the research literature, there is a need for schools to be able to do less in the form of more focused work, with less resources by leveraging an effective and efficient workforce, to complete all the administrative burdens placed on them. While accomplishing this goal seems monumental, following a carefully crafted and repeatable set of predefined procedures and protocols can allow schools to streamline the completion of these activities in a timely manner, freeing schools from administrative burdens. The efficiency gained by streamlining the completion of these administrative activities allows schools to

increase their capacity to support teachers and students which then results in improved student outcomes and subject matter proficiency.

Review of Methodological Issues

Many research methodologies and corresponding research methods are encountered when examining the published literature that has studied how increased administrative demands of today's educational leaders should be handled. As with any research effort, there are challenges and issues that the researcher encounters as they attempt to answer their research questions. This research topic is no different than any other topic being explored in that methodological issues are present and have helped form the specific methodological choices described in this study's Chapter 3.

Throughout the literature review, each literature source was evaluated and critiqued. The majority of discovered literature utilized an analytical or conceptual research methodology while focusing on research methods of document analysis and case study examination. Case studies, like Roberts' (2014) study on the nature of the principal's leadership in elementary schools and Leithwood and Poplin's (1992) article, "The Move Toward Transformational Leadership," also included the integration of the research subject's life history and experiences whenever possible. Yet, there were limited personal, focused or group interviews conducted. These types of interviews can potentially inform the research more since interview questions can be probing and deep reaching into the experiences of the interviewees. The structure of the interview can also be made to be more informal to allow for any unforeseen issues drawn out of the interview to be discussed and more closely examined with follow up questions.

Methodological issues and trade-offs. With nearly 60% of the discovered literature focused on analytical or conceptual research methodologies, some significant issues and study

limitations come to light. Analytical research requires the researcher to use findings and data that has already been uncovered and apply their own criteria to interpret them. Conclusions can be biased based on the ways in which analytical research data and findings are presented by prior researchers. Misinterpretation of research results can influence an analytical study causing an interpretation that may provide false conclusions. Additionally, a researcher's personal bias may influence the results of the new research study when striving to arrive at a conclusion that the researcher would like the data to represent. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2011) noted that bias is a "distortion of research data that renders the data suspect or invalid and may occur due to the researcher, the respondent, or the research design itself" (p. 595). Whenever possible, a researcher must find ways to mitigate against their bias or at least acknowledge their bias.

Conceptual research studies have similar challenges as analytical ones. Conceptual research is based on a theory or a collection of ideas that is examined against research findings or data to be proven true or false. Through this type of research, new concepts or ideas can be scrutinized or previously accepted conclusions can be reinterpreted. McCall and Groak (2005) noted that "it is sometimes difficult to prevent tailoring to fit participant characteristics and circumstances" (p. 6), which is especially true when the research is following a fluid conceptual premise that can be adjusted as findings become evident in the research study.

Within the research performed for this study, I used a program evaluation design to assess how schools are currently dealing with the administrative activities that they have to contend with completing. I also developed a qualitative program evaluation descriptive element that described how schools can streamline educational administration that allows for improved practices to be implemented, reducing the effects of administrative burdens on schools.

Dissimilar to other research studies, like quantitative research studies, I am not attempting to

prove causation, just present a theory that examines the various factors that could influence activities or change the conditions within the school when they are overburdened by administrative activities. As described in the Association for Educational Communications and Technology's (2001) "Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology", "descriptive research does not fit neatly into the definition of quantitative or qualitative research methodologies, but instead utilizes elements of both, often within the same study" (p. 1). By using the program evaluation research study methodology and focusing on the descriptive element, the challenges experienced within the analytical or conceptual research methodologies can be greatly minimized, if not eliminated altogether.

Discovered literature limitations. In examining the types of limitations found in discovered literature, there are multiple aspects of the research that must be considered. A key aspect of a research study is the sample size. If the sample size is too small, it may prove problematic to determine if a significant relationship exists in the data. There may also be a lack of available or reliable data which causes a limit of scope in the research study. Additionally, the way in which data is collected may cause limitations in available data that restricts the analysis and inhibit the findings. Ike's (2012) study on principals' perceptions of the skills needed for the administration of nontraditional schools identified several data limitations within the study. Data limitations included: "sampling was not a representative sampling of any or all nontraditional schools; data collected from the self-reporting interview resulted in generalization of the findings as subjective; and some concerns or unforeseen circumstances with questions, its administration or response analysis" (pp. 9–10). To overcome these data limitations, I utilize surveys targeted directly to schools that are impacted by the overwhelming administrative burdens most, if not all schools complain about. These surveys were completed by the school administrators and by

each of their staff members in an effort to provide the most realistic picture of the situation as possible.

Roberts' (2014) study on the nature of the principal's leadership in elementary schools identifies the researcher's own bias as a limitation to the research study. "Potential bias the researcher might have about leadership is one limitation of the research" (p. 23). This bias is based on the researcher's own experience in implementing effective instructional and intervention practices by knowing what has worked well and what has not worked well.

McGuire (2014) recommends that the researcher makes every attempt to minimize bias in their research studies in one of two ways, either "simply to declare bias and move" or "to strive for objectivity" (p. 1). While there may be personal bias included in research studies, the researcher must make every effort to cleanse these biases or at least identify them within the assumptions of the study. Within the construct of this research study, personal bias was minimized as much as possible or at least identified wherever it was found.

In exploring the implementation of Baldrige's system reform in New Mexico, Schumpelt (2011) studied elementary schools that have implemented these reforms consistently for three years, received training over the course of the three years, and retained the same principals for three years. Within these parameters there were several limitations that could have impacted the research study. The study focused its research on "principals receiving training using a state training model" (p. 14) that may have limited their exposure to the options available to them in the system reform. This particular study "called for the interview of twelve elementary school principals, but the study failed to receive an adequate number of positive responses" (p. 14). Additionally, principals that did not use the Baldrige system reform for three years were not considered in this study, "perhaps there were other principals who were

faced with insurmountable barriers that led to failure of the reform at their schools” (p. 14). As this study was limited in the collection of data available to the researcher, the findings of the study are challenged to find a significant relationship from the data.

Additionally, Willer’s (2011) study on identifying leadership traits in new principals also emphasized noteworthy limitations based on the criteria of the study. Limitations that were called out included “a finite number of responses from new principals; surveys and interviews focused only on school vision and culture, rather than the full range of leadership behaviors; and was delimited to only participating principals in a university’s new principal program” (p. 18). With such limitations, the amount of available data and feedback from interviews does not provide insights that can be extrapolated to larger groups of new principals. Willer (2011) noted that “this study was further delimited to a small sample of convenience of fourteen” (p. 18). Willer (2011) continues to define parameters in which the admission that the study “does not necessarily indicate a representative sample of all new principals in their first three years” (p. 19). Therefore, within this research study, the proper sample size of survey participants was issued and tracked for completion. In order to strike the proper balance of survey results and to ensure responses are received in a timely manner, surveys were issued through the Education Policy Fellowship Program cohort of which I am an alumnus.

Within the study investigating professional learning communities, Thigpen (2011) highlights the limits in the sample size as being restricted to a few principals. This case study was limited to “interviews and analysis with selected principals in a particular district” (p. 29), one in which the researcher was employed. While stating that the researcher did not have “supervisory authority over these individuals, personal insights, and reflections” (p. 30) were

contributed. This causes two limitations to be discovered within the research study: limited data and personal bias.

Throughout the review of each discovered literature, lessons are learned, and opportunities for improvement are discovered. Proper sample sizes, elimination or at least constrained bias, transparency, open lines of communication, and a clear, agreed upon methodology toward this qualitative research study is needed to be defined prior to the issuance of surveys. An agreed upon methodology formulated and constructed with guidance from my dissertation committee is presented within Chapter 3. This methodology explains, in detail, how the research study was conducted. Included in the explanation is the choice of the design and a series of step-by-step procedures that was followed to collect the data. Once the data was collected, it was analyzed in order to obtain answers in response to the research study questions.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Along the spectrum of research contained within the discovered literature, a central and singular emphasis becomes overwhelmingly apparent. Schools need to be able to do less, by having more focused work, with less resources, a highly efficient and effective workforce, to complete all of the administrative burdens placed upon them. With the increased importance being placed on these administrative activities and the short durations of time to get them submitted, school administrators have turned to taking teachers out of the classroom to get the tasks completed. MacDonald (2011) identified this issue and postulated that “the increase in administrative workload appears to have happened gradually, but it is now at the point where the teachers are resentful and may be at the breaking point” (p. 2).

Further analysis of the discovered literature helps to reveal four main concepts that supports a school’s need to do less through more focused work with less resources by having an

efficient and effective workforce. Schools are overburdened by administrative activities that are placed on them by each level of the educational system. Key staff are overworked and are unable to focus on their primary responsibilities, for example: teachers teaching students instead of completing administrative activities. School administrators do the best they can to complete the assigned tasks but are forced to engage nonadministrative staff to get these activities completed when they are due. Successful schools utilize a carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable set of implementation procedures to accomplish the burdensome administrative activities and focus their resources on their required roles and responsibilities.

Schools are overburdened by administrative activities. In addition to the rigors of educational instruction, schools have been placed in the forefront of educational assessment and evaluation. Schools are required to collect and report data reflecting student progress and how federal or state funds are being utilized. Lusia (2012) stated that “paperwork and other administrative burdens are a top concern of school teachers and administrators nationwide” (p. 1). Multiple entities require schools to provide assessments, evaluations, and data reports. Whether these tasks are federally, or state mandated, school administrators are delegated the responsibility to complete various administrative tasks that ranges in difficulty. Schools must complete a myriad of forms and data reports to satisfy the reporting needs of each oversight layer of the educational system.

As the number of requests for data and reports continue to overwhelm the administrative staff, teachers are being designated to assist with the completion of these tasks. This is due to schools being given more responsibilities in managing themselves as they take on the burdensome administrative activities that they have been assigned. Increased administrative flexibility was originally envisioned to provide schools with a way to complete the assigned

tasks without adversely affecting the functions of the school, but a reduction or elimination of these burdensome tasks would be the best solution. As noted by Lusic (2012), “the Government Accountability Office, a nonpartisan agency that works for Congress to investigate how the federal government spends taxpayer dollars, recommended that the Department of Education identify burdensome requirements and eliminate the burden” (p. 1). This allows teachers to remain in the classrooms, teaching students.

Key staff are overworked. With the increased amount of administrative workload being required to be completed for these educational entities, key staff are overworked and unable to keep up with the demands. As discussed in Harvard University’s “The Civil Rights Project”, Sunderman and Kim (2004) discovered that “districts provided considerable administrative and managerial oversight of administrative burdens, yet no additional resources to meet these responsibilities” (p. 4) existed. Administrative burdens overwhelm administrative staff, resulting in tasks being spread across all available resources, which unfortunately includes teachers in the classroom.

While the delegation of administrative tasks to nonadministrative staff can help complete the tasks in the time in which they are required to be submitted, it is not necessarily the best use of their time. Nonadministrative staff, including teachers, help with the completion of administrative activities, but their time can be better devoted to their assigned roles. As noted in DePaepe’s (2016) “Central Washington University Teacher Time Study”, randomly selected teachers were surveyed and reported that “teachers felt their roles were moving away from teaching as the primary focus of their work” (p. 7). As the need to complete administrative activities steals time away from the classroom, teachers are challenged by “filling out paperwork while district, state, and federal requirements come and go” (p. 7). Without comprehensive and

clearly defined procedures to complete the administrative burdens placed on schools, school staff become frustrated and upset that they cannot concentrate on the roles that they should be focusing their attention on performing.

School administrators do the best they can. While there are administrative activities assigned by each layer of the educational system, school administrators do the best they can to complete them. School support staff become overwhelmed and assignments are delegated to the teachers in the classroom in order to meet deadlines imposed by these educational system layers. In order to accomplish the administrative burdens placed on schools, schools have been transforming and becoming more self-sufficient and empowered. Herman and Herman (1992) described this empowerment of a school as “school-based management resulting in an increase in local accountability, with fundamental changes in management functions and school culture” (p. 262) occurring.

As school administrators take on the additional responsibilities of school-based management, they become more accountable in completing the tasks assigned to the school. Yet, in order to be successful, the school administrator must fully realize and understand the workload of their staff and at which stage of the process each activity is progressing, until the task is completed and ready for submission. In MacDonald’s (2011) workload study the results indicated that teachers “are spending more time doing administrative and other tasks and less time interacting with students while also suggesting teachers are near the breaking point with frustration at the extra duties that limit their teaching time” (p. 1). Collaboration between administrative and nonadministrative staff is required to complete these tasks when the administrative staff become overwhelmed, otherwise administrative activities will not be submitted on time, thus potentially impacting the amount of funding the school receives.

Management of this collaboration is a critical aspect that the school administrator must embrace. Ike (2012) noted that school administrators and the way in which they “interact with others have a profound effect on the level of performance” (p. 13) of their staff. Using proper leadership techniques and tools, school administrators must be able to oversee and assign work to those best equipped to get the job done. Schools must focus on the evidence of their actions to determine what they should or should not continue to do. This evaluation helps to inform staff on their merits of their efforts. Gann (2003) stated that “all staff are entitled to know that their work is valued and that they can get support to help them improve continuously” (p. 3) and in order to properly evaluate each staff member’s contribution, the use of standardized procedures and protocols establishes a level playing field for all.

Successful schools utilize carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable procedures.

In order for a school to engage teachers and students in learning, they must not be undermined in those efforts by the absence of the teacher being pulled away from classroom instruction to complete administrative activities. To accomplish this and to ensure that teachers are in the classrooms teaching, successful schools institute a series of carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable set of implementation processes and procedures. High performing schools in Asia use procedures that inform, guide, and drive improvement. Identified by Harris, et al. (2014), “of the 65 countries and provinces participating in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2012, the top performers were Shanghai-China, Singapore, Hong Kong-China, Chinese Taipei, and Korea as the top five” (p. 861). As discovered by Harris, et al. (2014), “a productive place to start is by looking at the actual mechanics of processes that actually make a difference” (p. 863) in completing administrative tasks and activities. While the creation of these procedures does not typically evolve overnight, collaboration between administrative and

nonadministrative staff helps bring innovative thinking to resolve this problem. This allows efficient and effective schools to use a procedural framework to streamline the completion of administrative burdens and free up teachers to remain in the classroom, teaching. Once these processes are developed, they should always be examined for ways to improve upon them.

Process improvement efforts help refine and improve the current processes. As noted by Zellner (2011), “process improvement becomes an everyday task and a part of a processes lifecycle” (p. 204). School administrators, saddled with the assigned administrative burdens, must find ways to improve staff efficiency so these activities can be completed without impacting the students in the classroom. Initial procedural frameworks may improve efficiency of administrative staff, but possibly not to the degree of allowing nonadministrative staff to be freed up from helping. Schools must implement a continuous improvement framework and constantly look for innovative ways to increase efficiency. Studer (2014) identifies process improvement’s “prime ingredient: building a culture of high performance” (p. 96). Integrated into the culture and climate, a school can take on process improvement by leveraging “collaboration and empowerment through training and development to feed employees’ natural enthusiasm and to continue to reach higher” (p. 96).

Critique of Previous Research

As revealed within the discovered literature, there are four main concepts that support a school’s need to do less through more focused work, with less resources by having an efficient and effective workforce. Each concept has strengths and weaknesses that are identified within the literature and contributes to their scientific merit, logical coherence, and accuracy in explaining, describing, or modeling their research claims. In analyzing and critiquing the research contained within the discovered literature, my hope is to take the findings from these

studies into account when presenting my own research on streamlining educational administration: a process improvement methodology to free schools from administrative burdens.

Schools are overburdened by administrative activities. The increasing demands of requested data and reporting requirements by districts, state, and federal education agencies has overwhelmed schools. Discovered literature supports and reinforces this impression as noted by Jennings and Diane (2006), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as updated by the “No Child Left Behind Act, have caused administrative burdens with little evidence that they have raised student achievement” (p. 3). Yet, as this problem of increasing administrative burdens is identified as one of the ten effects of No Child Left Behind, there are no insights on how to address or resolve this problem. Additionally, the research is limited to the federal level of the educational system. To fully examine the level of effort needed, administrative burdens placed on K–12 schools on all levels of the educational system should be included. With the recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the introduction of Every Student Succeeds Act, there are refinements in legislative language that possess the opportunity to reduce the amount of administrative burdens placed on schools from a federal education department perspective. While this possibility exists, each state department of education is responsible for analyzing and assessing the requirements defined within the Act to determine if a reduction exists or not. Based on my professional experience working for the Michigan Department of Education, this assessment will take some time to complete and, in the meantime, no reduction in administrative activities has occurred thus far and schools continue to be overburdened.

Key staff are overworked. Throughout the discovered literature, another key theme that resonated with the literature research findings is that key staff are overworked. With an increased number of administrative activities being levied on schools, school administrators have no choice but to delegate these tasks to nonadministrative staff, including teachers. Discovered by Sheppard (2008), “teachers experience increased levels of accountability, role conflict, unrealistic expectations, and burdensome administrative tasks” (p. 18). Burdensome administrative tasks are only one aspect of increased workload for teachers identified, nowhere does Sheppard (2008) provide any way to resolve this issue. Within the research, the information gathered only focused on teachers and did not include principals or superintendents in the results, which could have provided a broader perspective in the study’s findings.

With each task being delegated as administratively coherent as possible, the school administrator attempts to manage the workload by assigning tasks to those nonadministrative staff that may have some experience with the activity. Yet, this is not always the case. The nonadministrative staff, namely teachers, may not have any experience with what is being asked of them to do. It may be a new task or activity that they have never performed before, but when faced with the alternative of the activity remaining incomplete, the school administrator may not have another choice. This newly assigned role and responsibility places additional pressure on teachers to complete the goal of the assignment. Sheppard (2008) identified that when teachers are given “new roles and responsibilities, these goals compound what is already a complex professional challenge” (p. 51). Lack of formalized processes and procedures lead to inconsistent work products and lack of coherence when someone else is asked to complete the activity when it is needed again.

School administrators do the best they can. While attempting to maintain the various activities that occur within a school, school administrators face difficult challenges every day. They understand the importance of teachers being in front of students and providing instruction and interventions as needed. Yet, they are forced to make some hard decisions when the amount of administrative activities place undue burden on their administrative staff members. Within this decision-making process, there are some instances, as noted by Roberts (2014), in which a school administrator “tries to carry the burden alone” (p. 49) instead of using nonadministrative staff members. This valiant management effort is relied upon more often as a reason why administrative activities are not completed on time, usually while the school administrator is requesting additional time to complete the task. The focus on Roberts (2014) research is limited to two schools that implemented an instructional intervention and concentrated research questions around the intervention instead of looking at all aspects of administrative activities. As this research further evolved, Roberts (2014) identified “two conditions for successful distribution of leadership” (p. 50) but only eludes to the need for coordinated efforts to make this distribution successful. Roberts (2014) does not provide an approach to ensuring that the recipient of the activity is not overwhelmed by the administrative burdens delegated to them.

Successful schools utilize carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable procedures.

When provided an opportunity to improve their processes and procedures by leveraging process improvement techniques, most schools are lukewarm to the idea. Some schools are engaged in process improvement, as identified by PR Newswire Association (2003), “Minnesota schools will spend less time on administrative tasks and will apply those savings directly to their education programs” (p. 1). While others resist change and process improvement as noted by Rudenstine (2002), “administrative practice remains fundamentally resistant to attempts to re-

orient the work around improvements” (p. 5). This also corresponds with my professional experiences in implementing process improvements and the use of organizational change management techniques. Change resistance impedes the potential gains that a school could achieve, if only given a chance. Roberts (2014) identified “that teachers are resistant to change because many have an aversion to risk, they prefer a sense of order, security, and stability” (p. 42). Yet, when schools embrace change and adopt carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable procedures, improvements are sure to follow. Lieberman and Miller (1990) noted that school administrators and staff members “seem to move through stages as they relinquish traditional views of administrative leadership and embrace new visions” (p. 762) and standardized procedures. As they progress through these stages of change, Mlkva, Prajova, Yakimovich, Korshunov, and Tyurin (2016) identified the “benefits of standardized work are a baseline for improvement activities” (p. 332). Yet, none of this research provides a leadership framework that could be used to properly, purposefully and equitably standardize the work efforts and improve performance for the staff members involved in completing administrative activities. This research only examined limited aspects of implemented procedures as a basis of their findings and did not include a deeper examination around how a comprehensive set of procedures could lead to improved outcomes as identified by Harris, et al. (2014) and demonstrated in high performing schools in Asia.

Discovered literature review conclusions. When examining what makes a school successful, it does not take long to notice the use of performance management through the deployment of repeatable processes to complete tasks and activities. Gann (2003) described “performance management as the single most important element in continuous school improvement” (p. 1). School administrators must concentrate on activities that make the most

efficient use of their administrative resources thus allowing teachers to remain in the classrooms teaching.

To make efficient use of administrative staff resources, school administrators must focus their efforts on implementing a leadership framework, like Education FIRST, that clearly and methodically provides procedures and protocols that streamline the administrative burdens placed on schools from every level of the educational system. In order to do this, as described by Meyers, et al. (2012), “a team-based approach to implementation should involve matching team members’ unique talents and expertise with documented roles and responsibilities” (p. 486). Tying member’s skills to roles that match them allows each staff member to accomplish great things while improving efficiency and effectiveness of the team.

As the administrative staff comes together, each staff member embraces the predictability and consistency of the leadership framework by embracing the teamwork concepts that grow stronger as each activity is completed. Teamwork concepts that Korsaa, et al. (2011) described as “project focused; and commonplace among managers and is the norm among process performers” (p. 385). They focus on completing tasks and activities in efficient and effective ways while continuously looking for ways to improve upon the process. Described by Matthews and Marzec (2015), “improvement efforts may well be ongoing; however, they also need to be progressive, which may consist of not repeating errors and engaging in cumulative improvement” (p. 6). By consistently utilizing the leadership framework, like Education FIRST, schools can be freed from administrative burdens.

Chapter 2 Summary

Within Chapter 2, a significant amount of information surrounding the challenges of administrative burdens placed on schools was presented. These administrative burdens distract

educators from providing effective instructional practices which hinders the ability for students to learn. Discovered literature helped to convey the overwhelming need for schools to be able to do less, in the form of more focused work, with less resources, by leveraging an effective and efficient workforce, to complete all of the administrative burdens placed on them. As the research was further distilled, that premise evolved into four separate and distinct topics for consideration. They included: schools are overburdened by administrative activities; key staff are overworked; school administrators do their best they can to complete the assigned tasks; and successful schools utilize a carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable set of implementation procedures.

The identification of how a school can reduce the amount of time spent on administrative burdens was examined, compared, and contrasted. The results of the literature review have helped to inform the design of the research study, which is captured in the remaining chapters of this study. As the research study progresses, the results help to inform school administrators how they can refine and reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks and activities. It is through this important reduction in overall effort that school administrative staff can finish these tasks in a timely manner through efficient methods that allows teachers to remain in their classrooms instead of helping in the completion of administrative activities. By allowing staff to focus on their particular role within the school, more dedicated teaching time is made available for students to learn and the students can improve their subject level proficiency. As the results of the research study shows, the key to freeing schools from administrative burdens is Education FIRST.

Education FIRST. The Education FIRST leadership framework provides schools with a consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear

direction from start to finish. The actions contained within the Education FIRST leadership framework are focused on creating internal strategies to improve efficiency and effectiveness of staff members in completing the administrative burdens placed on schools. In order for educators to deliver instructional practices, they need to be supported by efficient administrative staff. Support that staff, when distracted by an overwhelming series of burdensome administrative activities, cannot provide. Through Education FIRST, schools can construct a logical, collaborative, problem-solving set of procedures, processes, and protocols that support teachers in their efforts to improve outcomes for students. Each component within the leadership framework works in harmony as the Education FIRST leader and followers work to complete the tasks and activities of the assignment. The Education FIRST leadership framework requires the dedication and commitment to the prescribed process, so that the framework can achieve the goals and objectives of the school by accomplishing great things and reducing the administrative burdens they face every day.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to the Methodology

Findings from the literature review highlighted the need for implementing structured administrative procedures to help alleviate the administrative burdens that force teachers out of their classrooms, negatively impacting the quality of instructional practices and student learning experiences. As the discovered literature was critiqued and analyzed, the results identified the need for a school to be able to do less through more focused work with less resources using a highly efficient and effective workforce to complete all the administrative burdens placed upon them. The research study that was conducted investigated how a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks, by using the Education FIRST leadership framework, may help improve student outcomes based on the ways in which administrators and their staff handle the administrative burdens placed on them.

In consideration of the different research methodologies and the various corresponding research designs for this study, there is one qualitative research design that provides the construct necessary to accomplish the research goals, program evaluation. Through the use of the program evaluation design, this study gathered information and provided an assessment on the usefulness of the Education FIRST leadership framework used to address administrative burdens within a school environment. Conducting a program evaluation determines how beneficial the framework is to a school, through the use of a “systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using information” (Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2010, p. 6) to assess the framework’s value to complete processes and duties associated with the burdensome activities placed on schools. It is through the program evaluation’s descriptive element under that design that this study describes how schools can streamline educational administration through a

process improvement methodology resulting in schools being relieved of administrative burdens. “Descriptive research refers to the type of research question and data analysis that will be applied to a given topic” (Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 2001, p. 1). Potential benefits from the use of Education FIRST can be identified within the descriptive element of the program evaluation design and presented to schools for their feedback and comments. In representing this topic, in this manner, a well-thought conceptualization and construct can be defined and presented in conjunction with captured data from the research consisting of surveys and interviews, to “organize it into patterns that emerge during analysis aiding in comprehension of the qualitative study and its implications” (Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 2001, p. 2).

Within this research study, identification of how school administrators can reduce the amount of time spent on administrative burdens is examined, compared, and contrasted. The results of what develops as the research study progresses may provide information that can be helpful in reducing time spent on administrative tasks by school administrators and their administrative staff members. School administrators need time to be instructional leaders, not operational managers that oversee the transactional aspects of data collection and reporting. As identified by Willer (2011) “sometimes finding the appropriate balance between the roles of instructional leader and completing necessary managerial tasks becomes impossible” for these administrators (p. 29). Too often, school administrators are consumed by the demands of the overwhelming administrative tasks and the political aspects that distract them from the true purpose of their role within the school—leading and ensuring student success. This important reduction in task time and effort may allow staff members to finish these tasks timely, efficiently, and accurately without the need to pull teachers out of the class room to help out.

Teachers therefore can remain in the classrooms teaching with an uninterrupted focus of improving student outcomes. By teachers being allowed to focus on the teaching and the learning process, student success should increase. “New tasks constantly bombard many teachers and distract them from being able to focus on teaching” (Reichardt, et al., 2008, p. 1). These tasks include an overabundance of activities that administrative staff cannot complete without some assistance, sometimes from teachers. School administrators need to implement procedures that monitor and control the administrative activities they are responsible for completing, “so that these efforts do not have the unintended consequence” (Reichardt, et al., 2008, p. 2) of involving teachers.

The significance of this research study is that the application of the Education FIRST leadership framework may allow staff to focus on their particular role within the school providing more dedicated teaching time made available for students to learn and the students can improve their subject level proficiency. The desired outcome of this research study is to conduct the study, capture results that are analyzed, and to determine if the Education FIRST leadership framework can find ways to streamline protocols and processes that prevents teachers from having to be taken away from their classrooms to help complete administrative activities. This knowledge contributes to more efficient schools and less teacher time spent on administrative activities. In allowing school administrative staff to complete these activities without assistance, these activities will no longer require additional staff members, outside of those administrative staff members, to spend time finishing them. Teachers can continue to participate as teacher leaders by focusing on collaborative learning, contributing to school-wide improvement, and impacting educational system performance. But it is my hope, that by administrative staff members using the Education FIRST leadership framework, schools are provided with a

consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of high administrative activities quality output with a clear direction from start to finish.

Throughout this chapter, sections cover the methodology of a qualitative research study. An overview of the research questions that anchors this study, along with the purpose and design of this research study will be discussed. The design of the research study provides detailed descriptions of the target population, instrumentation, and the type of data that was collected. Additionally, a breakdown of the data analysis procedures along with a summary of limitations and delimitations of the research design are included in this chapter. Finally, as the chapter concludes, identified precautions to ensure trustworthiness and reliability of the data is explained accompanied by the anticipated results that are expected to be discovered in the research study.

Research Questions

Schools are challenged by the administrative burdens placed on them that distract educators from providing effective instructional practices that results in students learning. As identified by Reichardt, et al. (2008), “those who shape policy, from principals through state policymakers, need to minimize distractions by minimizing the burdens to support teachers as they work to educate children” (p. 2). But it is more than that, administrative activities to support policy changes and efforts to improve student outcomes always continues to be a high-priority placed on schools. School administrators that are unable to manage the workload associated with these critical efforts continue to propagate the distraction of educators from instructing students. Administrative activities reach a burdensome level when each school is being asked to provide data and information requests from a variety of entities. Entities like the U.S. Department of Education, the State’s Department of Education, the intermediate school district, and the school district itself. Each of these requests, sometimes requested multiple times

throughout the school year, are typically not coordinated but are one-off requests that each school is required to respond to and provide data for financial monitoring compliance or based on law. As identified by Messelt (2004), these numerous requests become a burden to schools since they are required to collect “a vast array of student and institutional information, including such items as test scores, enrollment data, budget and finance information, and human resource information” (p. 2). As the years pass by, more requests get added to the list with few coming off the list of needed information. Messelt (2004) noted that “in fact, administrators have been dealing with continuously expanding data reporting requirements for years” (p. 2).

To prevent this from occurring and to stop distracting teachers from their intended role, establishment of standard procedures on handling all administrative activities must be implemented. Messelt (2004) identified that “school administrators are responsible for monitoring and enabling student and teacher performance improvements that requires a system allowing them to make informed decisions” (p. 2). Through the adoption of the Education FIRST leadership framework, a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach by blending project management, lean organizational concepts, and system engineering methodologies, educators are freed up from those restrictive administrative burdens to allow them to focus on improving student outcomes. Supporting this concept, Messelt (2004) stated that when “schools can enable key decision makers with data and information to facilitate more informed decision-making, overall school performance receives a boost and student achievement improves” (p. 2). As demonstrated within the descriptive element of program evaluation and assessed within the program evaluation tool, the research study’s results aids in providing insights on how Education FIRST can help answer the research questions that formed the basis of this study:

- Main Research Question—In what ways can a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks implemented in a school impact student outcomes?
 - What implementation methodologies are currently in use by effective (high performing) schools?
 - In what ways do the components of the Education FIRST leadership framework currently exist in other implementation methodologies in use by schools?
 - How do the components of Education FIRST compare to other leadership frameworks in use by schools?
 - What issues experienced in schools, contributes to the breakdown of consistent processes and procedures, like Education FIRST, and in what ways can a school avoid those breakdowns?

Data related to the overall impression of the Education FIRST leadership framework was collected by those audiences that could potentially benefit from an implementable structured set of procedures. In examining the best approach toward gathering feedback and comments on Education FIRST, the use of surveys targeted directly to schools that are most greatly impacted by overwhelming administrative burdens was included in the research population. These surveys were completed by school administrators and by each of their staff members in an effort to provide the most realistic picture of the situation as possible. Based on the results of the surveys, semistructured interviews were set up to allow for a deeper probing of the survey results. Through the use of these inquiring feedback loops, the data captured may help inform whether or not an examination of the Education FIRST leadership framework can assist schools with improving student outcomes by streamlining administrative burdens.

Purpose and Design of the Study

In an effort to discover how a school could reduce the impact of administrative activities on its administrative staff, a qualitative research method was utilized by focusing on the research design of program evaluation. The qualitative research method was chosen to allow me to develop customized instruments, specifically surveys and semistructured interview questions, to obtain the perspectives of the research study participants regarding their experiences with their current administrative procedures and their opinions on whether the Education FIRST leadership framework could or could not help in streamlining how administrative burdens are worked on and completed. By leveraging the research study participants perspectives, as noted by The Center for the Study of Social Policy (2013), participants are able to “translate their personal experiences into constructive recommendations for improving practices, systems, and policies” (p. 33). Within McCall and Groak’s (2005) article identifying challenges and issues in designing applied research, the authors noted that the use of “practice research, which consists of studies of phenomena and interventions as they occur with the aim of understanding how things work and could be improved” (p. 1), can be used to provide insights on how to implement improvements.

This is further validated by Posavac (2011) “when program personnel treat an evaluation as a means of improving the effectiveness of their work, they are more likely to give assistance in data collection and to volunteer valuable insights into the interpretation of the data” (p. 29). By choosing the qualitative research method, within the descriptive element of the program evaluation design, the ability to describe the overtaxed school administrative staff and the potential intervention of the Education FIRST leadership framework can be: coupled together; examined through surveys and in-depth semistructured interviews; and answer the main research

question: can a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks implemented in a school help improve student outcomes?

Ultimately, the desired goal of this research study was to gather information about improving efficiency within schools by implementing proper procedures that may make a meaningful impact and possibly contribute to a better understanding of how to streamline the administrative burdens in schools, while adding to the research on the topic. The program evaluation model used for this research study was the qualitative or naturalistic evaluation design. Posavac (2011) describes this model being “based on personal observations making use of intensive personal observations and conversations with stakeholders” (p. 23). Within my responsibilities as the researcher and playing a central role within this evaluation model, Posavac (2011) calls out that “the evaluator must be the data-gathering instrument; however, a greater emphasis is placed on understanding the experiences of stakeholder” (p. 23). Since I am the main facilitator for this research study, there is alignment between the design of the study and the program evaluation model. Posavac (2011) warns that “evaluators must be free to observe the program and must remain on guard for attempts by staff to guide evaluators only to what managers want the evaluators to see” (p. 73).

Within this model, the descriptive element allows the researcher to describe their observations similar to a descriptive study. “Descriptive studies have an important role in educational research, they have greatly increased knowledge about what happens in schools” (Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 2001, p. 3). Keeping in line with the events and activities within schools, this research helps to determine if the use of the Education FIRST leadership framework increases school administration staff efficiency. The use of the program evaluation tool, the Hexagon Tool from the National Implementation Research

Network, helps in assessing the viability of Education FIRST by providing insights on whether “the program has been successful in attaining the anticipated implementation objectives and the anticipated participant outcome objectives” (Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2010, pp. 7–8). Posavac (2011) also noted that “qualitative evaluators are intimately involved in data collection, so they can react to the observations made, such reactions may involve adjusting the focus of an interview or the evaluation itself” (p. 149). While the evaluator is intimately involved, they also must remain neutral. But should be able, as Posavac (2011) recognizes, “involve corroborating conclusions with evidence from multiple, independent sources; developing a sense of correctness of the conclusions; and confirming the conclusions with people who know the program” (p. 150).

Keeping in mind that while there may be success in answering whether or not the program was successful in achieving the identified outcomes, unless the participant goals and objectives are ascertained and assessed, it will not be known if the “program is worthwhile” (Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2010, p. 8). Results from this research study are “intended to produce information about aspects of education that will interest policy makers and educators” (Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 2001, p. 4) and help establish procedures and protocols that can be replicated across all schools in Michigan. Posavac defines stakeholders as “people who are personally involved with the program, sponsor it or are potential recipients of the program’s services” (p. 28). Stakeholders identified for this research study include: K–12 school leadership members including school administrators, principals, and central office managers; school administrative staff members; teachers; and students.

Over the course of the 12-week research study, a four-phased process was implemented to lead the research participants through the study. Phase one started with a pre-survey to

establish baseline information on the current state of procedures within the research site. Once the baseline is established, phase two provided the background information on Education FIRST and allowed the research participants to familiarize themselves with the processes, procedures, and protocols of the leadership framework. As the participants became familiar with the essential components of Education FIRST, phase three had the research site select and implement the leadership framework to a single effort, process or protocol. In experiencing the Education FIRST leadership framework, the participants were better prepared for the final phase, responding to the post-survey to provide their personal insights and opinions if Education FIRST helped to streamline the process of completing the administrative burdens experienced by schools.

The use of a quantitative research method to quantify results of this research study statistically would be challenging. The greatest challenge faced by this study would be in attempting to quantify data based on the streamlined completion of administrative activities. The use of a time study to statistically track the amount of time it takes to complete these activities would require a high-level of effort to standardize the completion steps, which would be over burdensome to school staff and administrators. Therefore, as a way to be less invasive or disruptive to school administrative staff, the use of the qualitative program evaluation research method, focusing on the research design of program evaluation and its descriptive element, was the best method and design to use for this research study.

Research Population and Sampling Method

In determining the research participants for this study, a focus on school administrative activities and those within the school that are responsible to complete the tasks was chosen. The population of this research study was made up of school administrators and their staff members

from the Education Policy Fellowship Program cohort, of which I am an alumnus. Invitations to participate were issued to the portion of members that are school administrators. This group was chosen in order to strike the proper balance of survey results and to ensure responses were received in a timely manner. Surveys were issued to the Education Policy Fellowship Program cohort of 42 educators with varying backgrounds and experiences, many of the members of this 40th anniversary cohort serve in school administrative roles across the State of Michigan.

To ensure that the sample size was adequate for the qualitative research design method, a review of literature was conducted. There were many research studies that noted their sample sizes were too small, identifying that less than 20 participants may have skewed the findings of the study. Dworkin (2012) noted that “the sample size used in qualitative research methods is often smaller than that used in quantitative research methods” (p. 1319). However, one has to be careful to make sure that the sample size is not too small. Dworkin (2012) continued that “in order to have more clarity on what is expected in terms of sample size for studies, twenty-five to thirty participants is the minimum sample size required to reach saturation and redundancy” (p. 1320).

By leveraging the 42 members of the Education Policy Fellowship Program’s cohort, there was a potential sample size large enough to provide information that formed the basis of results for the study. There was a concern that the sample size would be too large and reach a point of oversaturation. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) stated that “saturation is reached when the researcher gathers data to the point of diminishing returns, when nothing new is being added” (p. 11). In using the cohort members and their administrative staff members, an adequate number of participants at four school sites totaling 27 participants was reached to achieve saturation, based on Dworkin’s (2012) recommended minimum sample size.

Stakeholders identified for this research study include: K–12 school leadership members including school administrators, principals, and central office managers; school administrative staff members; teachers; and students. With the identification of these stakeholders, a rich and diverse set of opinions and data is collected within the research study. But as identified by Posavac (2011), “stakeholders want to know more, and qualitative evaluators can supplement the numerical summaries with direct observations of activities associated with the program” (p. 147). It is with the selection of the qualitative or naturalistic program evaluation design, I have the ability to provide the stakeholders more of the type of information that they are looking to attain.

The two-sampling procedures that were used for this research study were purposeful sampling following the sampling strategies of homogeneous and convenience sampling. Palinkas, et al. (2015) identified “purposeful sampling as a technique used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources” (p. 533). By using the homogeneous sampling, Palinkas, et al. (2015) noted that this strategy is “used to narrow the range of variation and focus on similarities for the purpose of simplifying analysis and facilitating group interviewing” (p. 534). The use of the convenience sampling strategy was used due to the short timeframes associated with this research study; since data and feedback was only collected for a few months, a select and known group of school administrators were selected as participants. Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad (2012) stated that “convenience sampling is a kind of non-probability or nonrandom sampling in which members of the target population are selected for the purpose of the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer” (p. 785). The members of the Education Policy Fellowship Program’s cohort fit this description since they are known to me and have previously agreed to assist in this research study.

Another consideration that was kept in mind is ensuring that there are enough participants to provide the level of feedback needed to come to some sort of a conclusion. When inviting the cohort members to participate, there might be some members that are no longer involved in school administration or are altogether unreachable. Those that fall into the category of unable to participate were excluded from the group of research participants and was made up by the other members of the cohort. Those that did commit to participate were assured confidentiality as identified in this research study's consent form and were expected to participate in both the Qualtrics surveys and the semistructured interviews. Those that were unable to complete the research study had their feedback included up to the point in time when they were no longer able to participate. Attrition details were maintained and documented in the research study findings.

Instrumentation

In performing the gathering of data for this research study, a combination of surveys and semistructured interviews was conducted. Survey questions and the initial baseline questions for the semistructured interviews were created by me. Yet, these questions must be reviewed for thoroughness. As identified by Mair (2017), "psychometricians have worked collaboratively to develop improved ways to organize, analyze, and scale corresponding data" (p. 1). As a way to ensure appropriate questions are created, both sets of questions were processed through a field study being reviewed and analyzed by two or more psychometricians. These psychometricians are employed by the Michigan Department of Education and ensured thoroughness and reliability in the questions being asked and for the potential to gather the insights needed to complete the research study. Additionally, two or more psychometricians that are different than those that conducted the field study, were presented the survey questions as a pilot study to determine if the survey would deliver the intended scope and depth of answers. With the

psychometrician's assistance, the questions I developed had a greater chance of success to gather appropriate data.

The intention of the surveys is to gather current information regarding the procedures utilized by school administrators to complete administrative activities. The surveys were completed by the school administrators and by each of their staff members in an effort to provide the most realistic picture of the situation as possible. Questions were based and focused on the participant's interpretation of the currently implemented procedures and protocols in dealing with administrative activities to help provide insights and answers to the current situation at each of the schools being researched. There were no more than 15 questions asked on each survey and did not take more than 15 minutes to complete. A total of 15 questions was chosen to ensure that the survey questions would not be overwhelming to the respondent and can be answered within a short timeframe, roughly a minute per question. The questions consisted of five questions that were answered based on feeling/opinion on a Likert scale. The Likert scale questions were chosen to allow the respondent to provide insights to their feelings/opinions along a sliding scale. An example of the Likert scale questions is: Do you feel overwhelmed with administrative activities? The remaining 10 questions were open-ended requiring the respondent to provide an answer that expounds upon their feelings and knowledge about the subject asked within the question. An example of the open-ended questions is: Please define professional development and how it is used in your school. The same 15 question survey was administered during the pre-Education FIRST survey and the post-Education FIRST survey. See Appendix I for an overview of the five Likert questions and Appendix J for the open-ended questions for the pre-Education FIRST survey and the post-Education FIRST survey.

The use of semistructured interviews was also conducted throughout the two-month research study as a follow up to the surveys and at various points of time throughout the research study. At the conclusion of the pre-Education FIRST survey, the Education FIRST overview, technical assistance period, adoption period, and after the collection of the post-Education FIRST survey, semistructured interviews were held. Semistructured interviews were chosen because the questions focused on discoveries revealed by the surveys that require deeper probing discussions to develop the research study findings. By using a semistructured interview approach, questions are open-ended which allows for the discussion to flow without restricting the participant from expressing their experiences in their own words. These semistructured interviews probed deeper into the participants experiences and provided the necessary context that was interweaved into the research study findings. See Appendix K for an overview of the initial semistructured interview questions. Results collected from both the surveys and the semistructured interviews help answer the research questions that formed the basis of this study.

Regardless of the instrument being used for this research study, the research focused on ensuring data quality. As discussed by Bond and Sodot (2014), “data quality is the state of completeness, validity, consistency, timeliness, and accuracy that makes data appropriate for a specific use” (p. 19). One way to ensure that there is valid data being collected is to incorporate data triangulation. Bond and Sodot (2014) continues, “the goal of data triangulation is not to arrive at consistency across data, the inconsistencies may shed light on the different approaches and allow for an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data” (p. 20). Data triangulation was attained by surveys, interviews, and conducting test interviews with two individuals, after the psychometricians have reviewed the questions for thoroughness, as a way to test the

questions to ensure that they get the answers needed. This provided an opportunity to revise the questions prior to the actual data collection and gain feedback from the interviewees.

Data Collection

Before embarking on efforts to collect data for this research study, both a field study and pilot tests were conducted on the survey questions and the baseline questions that were used for the semistructured interviews. The field study focused on the survey question construction. As identified by Martens and Wingate (2013), survey question construction should ensure that the questions “use language that: is not wordy and does not ask about more than one thing at a time; minimizes bias by making sure questions are not leading; and that response options are aligned with the question prompt, nonoverlapping, and exhaustive” (p. 1). The pilot test focused on the validity of the questions. This test examined the questions to ensure that they, as called out by Evergreen, Gullickson, Mann and Welch (2011), “measure what it is intended to measure” (p. 1). The psychometricians that participated in the pilot test took the survey with the expectation that they “completed the survey and provided feedback on the content” (Evergreen, et al., 2011, p. 1) that helped collecting the data that relates to the research questions.

Following a multi-step process that outlines the ways in which data is obtained, data was collected, managed, and maintained following a strict protocol. The initial step in this repeatable process is the identification of research study participants. Selection was based on criteria that focuses the surveys and semistructured interviews on those school administrative staff members that are involved in the completion of administrative tasks and activities. It included any teachers that are pulled out of their classrooms and also involved in these tasks. Due to the short timeframes associated with this research study, a select and known group of school administrators has been identified as research study participants. Each participant is associated

with a school district as an administrator or within the administrative staff. As a convenience to me, all contact information for these participants is known and maintained in a publicly available website.

With the 42-member pool of participants identified, an invitation to contribute to the research study, including an overview of what the study consisted of, was sent to each member when the study began. This invitation, issued through email to each prospective participant, was used to obtain informed consent and explain how the research study protected the rights and well-being of the study participants. Three days after the initial email invitation was issued, a follow up email to those participants that did not responded was issued. After five additional days, the research study invitation closed. Only the four prospective participants who agreed and returned an electronically signed consent form within the open invitation period were included in the research study. By leveraging the administrative staff members for those four prospective participants, a sample size necessary to produce meaningful research results was met. Those participants who did not agree to participate were removed from the list and all personal information related to them was deleted from the research study's files.

The next step is in the initial method of collection, pre-Education FIRST survey. A pre-Education FIRST survey was used to establish the baseline environment in which the school is operating and experiencing. Questions included Likert scale answers that helped gauge the degree of frustration experienced by the school administrators and their staff members when dealing with administrative activities. There were also questions in which the participants could provide open feedback and comments in narrative form. See Appendix I for an overview of the five Likert questions and Appendix J for the open-ended questions for the pre-Education FIRST survey and the post-Education FIRST survey. Through the use of fillable forms, a Qualtrics

secured site stored the survey questions and responses. Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool, was chosen based on its ease of use and because Concordia University bears the cost of the Qualtrics surveys. Surveys were only allowed to be completed by those that signed or electronically signed the consent form and was granted access to this research study. Once survey responses were entered into the fillable form, which took less than 15 minutes, the captured data was offloaded to an encrypted hard drive from the Qualtrics secured site for analysis purposes. As analysis was conducted on the collected data, interview questions were formed to follow up with all research study participants in an effort to obtain clarification on provided information. Following a semistructured interview methodology, interview questions were asked to all participants that completed the survey allowing for additional clarification questions to be asked, providing a way to obtain a deeper meaning of the participants' experiences and insights. See Appendix K for an overview of the initial semistructured interview questions.

Once the pre-Education FIRST surveys were returned, an Education FIRST overview was presented to the school administrators and their staff members. This overview provided an in-depth look at the processes and procedures that help to streamline the administrative burdens placed on schools. The overview was conducted as a webinar to all research survey participants using the WebEx web conferencing tools. All Education FIRST supporting documentation, including the documents used as deliverables and corresponding fillable forms that support the Education FIRST framework was provided to each group.

In an effort to provide high-level training on the Education FIRST leadership framework, Education FIRST information packets were provided to each registered research study participant. Members were provided an overview and all corresponding documents and fillable form deliverables that make up the Education FIRST framework. This initial training provided

the participants with the information they need to understand the interaction of the Education FIRST critical components and how each member can apply them to their current school environment.

To support the participants in familiarization with the Education FIRST leadership framework, technical assistance during the adoption phase of the research study was provided. Technical assistance was provided by me for the first few weeks of the research study to ensure that each group is using Education FIRST as it is intended. Detailed instructions on how to request assistance was clearly outlined and provided to each participant. A monitored email address established specifically for this research study was available for any and all participants to request assistance and ask questions. After the first two weeks of the research study, a document outlining frequently asked questions and their answers was published and disseminated to the group of participants involved in the research study. At the conclusion of the technical assistance period, a six-week adoption period commenced. This adoption period allowed the schools to utilize Education FIRST within their own environment before a post-Education FIRST survey was issued that asks the same questions as the pre-Education FIRST survey. This post-Education FIRST survey gathered data related to the implemented use of Education FIRST and whether or not it helped to streamline the administrative burdens experienced by the schools.

At the end of the research study, post-Education FIRST surveys was issued to all participants. These surveys were structured to collect data and information about their Education FIRST experiences and how they were able to integrate the framework into their protocols to complete administrative tasks and activities. Semistructured interviews followed shortly after the submission of the post-Education FIRST surveys. Based on the feedback received, there was

a set of questions that all participants answered, with enough flexibility to allow the data gathering conversations to expand into conversations that the research study participant would like to discuss.

In the use of surveys and semistructured interviews, data collected related to this research study was stored in a password secured Oracle database located on the hard drive of a password secured laptop computer and backed up on an encrypted one terabyte external hard drive. Password protected participant consent agreements were also stored on the laptop and the backup external hard drive as well, to ensure that proper documentation is retained for auditing purposes. No personally identifiable information was retained within the database as each participant was assigned a numerical identifier and a single password encrypted document contained the research study participants and their email addresses for participant management, which includes the issuance of surveys and scheduling of the semistructured interviews was used. All paper-based and electronic data was kept on the password secured laptop computer and backed up on the encrypted external hard drive for three years. Paper-based data was crosscut shredded and electronic data was destroyed following the National Institute of Standards and Technology's guidelines for media disposal in which Kissel, Regenscheid, Scholl, and Stine (2014) state, "when media reaches end of life, the organization executes the system life cycle sanitization decision for the information on the media" (p. 16). It is through the procedures to clear the data or overwriting that was followed by this research study. Kissel, et al. (2014), identified "the security goal of the overwriting process is to replace target data with non-sensitive data" (p. 24) and make the data unattainable by recovery methods.

Identification of Attributes

Education entities across the nation have struggled in the past to complete the overwhelming administrative tasks and activities on time and without taxing all of the school's resources in the process. Wimsatt, et al. (2009) noted that "faculty are spending large amounts of time on administrative duties that they could otherwise be devoting" (p. 77) to their assigned role within the school. With today's emphasis on getting better performance and a quicker turn around on completing these tasks, schools have to reign in these activities more closely than ever. Reichardt, et al. (2008) reported that the school administrator must demonstrate leadership traits by "ensuring that staff is not overwhelmed by district initiatives" (p. 6), not just managerial traits by delegating and assigning tasks to all staff members regardless of their role within the school. The Education FIRST leadership framework provides schools with a consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. Education FIRST's components are designed to focus attention on the things that matter most through the use of predefined deliverable documents and templates. These documents and templates have been created and tailored to meet the need in facilitating discussions amongst the school's administrative staff members involved with the process reengineering efforts. The use of the Education FIRST framework provides a methodical approach toward conducting and aligning the work to get each staff member collaborating to complete the administrative tasks and activities in a timely manner.

Following this methodical approach to align work efforts of administrative staff members, the research study focused and measured the attributes that make up the Education FIRST leadership framework. Those attributes included:

- School's governance structure, which defines the way in which the school works and the lines of authority for decision-making.
- Open lines of communication, which demonstrates the freedom associated with the flow of information.
- Perceived worth of professional learning and technical assistance, which assesses the value being received by staff members;
- Potential feeling of being overwhelmed with administrative burdens, which provides insights to how staff are feeling about their workload
- Application of quality standards, which assesses the overarching quality aspects of staff member's work;
- Observance of fiscal controls, which examines the financial controls that are in place.
- Resource management, which looks at staff utilization.
- Use of data, which evaluates how data is being used in decision-making.

Perceptions and insights associated with these attributes were collected with Likert scale and open-ended questions. In identifying assessment criteria for statistical significance, Northcote (2012) calls out that “unlike the general consensus evident amongst researchers about the criteria by which to judge quantitative research, there is understandably less clarity and direction about which criteria to apply to qualitative research” (p. 103). For this qualitative research study, the criteria being used for statistical significance, as identified by Northcote (2012) is “coherence, consensus, and instrument utility to ensure credibility and dependability is achieved” (p. 104). It is through these criteria that an evaluation of pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST responses can be determined to be statistically significant until a quantitative study can be completed sometime in the future.

As part of the research study there are certain terms and references that are identified and discussed. Administrative burdens are identified as the administrative activities that have built up over time that overwhelm the school's administrative staff members based on the large number and depth of information being requested. Reichardt, et al. (2008) described administrative burdens as "the sheer number of initiatives and reforms that shower down on schools to collect data on the outcomes of their efforts" (p. 2).

In using the Education FIRST leadership framework, a school benefits from its focus on providing a process improvement methodology that allows a school to gain efficiencies in their protocols and processes by using data-driven decision making. As discussed by Messelt (2004), using data to drive decisions, schools are able to "increase school efficiencies and improve student achievement" (p. 1). Applying the practical steps involved in gaining protocol and process improvement, there is a need to envision their organization becoming a learning organization. Senge (1996) identified that successful "learning organizations are made up of people who are genuinely committed to developing new skills, capabilities, and understandings" (p. 36). Learning that focuses on "both behavioral and cognitive elements and involves the capacity to challenge routines, not simply enacting them" (Austin & Bartunek, 2006, p. 108). Leveraging the use of deliverables and templates allows for the capture and evaluation of processes and procedures to allow the conversation around routines to take place and to implement changes that makes them more efficient and effective.

Data Analysis Procedures

Over the course of the research study, there were two interrelated analytical examinations that occurred. "Information analysis should be conducted at various times during the course of the evaluation to allow for ongoing feedback" (Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation,

2010, p. 9). The first analytical examination occurred after obtaining the data from the surveys. Survey data that was collected through the Qualtrics secured site must be organized to allow for analysis and interpretation and as input for the semistructured interviews. As identified by the American Association of Community Colleges (2009), “it is important to keep in mind that data analysis is an iterative process where results from one type of analysis may yield new questions, resulting in another round of data analysis” (p. 36) or in this case, a refined data collection effort to further inform the research study.

Data collected from the results of the surveys was collected and analyzed for trends and categories. The analysis report included the mean and the median for Likert questions with the open-ended narrative responses being evaluated and categorized for interpretation and examination. It is through this first examination, the collected data from the surveys was organized and analyzed to identify result patterns that help define more specific questions for the semistructured interview. This examination of survey data was used to highlight focus areas within Education FIRST that the respondents have found as unnecessary or superfluous. By defining the focus of the semistructured interviews based on the interpretations of the survey responses, probing questions revealed feedback and insights that the survey by itself could not have uncovered.

As the semistructured interview questions were assembled, an in-depth conversation about the interviewee’s school administrative activities and how the Education FIRST leadership framework could be applied to reduce the burdensome tasks, was held. Data collected throughout the semistructured interview came in many shapes and forms. It included narrative answers to questions and even include hardcopy examples that helped to represent answers. The second analytical examination took into consideration all of the various forms of collected

information in order to draw one or more conclusions. “The process of interpretation involves taking the results of the analysis, making inferences relevant to the research relationships studied, and drawing useful conclusions about these relationships” (Smith & Albaum, 2013, p. 38).

The second analytical examination occurred after data was collected from the semistructured interviews and helped form the basis of the findings of this research study. For this collection of data, topic coding of the semistructured interview was used to convey the information captured. By using topic coding, a “researcher might look for stories, individual experiences, and the context of those experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186) in order to ascertain the findings for this qualitative research study. Field notes collected during the semistructured interviews reflected the respondent’s use and observation of the Education FIRST leadership framework and what worked well or what challenges arose. As noted by Creswell (2013), “we conduct qualitative research when we want to write in a literary, flexible style that conveys stories” (p. 48) about the research study. Coding provides a structured way to organize these field notes in ways in which the meaning behind the semistructured interview can be told. These discovered meanings were incorporated into an overall analytical assessment of participant responses to provide a comparison of feelings/opinions, both pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST, to help answer the research questions.

Limitations of the Research Design

As with every research study, there are limitations that every researcher must contend with and acknowledge. According to Simon (2011), “limitations are potential weaknesses in your study and are out of your control” (p. 2). This research study is no different. For instance, a limitation being faced by this research study is in the confines of those called upon to

participant as respondents, as discussed in the Research Population and Sampling Method section of this chapter as convenience sampling. Being known to me and associated with the Education Policy Fellowship Program, a personal bias may exist due to shared experiences of the respondents. This bias was primarily offset by the inclusion of non-cohort members being involved in the research study. Additionally, while this research is examining an important issue challenging schools today, streamlining administrative burdens, this study may not be the top priority facing the research study participants. There may also be a lack of awareness or even an indifference on the part of the respondent if the problems being discussed does not significantly impact them or their administrative staff members. Administrative staff members in which the research study is extended to by the four prospective participants that agreed and returned an electronically signed consent form is not known to me. Knowledge of the impact of this issue is unknown at this time and became evident as the research study unfolded.

Personal bias may also play a part in the limitations of this research study. As identified by Sanchez (2007), “a person’s environment and the nuances of a person’s job often produces biases that influence individuals over time” (p. 2). Within this research study, the participants have been selected partly due to their job responsibilities. Yet, Sanchez (2007) continues to inform us that “the workplace often produces some of the stronger biases that humans develop” (p. 2). As a way to combat personal bias, I explained the value of the research study and how important their contributions are to the findings, while reassuring the respondents that there is no time limit on answering the questions. Making sure that the respondent is not rushed through the survey questions allowed for deeper, more meaningful feedback.

There may also be a limitation experienced by this research study due to the lack of honesty by the participants. In today’s society, one must pull together with others to succeed

beyond the capabilities of themselves and to achieve the vision for the common good. Nowhere is that more prevalent than in today's educational system. Yet, when faced with overwhelming administrative burdens and late submissions of required progress reports, school administrators do not always want the truth to come out - the truth that they are overwhelmed and cannot keep up with all of the demands being placed upon them. Therefore, to create an environment that helps facilitate honest and truthful dialogue, all data collected was held in the highest confidence only being published in findings at an aggregate level. While there may be some apprehension on the part of the respondent as they wrestle with the possibility that their responses may become known, every precaution was taken to ensure that the confidentiality of the responses was maintained and then destroyed at the end of the research study.

Conversely, another limitation that this research study may face is the fact that respondents may ramble in their responses and provide a lack of focused response to the questions being asked. Throughout the semistructured interview, if needed, I implemented facilitation skills to ensure that responses provided were focused on the questions being asked. Wandering answers and discussions were placed on a parking lot for follow up at a later date and questioning was refocused to address the content of the question that was asked. In addition to the limitations that this research study faces, there are delimitations that have been chosen to establish boundaries for this research study. Simon (2011) defines "delimitations as those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of your study and are in your control" (p. 2). A significant delimitation for this research study is the selection of the participants and the 12-week timeframe associated with this study. Respondents are purposefully restricted to the Education Policy Fellowship Program cohort as a way to monitor and control the length of time it takes to gather feedback and insights. Leveraging a personal

relationship with the research study participants, I was able to establish quick turnaround cycles of information gathering while maintaining the confidentiality of those participants.

Another delimitation established was the way in which the research findings are being published. Data gathered and analyzed was interpreted through an analysis process that categorizes and topic codes the information. A summary of responses is being reported in the research study's findings at the conclusion of the study instead of reporting these findings in detail. Additionally, this research study is not an in-depth, deep reaching research study but a study that helps describe the situation being faced by school administrators. As identified by Hale (2011), "descriptive research methods are pretty much as they sound—they describe situations and they do not make accurate predictions or determine cause and effect" (p. 2). As the results of this research study are published, a proposed follow up quantitative research study that embeds the Education FIRST Leadership framework within one or more schools will be identified as a potential future research opportunity.

Validation

Throughout this qualitative research study, specific attention was placed on the collection of highly credible and dependable data. This attention started with the selection of the survey recipients, the Education Policy Fellowship Program cohort members. Made up of 42 educators with varying backgrounds and experiences, many of these highly-qualified education professionals are placed in leadership positions in schools across the State of Michigan and have completed an intense yearlong education policy program before receiving their Institute of Educational Leadership certifications. Surveys were crafted, and results captured using the secured Qualtrics online platform. As noted by Carr (2013), "Qualtrics gives the flexibility to design the survey experience, which can go beyond multiple-choice questions to include many

different kinds of prompts” (pp. 2–3). Ensuring that the survey environment gave the participants an experience that they trusted, helps to guarantee the validity of the answers they provided.

In addition to the participants and the Qualtrics survey environment, data was validated through the use of semistructured interviews that test the trustworthiness of the collected survey data. Validation questions to confirm or deny the survey results was asked of all participants. Conflicting answers or those responses that ran counter to the results of the surveys were followed up with deeper probing questions. All interview questions and answers have documented transcripts associated with them to allow for a more thorough review that tests and verifies the feedback given by the participants.

Researcher role. Within my role as a participant-observer, I helped to facilitate learning the Education FIRST leadership framework to the research participants as a subject-matter expert while observing as an evaluator. Posavac (2011) identified that “since the goal of qualitative evaluation is to understand the program, procedure or, policy being studied, it is essential for the evaluator personally to observe the entity being evaluated” (p. 150). Participating in my role as participant and observer, I minimized my personal bias by remaining objective by preparing survey and semistructured interview questions in collaboration with independent psychometricians from the Michigan Department of Education. I also made sure that the respondents are ready and willing to be interviewed and by conducting the semistructured interviews in conference rooms where others could not be overheard. Posavac (2011) noted, “evaluators find it easier to remain objective if they remember that their value to an organization depends on their work being credible” (p. 17). It is through my role as participant-observer that the program evaluation model of qualitative or naturalistic evaluation design was used. In regard

to this model, Posavac (2011) stated “the evaluator must be the data-gathering instrument with a greater emphasis on understanding the experience of stakeholders” (p. 23).

Expected Findings

The desired goal of this research study is to gather information about improving efficiency within schools by implementing proper procedures that may make a meaningful impact and possibly contribute to a better understanding of how to streamline the administrative burdens in schools, while adding to the research on the topic. In an effort to leverage the administrative management activities that are already underway in schools, this research helps to provide a concentrated focus on how following a prescribed process management approach can help improved efficiency and reduce the administrative burdens that overwhelm school administrative staff to the point of pulling teachers out of the classroom to help. As discussed by Ogden and Fixsen (2014), “implementation activities help practitioners become increasingly skillful, consistent, and committed in their use of an innovation” (p. 4). The Education FIRST leadership model is the innovation that provides structured implementation activities for school administrative staff to become skilled and committed to using, with the hope of attaining a level of efficiency that streamlines the administrative burdens schools face.

This research study investigated how a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks can help improve student outcomes based on the ways in which administrators and their staff handle the administrative burdens placed on them. As results are uncovered in this research study, the expectation is to discover ways in which the amount of time it takes for staff to complete these tasks can be reduced. Increasing efficiency in the completion of these tasks allows for the reduction or downright elimination of the need to pull teachers from the classrooms to help complete these tasks. But this cannot be completed unless there is

effective support for the efforts demonstrated in this research study to increase efficiency by administrative staff. Reichardt, et al. (2008) describes “effective support should be designed so that it is: job-embedded rather than abstract; ongoing and sustained rather than piecemeal; collegial and peer-supported; aligned with relevant school improvement goals and practices, and; centered on active rather than passive learning” (p. 2). The expectations of this research study are that it lays the foundation and gathers evidence that the concept and subsequent hypothesis of following a predefined repeatable approach to administrative tasks will lead to a proposed follow up quantitative research study that embeds the Education FIRST Leadership framework within one or more schools as a future research opportunity.

Ethical Issues

When conducting a research study, acknowledgement and mitigation of ethical issues or potential ethical issues must be addressed. Identified by Smith (2003), “researchers face an array of ethical requirements: they must meet professional, institutional, and federal standards for conducting research with human participants; often supervise students they also teach; and have to sort out authorship issues” (p. 56). Within this research study, I followed the ethical principles and code of conduct of Concordia University–Portland and defined by the American Psychological Association (2017).

Ethical issues are characterized into five major categories. According to Posavac (2011), “the first responsibility of an evaluator is to protect people from harm” (p. 92). An evaluator must be watchful and attentive ensuring that no harm comes to those participants involved in the study. This includes the attainment of prior agreement from the participants through informed consent. Posavac (2011) explains informed consent as the “potential participants themselves decide about whether to participate and that sufficient information about the program be

provided to enable them to weigh all alternatives” (p. 94). Even with the signed consent form, a researcher must make every effort to protect people from harm.

A second major category for ethical issues is captured within the role of the evaluator. Posavac (2011) identified “role conflicts facing evaluators can be expected and anticipating these conflicts can spell the difference between a poorly received evaluation and a carefully balanced evaluation” (p. 95). Maintaining a non-biased position when conducting the program evaluation allows for a researcher to “go beyond analysis of particular stakeholder interests and consider the welfare of society as a whole” (Posavac, 2011, p. 96).

In examining the third major category for ethical issues, an evaluator needs to consider the variety of stakeholders and what each one is looking to get out of the research study. Posavac (2011) stated “considering the interests of different stakeholders is important for making an evaluation as useful as possible for all those who may use or be influenced by an evaluation” (p. 96). Each stakeholder may have similar or conflicting interests, but all must be considered during the research study. Posavac (2011) calls out that “focusing on the needs of one stakeholder group can easily lead to narrow and misleading conclusions” (p. 96).

The fourth major category for ethical issues concerns the validity of the study. Posavac (2011) stated that “conducting evaluations that are not appropriate is just as unethical as not protecting the confidentiality of information obtained from participants” (p. 98). Researchers must use valid instruments and an appropriate research design to ensure the validity of the study.

The fifth and final major category for ethical issues, according to Posavac (2011), is in regard to the adverse effects that can come from a research study. “Inaccurate findings can show either falsely positive findings or falsely negative findings (Posavac, 2011, p. 101). Researchers must pay attention to the design of the study and ensure that defined research procedures are

followed with fidelity. Posavac (2011) noted that “false conclusions can be made when insufficient attention is paid to the design of an evaluation or if evaluators focus on the wrong variables or use too short a time span to show either positive or negative effects” (p. 101). When research procedures are followed with fidelity and as identified by Posavac (2011), “what is most critical is that the evaluator not hide negative side effects” (p. 103).

The potential ethical issues that this research study faces have to do with the nature of my relationship with the study’s participants and the assurance of confidentiality of the participant’s insights and feedback. As an alumnus of the Education Policy Fellowship Program cohort, there is the ethical consideration of informed-consent that must be considered as this research study is conducted. Smith (2003) noted that “when done properly, the consent process ensures that individuals are voluntarily participating in the research with full knowledge of relevant risks and benefits” (p. 58). Participation in this research study is strictly voluntary by those members that choose to contribute their feedback and insights. Consent agreements with each participant was collected as part of the process for study participation. The consent form provided specific information related to the research study including:

- What the study is about.
- What the participant will be asked to do.
- Identification of any risks and known benefits.
- Terms and conditions including: taking part is voluntary; feedback will be kept confidential; how questions about the research study will be handled; and a statement of consent affirming the participant agrees to participate and is over eighteen years of age.

Confidentiality of insights and feedback from the participants was held in the highest regard. Smith (2003) stated “upholding individual’s rights to confidentiality and privacy is a central tenet” (p. 59) of any research study. Participants have the option to disclose or share as much or as little information as they saw fit, but a discussion regarding the limitations of confidentiality was held as part of the invitation process to all participants. Smith (2003) recommends that this discussion provides “how data will be used, what will be done with the case materials, and their secured consent” (p. 60). Additionally, this discussion addressed the secured storing of information provided to me and identified who has authorized access. All data and information captured and utilized by this research study was kept on a secured server with encrypted backups preserving the data for my use and anonymous results publication.

Chapter 3 Summary

Throughout this chapter, sections covered the methodology of this qualitative research study including an overview of the research questions, along with the purpose, and design of this research study. Also discussed was the design of the research study that provided detailed descriptions of the target population, instrumentation, and the type of data that was collected, the breakdown of the data analysis procedures along with a summary of limitations and delimitations of the research design. As the chapter concludes, there were identified precautions to ensure trustworthiness and reliability of the data explained with an examination of the anticipated results that are expected to be discovered in the research study, and what potential future research study can be conducted to further the discoveries uncovered in this study.

As noted previously, schools across the nation have struggled in the past to complete the overwhelming administrative tasks and activities on time and without overwhelming administrative staff. It is my goal to help facilitate changing processes and procedures to allow

for efficiencies to be attained by school administrative staff, thus reducing the impact of administrative burdens. As this research study was conducted, discoveries that demonstrate the true power of creative personnel were uncovered and applied to the continuous improvement process inherently built within the Education FIRST leadership framework.

Within the upcoming chapters, findings and results of the research study are reviewed. Chapter 4 describes the 12-week, four-phased research study; summarize the findings; and present the data and results. Chapter 5 discusses the research study results from my perspective and include an examination by being contrasted with the findings in Chapter 2, the literature review of this study. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion on the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory while developing recommendations for further research on this topic.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction to the Data Analysis and Results

Schools have continued to struggle with the need to deliver administrative tasks and activities on time, within the roles of the central office, and without impacting educators in the classrooms. With the overwhelming need to provide data and information throughout the various levels of the educational system, schools must rein in these efforts more closely than ever. Otherwise, these activities become overwhelming for school administrative staff to complete and they have little to no choice but to pull teachers out of the classroom to help out. Over the course of the 12-week research study, data was collected through a four-phased process that started with the issuance of the pre-Education FIRST survey in phase one. This survey was used to establish baseline information regarding the current state of procedures utilized by school administrators to complete administrative activities. These survey results were also used to help form deeper probing semistructured interview questions to supplement and refine the initial set of ten interview questions to gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences encountered at each of the four research sites included in the study.

The second phase of the research study included the Education FIRST leadership framework familiarization. This familiarization process allowed the research study participants to get to know the Education FIRST framework and provided a forum to ask questions on how it can be applied to their schools. As acknowledged by Alexander (2011), “research in a number of fields have consistently demonstrated that training does not lead to skill retention and regular use of the new skill on the job unless such training is followed by on-the-job coaching and feedback” (p. 48). This phase started with an overview of the Education FIRST leadership framework and included distribution of the Education FIRST training materials. To support the skills taught in

the training, continuous technical assistance and support was provided throughout the remaining phases. This was to ensure that skills taught were retained by the participants and they had an opportunity for coaching and the ability to provide feedback to me. The familiarization process was used to allow the participants to become accustomed with Education FIRST before asking them to apply it to a single effort, process or protocol in their own research site within phase three of the research study.

During phase three, each of the research sites were asked to select a single effort, process, or protocol and implement the Education FIRST leadership framework as a way to complete the activity. As each site selected an effort, they became engaged in dialogue and came to consensus on which administrative activity they would end up applying the Education FIRST components. Once a decision was reached, the research study participants implemented the Education FIRST components to their chosen activity. As identified by the National Implementation Research Network (2018), “during this stage, staff are attempting to use these newly learned skills in the context of a provider organization that is just learning how to change to accommodate and support the new ways of work” (p. 1). But it is through this practical application of the seven components of Education FIRST leadership framework that participants were able to see firsthand how the framework can be applied within their own administrative environments.

Once this adoption phase of the research study was completed, phase four was started with the issuance of the post-Education FIRST survey questions to the research study participants. These results provided data related to the implemented use of Education FIRST and whether it helped to streamline the administrative burdens experienced by the schools. Similar to how the pre-Education FIRST survey results were used in the first phase of the research study, the post-Education FIRST survey results were used to help form deeper probing semistructured

interview questions to supplement and refine the initial set of ten interview questions. These interview questions provided a better understanding of the similarities and differences encountered at each of the four research sites after the Education FIRST components were implemented.

In an effort to assess the viability of the Education FIRST leadership framework, the use of a program evaluation tool was used. Selection of the program evaluation tool considered the various factors that would help assess the Education FIRST leadership framework. The tool also needed to be able to provide information that would identify areas that could be improved upon and help refine the Education FIRST processes and procedures. This program evaluation tool, the Hexagon Tool from the National Implementation Research Network, focused on “six broad factors: needs, fit, resource availability, evidence, readiness for replication, and capacity to implement” (Blase, Kiser, & Van Dyke, 2013, p. 2). Each of these evaluation factors helped to assess the effectiveness of Education FIRST through “a productive discussion related to the six areas and arrive at a decision to move forward, or not, grounded in solid information” (Blase, et al., 2013, p. 3). Each research site was provided the Hexagon Tool and as a group came to consensus on assigning a rating along a five-point rating scale for each of the six areas. As noted by Blase, et al. (2013), “the numbers do not make the decision, the team does” (p. 4). By engaging in group discussions and coming to consensus on the rating score, a deep and rich dialogue around the components of Education FIRST was had, highlighting aspects that team members valued and those they did not.

As the primary researcher in this study, I designed and developed the Education FIRST leadership framework. Education FIRST is based on project management principles and practices, foundationally centered on the Project Management Institute’s (2008), “A Guide to the

Project Management Body of Knowledge” and the over 30 years of management consulting experience that I have. Within my current role at the Michigan Department of Education, I am currently assigned to the Office of Strategic Research, Planning, and Implementation. The office builds processes and procedures to implement the Michigan Department of Education’s vision, priorities, and various cross-office initiatives by providing support to departmental leadership and program area specialists to move plans, policies, and initiatives forward. The office focuses on improving efficiency by reducing the duplication of effort and assumes responsibility for the achievement of outcomes defined by the department’s vision and priorities.

Within a leadership role in this office, I help carry out the department’s mission to achieve the promise of an excellent education for every Michigan student by coordinating the strategic implementation of education policies across the department. A major shift in policy related to education has taken place at the state and in cooperation with the governor’s office, the legislature, and the department, my group has taken the lead on ensuring that there are comprehensive statewide strategies, modeled after successful leadership frameworks, implemented throughout each level of the educational system to make Michigan a Top 10 Education State in 10 years (Michigan Department of Education, 2017). My role is focused on developing standardized processes and building capacity within the department by instructing Education Consultants to address issues raised to the State level. I was able to maintain a non-biased view of the research study and utilize these responsibilities to help me to stay involved in the day-to-day activities and needs of this research study as a participant-observer. Posavac (2011) noted that “the single most distinctive aspect of qualitative research is the personal involvement of the evaluator in the process of gathering data” (p. 149). As the phases of the research study progressed, my role was adjusted to whatever responsibilities needed to be

focused on to complete that phase. As an example, I participated as the trainer in providing professional learning and as the subject matter expert providing technical assistance on the Education FIRST processes and procedures to the research sites, when needed.

The intention of this research study is to identify how a school can refine and reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks and activities. Data collected through these four phases and in the program evaluation tool helps to provide insights to whether the Education FIRST leadership framework can help accomplish this goal. This important reduction in overall effort allows school administrative staff to finish these tasks timely, efficiently, and accurately. By having the right people focus on the right kind of work, no longer do teachers need to be taken away from their classrooms to aid in the completion of administrative activities.

Description of the Sample

In determining the research participants for this study, a focus on school administrative activities and those within the school that are responsible to complete them were chosen. The population of this research study was made up of school administrators and their staff members at four school sites totaling 27 participants. During the overview training, one participant stated “I am hopeful that these efficiencies could become reality, by having everyone in the room provides a great opportunity to really have a discussion and problem solve.” A breakdown of stakeholders that were included in this research study is detailed in Table 1. At Site One, one school administrator, one principal, one central office manager, five school administrative staff members, and one teacher participated in the study. At Site Two, one central office manager and three teachers provided responses to the study’s activities. At Site Three, one school administrator, one principal, two school administrative staff members and two teachers participated in the study. At Site Four, one school administrator, one principal, one central office

manager, three school administrative staff members and two teachers provided responses to the study's activities. Throughout the research study, all 27 participants completed all of the study's activities, without any of the 27 participants leaving the study.

Table 1

Education FIRST Stakeholder Participants

Stakeholder Role	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4
School Administrators	1	0	1	1
Principals	1	0	1	1
Central Office Managers	1	1	0	1
School Administrative Staff				
Members	5	3	2	3
Teachers	1	0	2	2
Students	0	0	0	0
Total	9	4	6	8

The sampling procedure that was used for this research study was homogenous and convenience sampling. Due to the short timeframes associated with this research study, data and feedback was only be collected for a few months, a select and known group of school administrators was selected as participants. The recruitment for this research study targeted the members of the Education Policy Fellowship Program and their staff members to ensure responses are received in a timely manner. In an effort to properly describe the research sites, I used "locale codes developed by the U.S. Census Bureau and assigned by the National Center for Education Statistics" (Van Beek, 2011, p. 2). Of the four sites that agreed to participate in the study, two are identified as city, one identified at town and one as suburb.

Original invitations to participate in this research study were sent to all members of the Education Policy Fellowship Program cohort, of which I am an alumnus. This group is made up of 42 educators with varying backgrounds and experiences, with many of the members of this fortieth anniversary cohort serving in school administrative roles across the State of Michigan.

In total, these members represent 17 school districts across the State of Michigan that initially received invitations to participate in this research study. By leveraging the 42-members of the Education Policy Fellowship Program’s cohort, a sample size of 27 participants across four sites provided a large enough sample size that collected data can be extrapolated. As a way to justify this sample size and as noted within Chapter 3, Dworkin (2012) identified that “in order to have more clarity on what is expected in terms of sample size for studies, twenty-five to thirty participants are the minimum sample size required to reach saturation and redundancy” (p. 1320). Within this research study, I followed a homogeneous and convenience sampling procedure, due to the short timeframes associated with the study. Data and feedback were collected over a 12-week period with a select and known group of school administrators and their staff members selected as research participants. Each of the 27 participants that engaged in this research study signed a consent form before participated in all four phases of data collection which started with the pre-Education FIRST survey, the Education FIRST leadership framework familiarization, Education FIRST application to a single effort, and completing the post-Education FIRST survey. They also participated and completed the program evaluation. Throughout the 12 weeks of research, all participants that provided data completed all of the activities without any of the participants leaving the study.

Research Methodology and Analysis

As defined within Chapter 2, the program evaluation with emphasis on the descriptive element was selected for implementation for this study. The descriptive element of the program evaluation research study was chosen to allow for the practical application of the Education FIRST leadership framework to be applied within a set of schools to determine if following these practices could improve efficiencies. While I am not attempting to prove causation, I am trying

to present a theory that examines the various factors that could influence activities or change the burdensome conditions within the schools. The use of the program evaluation research design was used to help provide an examination of the research participant's assessment of their use of the Education FIRST leadership framework. The evaluation results provide insights and understandings into the viability of Education FIRST and whether further, more detailed research studies should be attempted.

As data was collected for this study, particular attention was focused on the creation of the survey and semistructured interview questions to allow the participants to provide open and honest feedback. Feedback that would be analyzed through a topic coding process to identify trends and categories to help inform the findings of the research study. As noted by Saldaña (2016) topic "coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act" (p. 4). As the participant's insights proceeded through a series of topic coding steps, like responses were grouped into themes and broken down into categories that allowed for the creation of deeper probing questions discussed during the semistructured interview sessions. These topic coded themes were generated based on my interpretation of the collected data

Collected data through the four phases of the research study proceeded through analysis at each phase to help uncover deeper meaning and understandings of the research participant's experiences. Over the course of the research study, there were two interrelated analytical examinations. The first analytical examination occurred after obtaining the data from the pre- and post- Education FIRST surveys. Collected survey data was organized to allow for analysis and interpretation and as input for the semistructured interviews. This analysis consisted of identifying themes and categories from the results of the surveys, including the calculation of the mean and the median for Likert questions with the open-ended narrative responses being

evaluated and categorized for interpretation and examination. It was through this first examination, the collected data from the surveys was organized and analyzed to identify result patterns that help define more specific questions for the semistructured interview.

By defining the focus of the semistructured interview questions based on the interpretations of the survey responses, probing questions revealed feedback and insights that the survey by itself could not have uncovered. During these semistructured interviews, an in-depth conversation about the research site's school administrative activities and how the Education FIRST leadership framework could be applied was discussed. As the semistructured interviews were completed, the second analytical examination occurred and formed the basis of the findings of this research study. Through this collection of data, topic coding of themes and categories were extrapolated and is used to convey the information captured by examining and interpreting the electronic surveys and interview transcripts.

The process of topic coding the results of this research study considered the results of the surveys and the insights shared within the semistructured interviews. I examined the combined survey question answers and semistructured interview discussions from all four research sites and collated the main topics discussed to develop categories and to derive a theme or themes, as the data dictated. While data was collected from each of the four research sites, individually, the data was combined together to perform the topic coding analysis.

While there was adherence to the activities defined in the Chapter 3: Methodology section, over the course of the 12-week research study there were minor changes made to the data collection schedule and in the way in which some of the major data collection activities were handled. Minor changes due to the lack of accessibility to the Qualtrics survey tool by the research sites was made by using an alternative survey tool, SurveyMonkey. This survey tool

adjustment had no effect on the data collection schedule as all activities were completed within the anticipated timeframes and was seamlessly integrated into the timeline by taking advantage of some slack time that was built into the schedule. Additionally, the approach in which the Education FIRST familiarization steps of the Education FIRST overview and the training sessions were also adjusted. When this research study was first envisioned, the Education FIRST overview was anticipated to be a one-time presentation with each research site participating together. Throughout the semistructured interviews, concerns were raised with the confidentiality of those participating, so individual overview and training sessions were scheduled for each research site's school administration team instead of occurring as one-time event. Again, slack time that was built into the schedule was able to absorb these minor timeline adjustments eliminating any adverse impact to the data collection activities of the research study.

As noted previously, within the research study there were four research field sites consisting of twenty-seven participants. Within Appendix L, a table comparing the mean and median between the pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST surveys outlines results from the Likert questions captured during this research study. In Appendix M, a breakdown of themes and categories are compared on a question by question basis from the pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST questions.

Summary of the Findings

This research study provided a focus on how following a prescribed process management approach can help improve efficiency and reduce the administrative burdens that overwhelm school administration staff to the point of pulling teachers out of the classroom to help. As defined by Smith, et al. (2014), "an innovation is selected to address the need and is likely to result in desired outcomes" (p. 8). In investigating the Education FIRST innovation and how a

standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks can help improve student outcomes, the findings discovered in this research study indicates that implementing a leadership framework, like Education FIRST, can free schools from administrative burdens.

Collected survey and semistructured interview question data help to provide insights toward answering the main research question: In what ways can a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks implemented in a school impact student outcomes? In following the Education FIRST leadership framework, focus on improving efficiencies around the seven components provides school administrative staff members with an enhanced outlook of the work that they are performing. Common themes experienced by all four research sites demonstrates a deeper understanding of the Education FIRST leadership framework components and the meaningful impact that this research study had on the participants. A participant at one site commented, “I wish that they would have used this leadership framework earlier in my career, it would have simplified my life.” Another participant at a different site noted, “Education FIRST provides the clarity to prioritize and complete tasks and activities, so that everyone is on the same page.”

Based on the ways in which administrators and their staff handle the administrative burdens placed on them, in following the structured procedures of the Education FIRST leadership framework, staff can reduce the amount of time it takes for them to complete these tasks. Increased efficiency in the completion of these tasks allow for the reduction or downright elimination of the need to pull teachers from the classrooms to help complete these activities. Some of the more common adjustments in thinking included the approach in the way school administrative staff performed their work, shifting from management of the activities to an ownership-like oversight of the activities. This personal buy-in allowed for an exchange of

information instead of just a sharing of information following established and known standards that all staff members followed.

The discoveries from this research study's collected data shows that the study's participants were grateful for the structured methodology of the Education FIRST leadership framework. While there was very little variation in the majority of Likert scale questions, there were significant changes when thinking about administrative activities and the research study participant's feelings of being overwhelmed pre- and post-Education FIRST. This increased efficiency gained by streamlining the completion of these administrative activities allows schools to increase their capacity to complete these activities and free up teachers to remain in the classroom teaching instead of being asked to help complete these tasks. A teacher at one site conveyed their relief by saying, "Now I can fully concentrate on what I need to focus on—the students in my classroom." Based on the limited sample of research sites, the findings discovered within this research study show positive results that the Education FIRST leadership framework can help improve efficiencies and reduce the administrative burdens schools face.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The desired goal of this research study was to gather information about improving efficiency within schools by implementing proper procedures that may make a meaningful impact. Within the four phases of the research study, four separate and distinct sites and administrative teams provided data for this research study. The Education FIRST leadership framework was applied as the innovation that provided structured implementation activities for school administrative staff to become skilled and committed to using in the hope of attaining a level of efficiency that streamlined the administrative burdens schools face.

Similar in the way in which the results were collected in this research study, pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST survey and semistructured interview results were analyzed by the type of questions being asked, Likert scale and open-ended. The first analysis breakout, the Likert questions consisted of the first five questions asked and have the mean and the median calculated. The second analysis breakout is the remaining open-ended questions that have been topic coded into themes and categories.

Likert scale questions. A total of five questions were included as Likert scale questions with an assigned range of one to five. One being strongly disagree, two being somewhat disagree, three being neutral, four being slightly agree and five being strongly agree. The Likert scale that was provided included a five-point range that allowed the participant to express how much they agree or disagree to the question. The questions and scores can be found in Appendix L: Pre-Education FIRST and Post-Education FIRST Mean and Median.

Included in the five questions was one that discussed the governance structure in the school, whether they felt it was important to have one. The mean computed for the governance question was: pre-Education FIRST 4.07 and post-Education FIRST of 4.33. The median was 4.00 for both pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST.

Another one of the five questions asked about was did the participants see value in open lines of communications. The mean for communications was: pre-Education FIRST 4.67 and post-Education FIRST of 4.78. The median was 5.00 for both pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST.

The participants were asked if they see value professional development and technical assistance. The mean for professional development was: pre-Education FIRST 4.89 and post-

Education FIRST of 5.00. The median was 5.00 for both pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST.

When asked about being overwhelmed with administrative activities there was nearly a full point variance between the mean and the median. The research participants were asked to think about administrative activities, like regulatory reporting requirements, completion of forms, and data requests, the pre-Education FIRST mean result was 4.15 which indicates agreement that they feel they are overwhelmed. After adopting the Education FIRST leadership framework, the post-Education FIRST mean decreased to 3.22. The median was 4.00 for pre-Education FIRST and 3.00 for post-Education FIRST.

To refocus the question about feeling overwhelmed by administrative activities, the question was rephrased to ask if a normal 40-hour work week had enough time available in it to complete their assigned activities. The pre-Education FIRST mean was 1.93 and the post-Education FIRST mean was 3.22. The median was 2.00 for pre-Education FIRST and 3.00 for post-Education FIRST.

Open-ended questions. In examining the open-ended questions, divergent themes, and categories arose from the pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST results. The results of the open-ended questions were combined and examined from all four research sites being collated by the main topics to develop categories and to derive a theme or themes, as the data dictated. In asking the research study participants about how they define governance in their schools, the pre-Education FIRST theme centered on activity management focused on status reporting and updates. This view of governance was reflected in the pre-Education FIRST results in 89% of the responses with one participant noting, “Governance is nothing more than activity management because they are juggling all the priorities to make sure everything gets

done.” The post-Education FIRST theme centered on activity oversight including prioritization and resource management. This theme was discovered in 87% of the participant’s responses.

In identifying how communications are used in their schools, the pre-Education FIRST theme was knowledge sharing including updates, accomplishments, and upcoming activities being found in 71% of responses. One participant stated “Communications are only used to keep management informed, not to let everyone know where things stand.” While the post-Education FIRST theme was information exchange by informing stakeholders, receiving feedback, and making necessary adjustments. This theme was identified in 79% of the responses with one participant noting, “Communications helps keep all interested stakeholders knowledgeable on the work being performed by school administrators.”

Delving into how quality standards are applied in their schools, the pre-Education FIRST themes included unknown standards and informal standards. Unknown standards were broken out into several categories, including personal quality standards, group quality standards, and corrective action. The theme informal standards included quality standards that were set by school leadership and previously established standards. In 63% of the responses, these themes were uncovered and highlighted by the research participants. The post-Education FIRST theme centered on known standards, where standards were established based on group decisions and by being applied by staff. As stated by one of the research participants, “Deciding on these standards in advance and making sure that everyone is informed by them, leads to more consistent work products and less stress.”

In examining professional development and how it is used in their schools, collected data focused on a pre-Education FIRST theme of staff personal growth including new skill training and enhanced skills. Among participants, 91% included this theme in their responses. From a

post-Education FIRST perspective, the theme centered on knowledge management which included interactive information sharing, process improvement, and enhancing performance in 88% of the responses. Several participants indicated that by focusing on knowledge management, staff skills improved, and they felt more informed about the work that they were performing.

When shifting to technical assistance and how it is used in their schools, the research study participants identified the pre-Education FIRST theme of problem solving, consisting of getting help with problems, guidance, and professional learning. These categories appeared in 81% of responses. In applying a post-Education FIRST viewpoint, the theme identified was support. Support that included issue resolution, coaching, and mentoring. A total of 98% of the participant responses included the support theme in their responses calling out this essential need that technical assistance must provide.

Fiscal controls focus on the funding and other resource management issues that requires continuous monitoring to ensure they do not run out before the activity is complete. The pre-Education FIRST theme encompassed both budgetary effectiveness and fund management. Budgetary effectiveness focused on funding oversight and the analysis of spending trends and usage. Fund management included spending control and compliance monitoring/auditing. In 64% of responses, these categories were represented with one participant saying “Fiscal controls keep me from spending too much money.” The post-Education FIRST theme was consolidated into budget oversight. This included the effective use of funds, in-depth reporting, spending rationale, and transparency. These categories were identified in 72% of the participant’s responses with one respondent noting “By keeping watch on all the aspects of fiscal controls, the use of funding sources can be handled effectively and efficiently.”

In examining the resource management side of fiscal controls, the pre-Education FIRST themes included staff allocations and unused resources, with almost all participants including these categories. Staff allocations focused on teachers, paraprofessionals, and head count while unused resources called out the lack of resource examination and how resource management was not used with school administrative staff members. The post-Education FIRST theme was resource usage which included categories of effective use of resources, staff skills matching, and focused efforts. This resource theme was identified in 91% of results, with one participant noting “It is important to complete a skill matching inventory between the staff members and the administrative activities prior to making assignments.”

Monitoring and controlling focuses on the overall management of activities to ensure that they are being completed with a high level of quality and within the anticipated timelines. Research study participants described the pre-Education FIRST themes as after completion, while being worked on, and unused. Categories for after completion demonstrated the lack of monitoring and controlling that took place during the activity but did get reviewed by reporting and staff meeting discussions. The theme, while being worked on, showed that there was some monitoring and controlling being performed but with a focus on high priority activities, new activities, or overdue and reassigned activities. Yet, in the unused theme, activities were identified as having no monitoring or as an afterthought once an assignment was completed. These themes were mentioned in 78% of responses. The post-Education FIRST theme was centered on activity management, found in 82% of the responses. This included categories such as regular updates, assignment adjustments, and efficient assignment completion. One participant described the activity management theme as “Its a way to take a holistic view of administrative activities to ensure the timely completion of mandated activities.”

The component of data, being the foundation that helps to inform decision-making, asked the research study participants to identify the type of data being captured in their schools. The pre-Education FIRST theme was captured data which included student personal and performance data, program level data, and required reporting data. This theme, found in 69% of responses, provided a way for the participants to describe the type of data being collected. From a post-Education FIRST perspective, the theme centered on performance metrics. This included activity measurements, staff performance, and throughput quantities found in 62% of the responses.

When asked about how data is used in their schools, the pre-Education FIRST theme focused on reporting. Reporting that was broken into categories of compliance monitoring, program evaluation, performance, and resource usage and efficiency. One participant indicated “Data usage in my school is always looking in the past, never into the future.” The post-Education FIRST theme was information sharing. Information sharing that helped in decision-making, resource allocations, activity prioritization, and professional development/technical assistance needs. This theme was identified in 92% of the responses with several participants calling out increased benefits by looking at data in this new light.

Considering the program evaluation aspects of Education FIRST, the National Implementation Research Network’s hexagon tool was used to evaluate the Education FIRST leadership framework. As each of the six areas were evaluated by the research study participants, context of each of the areas were communicated to the participants as defined by Blase, et al. (2013):

- Needs; how well the program or practice might meet identified needs;

- Fit with current initiatives, priorities, structures and supports, and parent/community values;
- Resource availability for training, staffing, technology supports, curricula, data systems, and administration;
- Evidence indicating the outcomes that might be expected if the program or practices are implemented well;
- Readiness for replication of the program, including expert assistance available, number of replications accomplished, exemplars available for observation, and how well the program is operationalized; and
- Capacity to implement as intended and to sustain and improve implementation over time (p. 3).

Captured within Table 2 are the Education FIRST results from using the National Implementation Research Network’s hexagon tool based on the program evaluation feedback received from each research site by all 27 research participants. As noted by Blase, et al. (2013), “team members individually rate each area on a one to five scale, where one indicates a low level of acceptance or feasibility, three a moderate level and five indicates a high level for the factor” (p. 4). These results are then averaged by each research site and cumulatively averaged based on the Hexagon Tool factors.

Table 2

Education FIRST Hexagon Tool Results

Hexagon Tool Factors	Site 1 Average Score	Site 2 Average Score	Site 3 Average Score	Site 4 Average Score	Cumulative Average Score
Need	5	4	4	4	4.25
Fit	4	4	4	4	4
Resource Availability	4	5	4	4	4.25
Evidence	5	5	5	4	4.75
Readiness for Replication	5	5	5	5	5
Capacity to Implement	4	5	4	4	4.25

Blase, et al. (2013) describes that “the scoring process is designed to generate discussion to help arrive at overall consensus related to move forward or not” (p. 4). Each research site came to consensus on assigning a rating along a five-point rating scale for each of the six evaluation factors to help assess the effectiveness of Education FIRST. As noted by Blase, et al. (2013), “the numbers do not make the decision, the team does” (p. 4). It is through this dialogue that a decision to move forward with the implementation or the discontinuation of the effort to implement can be made. By actively engaging in group discussions and coming to consensus on the rating scores, a deep and rich dialogue around the components of Education FIRST was had, highlighting aspects that team members valued and those they did not.

Chapter 4 Summary

Throughout this chapter, sections covered the data analysis and results of this qualitative research study. Starting with an overview of the research study which included the four phases of the program evaluation research study and the use of the program evaluation tool, the research method was described providing details on the activities completed during the 12-week timeframe. Also included in this chapter was a description of the sample research population and

a discussion of how data analysis fit within the defined research approach contained in Chapter 3: Methodology. Also contained within this chapter, an initial, high-level summary of the research study's findings was also included. As the chapter concludes, a presentation of the analyzed data and results was presented to help establish the foundation for determining what these results mean in Chapter 5, discussion and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction to the Discussion and Conclusion

As the culmination of this study, Chapter 5 brings together information presented in the previous four chapters and conduct a discussion of: the research study; the study's results; and my conclusions derived from those results. Following the methodology defined in Chapter 3, a 12-week research study encompassed a four-phased process examining if the Education FIRST Leadership Framework could refine and reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks and activities. Data collected through these four phases and in the program evaluation tool helped to provide insights to whether the Education FIRST leadership framework could help accomplish this goal.

As noted in Chapter 4, the data analysis and results chapter of this study, the discoveries from this research study shows the study participants were thankful for the structured methodology of the Education FIRST leadership framework. The idea behind Education FIRST is to organize, prioritize, and complete activities efficiently and effectively. Survey participants found the organizing aspects of the Education FIRST leadership framework useful since the administrative activity selected was logically ordered, clearly defined, and openly communicated as the work was completed. With one participant claiming "I can retire now; my work can be passed on to another staff member." As noted by Hansen (2018), "hard work is not always the best work, the key is to work smarter" (p. 2). By working smarter and completing administrative activities efficiently, school administrative staff members increase their capacity and free up teachers to remain in their classrooms teaching instead of being asked to help complete these tasks.

Throughout this chapter, the research study results are summarized, discussed from my perspective, and examined by being contrasted with the findings in Chapter 2. Limitations with the research design or encountered problems experienced during the research study are examined to see if these insufficiencies could be improved if the study were replicated. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion on the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory while developing recommendations for further research on this topic. At the end of the chapter, a conclusion that sums up the study, clearly and concisely provides closure of this research topic—Streamlining Educational Administration: A process improvement methodology to free schools from administrative burdens.

Summary of the Results

Within this research study, the Education FIRST leadership framework was implemented to determine if school administrative staff, when focused on their particular role within the school, could complete their tasks without the need to pull teachers out of the classroom to help out. In gaining improvements in performance of completing administrative burdens, school administrative staff can free teachers to remain in their classrooms focusing on their role within the school. It is through the use of the Education FIRST leadership framework, schools are provided with a consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of completed high-quality administrative activities with a clear direction from start to finish, increasing efficiency in school administrative staff.

As discovered in Chapter 2, the use of performance management and continuous process improvement through the implementation of repeatable processes helps make schools successful. This success is demonstrated in high performing schools in Asia when the focus on using procedures that inform, guide, and drive improvement to help schools achieve success. As

discovered by Harris, et al. (2014), “success is a result of a carefully crafted and highly structured process of delivery” incorporating change management techniques to improve change acceptance (p. 863). In Melville, et al. (2012) article “Change Forces: Implementing Change in a Secondary School for the Common Good”, they propose “six change forces” (p. 2) to use to help foster change acceptance within a school:

1. Bureaucratic forces rely on rules, mandates, and requirements to provide direct supervision, standardized work processes, and or standardized outcomes to prescribe change.
2. Personal forces rely on personality, leadership style, and interpersonal skills of change agents to motivate change.
3. Market forces rely on competition, incentives, and individual choice to motivate change.
4. Professional forces rely on standards of expertise, codes of conduct, collegiality, felt obligations, and other professional norms to build professional community.
5. Cultural forces rely on shared values, goals, and ideas about pedagogy, relationships, and politics to build covenantal community.
6. Democratic forces rely on democratic social contracts and shared commitments to the common good to build democratic community. (2012, p. 2)

This structured process of delivery is evident in the actions contained with the Education FIRST leadership framework. These actions are focused on creating internal strategies to improve efficiency and effectiveness of staff members in completing the administrative burdens placed on schools. González-Sancho and Vincent-Lancrin (2016), identified that “it is important for education systems to develop a knowledge-supporting infrastructure that can promote more

efficient uses among a range of stakeholders” (p. 743). Through the use of the components of the Education FIRST leadership framework, a knowledge-supporting infrastructure is built to support the school’s needs and improve performance in school administrative staff.

Schools should not have to start from scratch and throw out procedures that they currently have in place. Therefore, in an effort to leverage the administrative management activities that are already underway in schools, this research study focused on providing a way to organize and structure the work by following a prescribed process management approach to help improve efficiency. Too often, today’s school leaders are derailed by processes that are unclear or not fully developed and documented. Following a clearly defined process and procedure pathway, like the one found in the Education FIRST leadership framework, school administrators can focus on their primary responsibility of instructional leader not a day-to-day manager overseeing the completion of administrative activities. A school administrator commented “By using Education FIRST, I can actually do the work that I was hired to do.” Additionally, the focus on reducing the administrative burdens that overwhelm school administrative staff to the point of pulling teachers out of the classroom to help was concentrated on as well. Examination of the results of the survey and semistructured interview questions have demonstrated that the organizing aspects of the Education FIRST leadership framework resonates with the participants.

Responses to the survey and semistructured interview questions helped provide answers to the main research question: In what ways can a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks implemented in a school impact student outcomes? Implementation of the organizing aspects of the Education FIRST Leadership Framework contributes to increased administrative staff efficiencies that in turn increases their capacity to refine and reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks and activities. This important reduction in

overall effort allows school administrative staff to finish these tasks timely, efficiently, and accurately, eliminating the need to pull teachers from their classrooms to help in the completion of administrative activities. As teachers are freed up from having to focus their attentions on administrative activities, they are allowed to remain in the classroom to drive student proficiency and improve student outcomes.

Additionally, discoveries revealed in this research study provided insights into the four sub-questions that support the main research question. The first of these sub-questions was: what implementation methodologies are currently in use by effective (high performing) schools? While there was no specific implementation methodology encountered within this research study, consistently mentioned in the literature review was the concept of implementation science. Effective schools use implementation science to gain efficiencies in administrative procedures allowing them to focus on student outcomes. Harris, et al. (2014) describes implementation science as “a more integrated, rigorous, and systematic approach to translating policy into practice” (p. 866). Similar to the Education FIRST leadership framework, “implementation science focuses in targeted settings, relying on coordination, communication, and consistency across multiple stakeholders within the system to secure change and innovation that is deeply and properly embedded” (p. 866). As schools leverage the concepts within implementation science, open lines of communication and coordinated efforts that drive improvements can be attained.

The second and third sub-questions focused on the Education FIRST leadership framework components. The second sub-question was: in what ways do the components of the Education FIRST leadership framework currently exist in other implementation methodologies in use by schools? The third sub-question was: how do the components of Education FIRST

compare to other leadership frameworks in use by schools? Since no specific implementation methodology was identified in the research study, these questions are answered within the aspects of the concept of implementation science and the quality implementation tools developed by Meyers, et al. (2012). The quality implementation tool was created to focus an implementation through a quality lens. Meyers, et al. (2012) “defines quality implementation as putting an innovation into practice in a way that meets the necessary standards to achieve the innovation’s desired outcomes” (p. 482). The quality implementation tool consists of six components or steps. Meyers, et al. (2012) defined these six components as:

1. Develop an implementation team.
2. Foster supportive organizational/communitywide climate and conditions.
3. Develop an implementation plan.
4. Receive training and technical assistance.
5. Practitioner-developer collaboration in implementation.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation. (p. 485)

The components within Education FIRST that exist in the quality implementation tool include: quality standards; and monitoring and controlling. While some of the finite activities contained within the quality implementation tool refer to some of the Education FIRST components, the activities do not fully embody the breadth of activities contained within the Education FIRST components. Comparatively speaking, the Education FIRST leadership framework is more robust and complete than the quality implementation tool. The quality implementation tool focuses on the implementation of a single innovation. The Education FIRST leadership framework components are focused on continuous improvement and providing a common structure and system for all operational aspects of a school to function. Education FIRST

provides for guided process development with school administrators, with the components focusing attention on the things that matter most. A school administrator at one site noted, “In using Education FIRST’s pre-defined set of processes and templates, I can easily integrate tasks to my staff.” A principal participating in the study at different site commented “In using Education FIRST, I can easily make adjustments to the way I have staff complete our administrative activities.”

The fourth sub-question concentrates on what contributes to the breakdown of consistent processes in schools. The fourth sub-question was: what issues experienced in schools, contributes to the breakdown of consistent processes and procedures, like Education FIRST, and in what ways can a school avoid those breakdowns? As discussed in the survey and semistructured interview results, schools are derailed by processes that are unclear or not fully developed and documented. While certain aspects are in place, there are other aspects that are completely ignored which leads to a breakdown of consistent processes. Another contributor to this breakdown is the overwhelming amount of administrative burdens that schools face. As school administrators are rushing to complete administrative activities, like regulatory reporting requirements and the completion of forms that are due or even overdue, other requests continue to build up. School administrative staff members are in such a rush to complete the next activity, they run from one urgent activity to the next. In the rush to complete the urgent activity, staff members disregard the need to follow organizing techniques to efficiently and effectively complete these tasks in a timely manner. These breakdowns in processes and procedures contribute to the frustration and feeling of being overwhelmed that school staff members feel every day.

Discussion of the Results

The discoveries from the research study's collected data and in conversations held during the semistructured interviews shows the research study participants were thankful for the structured methodology of the Education FIRST leadership framework. Eight participants stated that using the integrated components of Education FIRST provided a clearer picture of the status of administrative activities and allowed them to become proactive instead of reactive. While there was very little variation in the majority of Likert scale questions, there were substantial changes when thinking about administrative activities and the research study participant's feelings of being overwhelmed pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST. With a nearly one-point deduction from the pre-Education FIRST mean of 4.15 and the post-Education FIRST mean of 3.22, these results help reveal that the use of a set of standardized internal strategies following a consistent and reliable set of steps that aids in the delivery of completed high-quality administrative activities, a school can benefit from adopting the Education FIRST leadership framework. This finding was further supported by the over one-point variation when asked about the time available within a normal 40-hour work week to complete assignments. The pre-Education FIRST mean of 1.93 and the post-Education FIRST mean of 3.11 validates that the research participants can see that following the structured procedures and protocols helps to streamline the completion of these activities in a timely manner, freeing schools from overwhelming and time-consuming administrative burdens. This increased efficiency gained by streamlining the completion of these administrative activities allows schools to increase their capacity to complete these activities and free up teachers to remain in the classroom teaching instead of being asked to help complete these tasks. One participant noted, "There were significant changes in effectiveness between the pre-Education FIRST processes and post-

Education FIRST processes and that Education FIRST would be extremely beneficial in reducing the administrative burdens in their K–12 school.”

When examining the themes and categories captured in the topic coding of the open-ended questions, further support for the findings identified by the Likert questions is discovered. In each instance of the identified themes and categories for the open-ended questions, there was a refinement of understanding and clarity of purpose for each component of the Education FIRST leadership framework when comparing pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST responses. There is agreement that governance, which defines the way of work that helps to progress the assigned tasks and activities, is important to have implemented in a school. The research study participants shifted their way of thinking when defining governance from activity management based on pre-Education FIRST responses to a much broader organizational system view of activity oversight in their post-Education FIRST responses. Two participants from two different sites commented, “That the Education FIRST governance structure was what was missing from their K–12 schools.” The research participants also strongly agreed that they saw value in communications that helped the flow of information and with professional development identifying needed training that staff must have to be successful. As the participants described how communications are used in their schools, a migration in thought went from knowledge sharing to a more interactive information exchange where feedback and adjustments in direction could occur. One participant stated “With increased communications and information sharing, everyone would know what’s being worked on and how well they are doing.”

In examining quality standards and how they are applied within their schools, research study participants identified themes that called out informal or unknown standards they work under. While this allows increased flexibility in the way in which work is completed, it does not

lead to high quality or consistency in completed work products. After exposure to the Education FIRST leadership framework, participants journeyed from an unknown set of quality standards to a group established, known set of standards that can be applied reliably, regardless of the activity being completed. A participant stated, “Without the establishment of quality standards, staff are unaware of how well we are doing, there is nothing to measure against.” This migration in thinking was also applied when considering professional development and technical assistance. When examining the theme discovered regarding how professional development was used in their schools, the participants evolved their way of thinking from single focused staff personal growth to an all-encompassing knowledge management. This evolution also took place when asked about technical assistance which migrated from a limited problem-solving theme to full-fledged support that grew to include coaching and mentoring. Three participants from two sites noted that knowing that they have the proper training and support would alleviate their concerns when working on tasks that they are unfamiliar.

Both budgetary and resource management concerns are included in the Education FIRST leadership framework component of fiscal controls. As each of these aspects are examined in the research study results, a broadening of how these are thought of by the research study participants took place. In describing the fiscal controls that are in place at the schools, the participants advanced from basic financial management to budgetary oversight focusing more on spending rationale and transparency. Tightly connected to the financial aspect within a school is the need to manage resources effectively. Many participants provided comments that there was a need for better financial transparency and a better effort of sharing information related to funding at K–12 schools. After exposure to the Education FIRST leadership framework, the research study participants upgraded their interpretation of resource management from focusing on solely

staff allocation concerns to a more global resource usage across the school. So, no longer were staff allocations for teachers and paraprofessionals the only aspects being examined but ultimately, the effective use of all school personnel. One participant stated, “Knowing and understanding what everyone is working on provides confidence that all of the administrative activities are being addressed.”

Closely related to the fiscal controls, monitoring and controlling brings together resource management with quality standards to ensure that superior products are produced when completing administrative activities. This component also evolved between pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST responses. Instead of focusing on activities that are being worked on and in some sort of jeopardy, or as an afterthought once the activity is completed, the research study participants embraced an ongoing activity management stance. Ongoing activity management allows activities to be managed in a proactive way, identifying the need for adjustments that permits the efficient completion of assignments before an issue becomes problematic. A participant explained that “The monitoring and controlling aspect of Education FIRST is what is needed in my K–12 school to help remove roadblocks and provide a forum to ask for assistance.”

The final Education FIRST leadership framework component is data. Data is the foundation that helps to inform decision-making and based on pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST responses, research study participants again migrated from a reactive to proactive stance. The pre-Education FIRST theme focused on captured data being used for reporting purposes. This included student personal and performance data that is used for compliance monitoring and program evaluation. Based on the exposure of the Education FIRST leadership framework, the participants advanced their way of thinking to identification of

performance metrics and this data being used for information sharing. This advancement places data on a more global scale. Data can now be prepared and used to help inform decisions proactively instead of being in a position that requires a reactionary response to the interpretation of the data. Comments around the use of data included participants sharing their experiences with the use of local and state level collected data and the challenges in accessing and interpreting the data.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

As identified in Chapter 2, a central and singular emphasis becomes overwhelmingly apparent, schools need to be able to do less, by having more focused work, with less resources, a highly efficient and effective workforce, to complete all the administrative burdens placed upon them. Further analysis of the discovered literature helps to reveal four main concepts that supports a school's need to do less through more focused work with less resources by having an efficient and effective workforce. Schools are overburdened by administrative activities that are placed on them by each level of the educational system. This, even though, as González-Sancho and Vincent-Lancrin (2016) identified “public authorities do generally not have the resources, the time or the competences to exploit all the data collected and maintained” (p. 756).

School administrators do the best they can to complete the assigned tasks but are forced to engage nonadministrative staff to get these activities completed by the time that they are due. As administrative staff members contemplate how to overcome the magnitude of administrative activities facing them, they turn to teachers to leave the classroom and help complete these activities. Key staff including school administrators; their staff members; and teachers are overworked and are unable to focus on their primary responsibilities, for example: teachers teaching students instead of completing administrative activities. As MacDonald (2011) noted,

“the increase in administrative workload is now at the point where teachers are resentful” (p. 2). Additionally, McCarley, et al. (2016) identified that “teachers who are consistently burdened by administrative tasks and mandates often do not have sufficient time to teach what they believe is important” (p. 337).

Schools have continued to struggle with the need to deliver administrative tasks and activities on time, within the roles of the central office, and without impacting teachers in the classrooms. Successful schools utilize a carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable set of implementation procedures to accomplish the burdensome administrative activities and focus their resources on their required roles and responsibilities. The Education FIRST leadership framework is a structured and repeatable set of procedures that is implemented in the central office and helps to alleviate the need to pull teachers out of the classroom to help complete administrative activities.

When looking at the findings of this research study through the lens of the literature review, the results agree with the singular emphasis found in the literature materials. Schools need to do less through more focused work with less resources by having an efficient and effective workforce to complete the administrative activities that can burden and overwhelm a school. In diving deeper into the analysis of discovered literature, each of the four main concepts were found in the results of the research study. The literature review discovered that schools are overburdened by administrative activities. So much so, that these activities were identified by Lusic (2012) as “a top concern of school teachers and administrators nationwide” (p. 1). Within the research study’s responses, the participants agreed that when thinking about administrative activities, like regulatory reporting requirements and the completion of forms, they feel overwhelmed.

Additionally, key staff including school administrators and their staff members are overworked, resulting in tasks being spread across all available resources, which unfortunately includes teachers. Identified by Heissel and Ladd (2018), “teachers face more administrative burdens, with no perceived improvement in school climate” (p. 303) to help alleviate the burdens. As noted in DePaepe’s (2016) “Central Washington University Teacher Time Study”, “teachers felt their roles were moving away from teaching as the primary focus of their work” (p. 7). As teachers are pulled into working and completing administrative activities, noted within DePaepe’s (2016) study, teachers spend many “hours longer than their instructional day completing non-instructional activities” (p. 2). This feeling is not isolated to the teachers that are being asked to help out. As demonstrated in the research study results, school administrative staff members also felt overburdened by the myriad of forms and data reports required for submission to the various oversight layers of the educational system. Participants felt as if they were overworked and that within a normal 40-hour work week, there was not enough time available to complete all their assigned activities. This mutual feeling of being overwhelmed by administrative activities in either role, school administrative staff member or teacher, demonstrates the need to implement a structured approach, like Education FIRST, to manage administrative activities effectively and efficiently.

The literature review also discovered that school administrators do the best they can to complete the administrative activities assigned to them. But sometimes, doing the best the administrators can do requires the use of teachers to complete the administrative activities in a timely fashion. As identified in MacDonald’s (2011) workload study, teachers “are spending more time doing administrative and other tasks and less time interacting with students” (p. 1). In using the proper leadership tools and techniques, the efficient use of administrative staff

members can prevent the need to pull teachers out of the classroom. Revealed within the research study during the pre-Education FIRST responses, administrative staff members fixated on the activity management aspects of governance in order to maintain attention on completing the tasks by the due dates. By embracing the Education FIRST leadership framework components of governance and communications, the ability to complete these activities efficiently improved. As discovered in the post-Education FIRST responses, the research study participants agreed that governance, which defines the way of work that helps to progress the assigned tasks and activities, is important to have implemented within a school. The research participants also strongly agreed that they valued communications that helped facilitate the flow of information to become an information exchange (two-way communications) instead of just knowledge sharing (one-way communication). In using the aspects of these two critical Education FIRST components, administrative staff can do more than the best they can to accomplish the administrative activities requiring completion.

While school administrators are doing the best they can, the discoveries within the literature review revealed that school administrators can be informed from lessons learned from high performing schools in Asia. Successful schools utilize a carefully crafted, structured, and repeatable set of procedures, like Education FIRST. High performing schools in Asia use procedures that inform, guide, and drive improvement. As revealed by Harris, et al. (2014), “a productive place to start is by looking at the actual mechanics of processes that actually make a difference” (p. 863). Within the seven components of Education FIRST, a clear and methodical set of procedures that streamline administrative burdens is implemented, with a particular focus on the things that matter most. As demonstrated within this research study, each of the four research sites implemented Education FIRST on one administrative activity as a way to govern

the activities of school administrative staff members. Each component of Education FIRST interacted with each other to continually monitor and control the work efforts, allowing for adjustments where and when needed. Continuous improvement efforts built into the Education FIRST leadership framework helped refine processes and procedures to ensure that gains in effectiveness and efficiency contribute to the capacity building of school administrative staff.

When examining the conclusions reached in Chapter 2, and applying the findings from this research study, school administrators must make efficient use of administrative staff resources to keep teachers in their classrooms, teaching. School administrators must concentrate on activities that make the most efficient use of their administrative resources in order to build capacity within their administrative staff members. McCarley, et al. (2016) noted that school “leaders engage in activities that distribute power between the leaders and followers, while, at the same time, create a shared expectation of high performance” (p. 323). School administrators that focus their efforts on implementing a leadership framework, like Education FIRST, benefits from increased capacity and free themselves by streamlining the administrative burdens placed on schools from every level of the educational system.

Limitations

Identified within Chapter 3, the methodology of this study, there are limitations that every researcher must contend with and acknowledge as they complete their research study. This research study was no different. Limitations faced by this research study was in those called upon to participate as respondents and the short 12-week timeframe. There are “895 public school districts in Michigan” (Michigan Department of Education, 2018, p. 3), and to scale this research study to a statewide level was unrealistic, given the short timeframe associated with this study. In order to get a representative sample of school districts, the field of

respondents was limited to the Education Policy Fellowship Program Fellows representing 17 school districts as the initial point of contact for involvement in this research study. Concerns around the possibility of a personal bias existing due to our shared experiences and the potential respondents was offset by the inclusion of their administrative staff members that were non-cohort members of the Education Policy Fellowship Program. To overcome this limitation, the development of selection criteria to identify and qualify school districts for inclusion in this type of a research study could be created. This selection criteria could be built to pinpoint districts within a specific geographic location or a variety of school types (for example: rural; urban; or suburban). In examining the short 12-week timeframe, this limitation required me to limit the amount of time spent to evaluate the credibility of the Education FIRST leadership framework, since it was implemented and evaluated all in this short timeframe. The use of the program evaluation tool, the Hexagon Tool from the National Implementation Research Network, helped in overcoming this limitation by helping provide insights and assist in assessing the viability of the Education FIRST leadership framework.

Another limitation encountered during this research study was the limitation of assessing only one leadership framework. My Education FIRST leadership framework was selected as the only framework to be implemented and evaluated to maintain an extremely focused research study and fit within the time constraints of this research study. Following a set of selection criteria, additional leadership frameworks besides the Education FIRST leadership framework could be included in the study to provide comparative results as to the effectiveness of the implemented leadership framework.

As the 12-week research study began, there was an accessibility problem encountered by the research study participants when attempting to utilize the Qualtrics survey tool. Due to the

computer system network firewall settings, the ability to access Qualtrics was forbidden and another survey tool needed to be used to collect the data in the research study. The Michigan Department of Education uses SurveyMonkey to survey districts statewide and network firewall settings across the state has been configured to allow that survey tool to be used by all districts. The survey questions initially set up within Qualtrics was quickly migrated to the SurveyMonkey tool which allowed the study to continue without hesitation. Based on the feedback received from the participants, this minor adjustment did not adversely influence the survey submission statistics since all identified participants completed the pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST surveys.

Concerns were raised during the pre-Education FIRST semistructured interviews regarding the approach in which the Education FIRST overview and training sessions. When the research study was designed, the Education FIRST overview was a one-time presentation with all of the four-research site participating together. Apprehension around the confidentiality of those participating caused the overview and training sessions to be scheduled at individual research site events instead of larger scale, one-time events.

Other limitations identified in Chapter 3, the methodology of this study, was never realized by the participants or encountered by me. Those identified limitations included: the potential that this study may not be the top priority facing the research study participants; the lack of awareness on the part of the respondent; personal bias; and the lack of honesty by the participants. There were several strategies employed to help mitigate the limitations identified in Chapter 3. The first strategy, as part of the Education FIRST overview, I explained the value of the research study and how important the participant's contributions were to the findings. The

second strategy focused on creating an environment that facilitated honest and truthful dialogue that allowed for deeper, more meaningful feedback to be received from the respondents.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

As discussed earlier within this chapter, schools need to be able to do less, in the form of more focused work, with less resources, by leveraging an effective and efficient workforce, to complete all of the administrative burdens placed on schools. In simpler terms, schools need to do less with less resources. While this may go against conventional thinking that you have to do more with less, as noted by Lynch (2010) “implementing a doing less with less strategy actually results in increased productivity and decreased stress” (p. 1). The less with less approach allows for focused time on focused activities based on the prioritization of those activities. Lynch (2010) sums up this “new reality, it is not about doing more with less, it’s about letting things go by prioritizing what needs to be done” (p. 1). Based on the findings of the research study, the use of the Education FIRST leadership framework can help to focus the efforts of school administrative staff members. Following the procedures, processes, and protocols contained with Education FIRST staff members can embrace the doing less with less strategy discovered in Chapter 2 and discussed by Lynch (2010).

In practice, this new paradigm following the less with less strategy in managing the administrative activities that overwhelm schools is challenged by the fact that most, if not all, activities are required to be completed. Just letting them go by the wayside is not an option. Some of these administrative activities have funding attached to them, while others are mandated by federal and state regulations. These activities need to be completed, but as interpreted from these results, by implementing a formalized prioritization and management process, like Education FIRST, school administrators can optimize the way in which the work is done. What

is required is a shift in the approach to the work. A change from the status quo. An adjustment to what has always been done in the past, so that the benefits of these changes can be seen and experienced by everyone involved. As discovered in the findings of the research study, an adjustment in thinking from just management of the activities to an ownership-like oversight in the way school administrative staff performs their work is needed. But, with change comes resistance and an uncomfortableness that takes time for school administrative staff to gain confidence in their skills and abilities to complete the job. During this time, encouragement and acknowledgement of the benefits that can be gained through this process must be given to staff members. As the staff members progress through the path of change, it is rarely smooth. Staff must acknowledge that a change is needed and engage in trying to make the change belong to themselves. Through personal buy-in and realization, reductions in staff time, effort, and stress can be obtained and staff can accept and subsequently benefit from the change that this new approach provides. In embracing this new way of doing work, dependency on teachers to help complete administrative activities is no longer needed. Teachers can stay in the classrooms focused on educating their students.

From a policy perspective, the implementation of a formalized process, like the Education FIRST leadership framework, may also be met with resistance. Within the research study, some school administrators asked about the need of all of the Education FIRST components. With the enactment of the procedures, processes, and protocols contained with Education FIRST, arguments that all of these formalized steps are unnecessary and are nothing more than administrative overhead is made. One administrator asked specifically if the quality standards component was really needed or was it just administrative overhead that was not necessary. By examining the entire system contained within the Education FIRST leadership

framework, the value that each component contributes becomes known. The interoperability of the components helps to provide information and increase efficiency that allows the administrative activities to be completed within the confines of the school administrative staff members and relieve the need to pull teachers out of the classroom to help.

As noted in Chapter 2, my theory of action demonstrates that school administrative burdens can be reduced by implementing a process improvement framework, like Education FIRST, leading to improved student outcomes. Through the implementation of the components contained with the Education FIRST leadership framework, internal strategies to improve efficiency and effectiveness of administrative staff members in completing the administrative activities is created. Education FIRST clearly and methodically provides procedures that streamline administrative activities allowing school administrative staff to support teachers in delivering instructional practices that impact students.

This research study's results help to support this theory of action. The findings reveal that the use of a set of standardized internal strategies following a consistent and reliable sequence of steps that aids in the delivery of completed high-quality administrative activities, a school can benefit from adopting the Education FIRST leadership framework. In applying the transformational leadership aspects of Education FIRST, leaders keep their teams focused on its goals, building confidence in their teams while maintaining a collaborative environment. Administrative staff members gain increased efficiencies which allow these resources to focus on other support efforts, like supporting the teachers in the classroom. Benefits are also derived from the continuous improvement aspects of Education FIRST. Continuous improvement helps refine processes and procedures by applying lessons learned. These refinements, based on established quality standards, enhance training and support by using data to help guide the

continuous improvement effort. By implementing the Education FIRST leadership framework, schools increase their capacity to support teachers and students which then results in improved student outcomes and subject matter proficiency.

Recommendations for Further Research

Discoveries from this research study have formed findings that help lay the foundation and recommendations for further research. This research study was not an in-depth, deep reaching research study but a study that helps describe the situation being faced by school administrators, however the results are promising. The research study's results provide a positive indication that this concept of following a predefined repeatable approach to administrative tasks should lead to a proposed follow up quantitative research study. This quantitative research study could embed the Education FIRST leadership framework within one or more schools to build upon the findings of this qualitative research study.

Identified as a limitation of this research study, only one leadership framework, the Education FIRST leadership framework, was included in the study. As a way to expand the examination of the impact that a leadership framework has on reducing school administrative burdens, further research could include a study that includes more than one leadership framework. I would recommend that future research opportunities expand their scope to include other leadership frameworks like the framework of leadership from the Pennsylvania Department of Education or the Tennessee instructional leadership standards as a way to compare and contrast the components of each framework and how effective their results are within a K-12 school administrative environment.

In examining Chapter 3, the methodology of this study, a relatively small sample size was chosen for this research study. This small group of research sites was further limited by the

application of the Education FIRST leadership framework to only one process or protocol. In order to fully validate the findings of this research study and to move the research forward, a single research site utilizing the Education FIRST leadership framework across all processes and protocols should be conducted. I would recommend that the Education FIRST overview and training aspects of this research study be carried forward into the quantitative study allowing these research study participants an opportunity to understand the interaction of the Education FIRST critical components and how each member can apply them to their current school environment. I would also recommend that the participants proceed through a familiarization phase with the Education FIRST leadership framework with technical assistance being provided during the adoption phase of the research study. These important aspects help to ensure that the research study participants are using Education FIRST as it is intended and to limit the amount of frustration experienced with this major change in approach to completing administrative activities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to identify how a school can refine and reduce the level of effort needed to complete administrative tasks and activities. This important reduction in overall effort allows school administrative staff to finish these tasks timely, efficiently, and accurately without needing to pull teachers from the classroom to complete them. The research study activities also focused on answering the main research question—In what ways can a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks implemented in a school impact student outcomes?

The research study results called out what was discovered in literature, schools need to do less with less resources. Schools must focus their efforts and increase efficiency on the activities

that they are mandated to complete. As noted by Lynch (2010), “if we overburden people, we will succeed in only burning out employees” (p. 1). Changes in the approach to completing the administrative activities using the Education FIRST leadership framework helps to organize and prioritize the work that needs to be completed. To be implemented effectively, the Education FIRST leadership framework must be examined as a whole and as a set of interdependent components that interrelate with each other. It’s when you observe the Education FIRST leadership framework’s interoperability that the value that each corresponding component contributes becomes evident. To fully realize the benefits that the Education FIRST leadership framework brings to schools, the administrative staff member’s personal buy-in is needed. Only after the staff member’s progression along the change curve from change resistance to change acceptance do the benefits of following a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks be realized.

The research study conclusions confirmed the expected findings identified in Chapter 3. Findings from this research study help to provide the answer to the main research question—In what ways can a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks implemented in a school impact student outcomes? The first way is that school administrative staff builds internal capacity to complete the administrative activities on their own. School administrative staff no longer requires assistance to get the work done or requires teachers to help out on completing administrative activities. Keeping teachers in the classroom contributes to student outcomes improving.

Another way following a standard, consistent, and repeatable approach to administrative tasks help improve student outcomes is as administrative staff members become more effective, they have more time to support the teachers and students, which also contributes to improving

student outcomes. Based on my interpretation of the research study findings, a clear path that school administrators can take to streamline the administrative burdens that schools face every day is provided—by following the formalized procedures, processes, and protocols within the Education FIRST leadership framework. Administrative staff members following the Education FIRST leadership framework can increase their capacity. This increased capacity allows school administrative staff to complete the required administrative activities in a timely manner. It also prevents the need to have teachers aid in completing administrative activities, keeping them in the classroom, focused on teaching students.

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Education *FIRST*

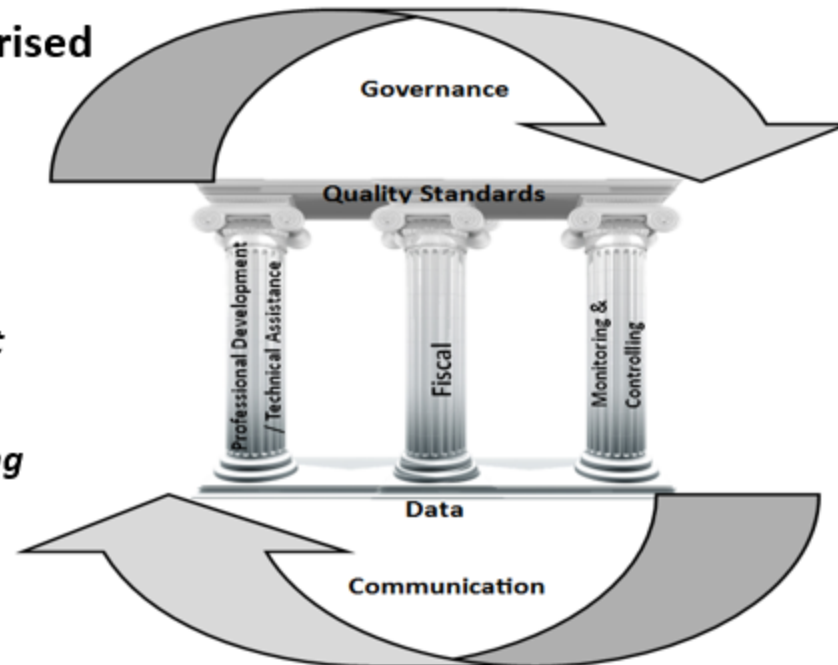
**Education
Focused Initiative of Resources
and Strategic Thinking
(*FIRST*)**



Education FIRST Components

Education FIRST is Comprised of 7 Components

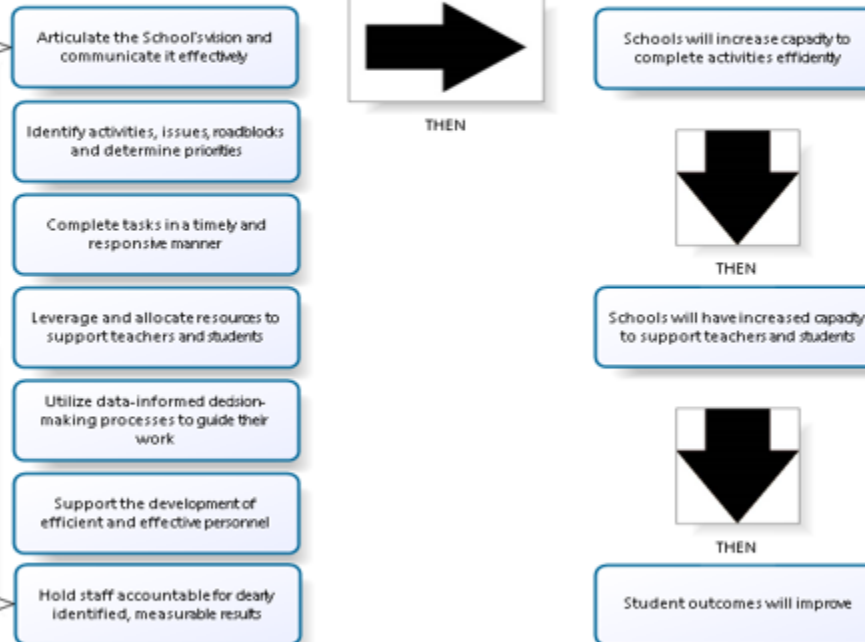
- *Governance*
- *Communication*
- *Quality Standards*
- *Professional Development*
- *Fiscal*
- *Monitoring and Controlling*
- *Data*



Theory of Action

The Education FIRST Theory of Action describes the significance that streamlining the administrative burdens of schools can make and the resulting impact it has on students.

If students are to succeed, schools must develop internal processes to



Governance

Governance has clearly defined protocols which include:

- **Prioritization of Activities** – faced with administrative tasks and activities, schools must be able to prioritize them based on level of effort, due date, and resource availability
- **Schedule Management** – staff member availability must be balanced against other assigned duties
- **Risk Management** – risk management focuses on developing a strategy to avoid or minimize the impact of risks
- **Issue Management** – issue management captures, surfaces, escalates, and resolves unplanned events to eliminate or minimize impact on accomplishing administrative activities
- **Change Management** – change management captures and classifies changes to evaluate the impact of change



Communication

Communication helps facilitate the flow of information

- Well-designed, developed and deployed communications help:
 - Manage expectations;
 - Minimize fear of the unknown;
 - Provide channels to gather feedback; and
 - Keep stakeholders informed.
- Communication goals take into account the following aspects:
 - Provide honest, well-managed meaningful information;
 - Respect the influence the communication process has on the creation, management and implementation of long-lasting change; and
 - Recognizes that for each person, change is accepted at a unique pace.
- Communications need to be often, targeted to specific needs while being highly visible



Quality Standards

Quality Standards forms the basis upon which the work is produced will be judged

- Quality Standards are:
 - Applied as guiding principles, aligning with the identified goals and objectives of each effort being worked on;
 - Provide specific guidelines to help ensure completed efforts produce quality results; and
 - Help ensure that results meet all regulatory obligations while avoiding slip-ups in completing the assigned task or activity.
- Focused on continuous improvement, quality standards are consistently reviewed and evaluated for all operational aspects following the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle that allows for the implementation of new ideas in a controlled way



6

Professional Development

Professional Development/Technical Assistance helps to identify the needed learning and assistance to make the team successful

- Focused, well-timed, and appropriate-to-use professional learning is a critical factor in implementation success
- This component seeks to create an innovative, research-based delivery system of professional development and corresponding technical assistance support
- Technical assistance bridges any gaps between the professional learning and their ability to use that knowledge as part of their work
- Knowledge transfer is accomplished by many methods, including:
 - Instructor-led training;
 - Hands-on activities;
 - Self-paced practice in online learning portals; and
 - Reading written materials.



7

Fiscal

Fiscal focuses on the funding and other resource issues

- A key aspect of this component is to make sure that there are enough resources (funding, office space, staff, etc.) to complete an activity
- Helps to identify ways to maximize resources on completing tasks and activities, including:
 - Evaluating current funding streams;
 - Building staff's capacity to use funding sources effectively; and
 - Recommending how to close funding gaps.
- Fiscal protocols will be clearly documented and readily available for all administrative staff members to use and reference when needed



Monitoring and Controlling

Monitoring and Controlling provides the ability and authority to make adjustments when it best serves the school

- Ensures the administrative tasks and activities are being produced with a high level of quality and in the anticipated timelines
- Leverages the deliverable produced in the other Education FIRST components
- Engages the Education FIRST leader to analyze and track risks, issues and changes that may occur to the scope and boundary of administrative activities
- Allows for the adjustment of priorities by managing the staff's involvement and performance that helps build staff member's confidence to complete the tasks and activities efficiently and effectively
- Provides independence to administrative staff allowing their creative energies and innovative thinking to be unleashed



9

Data

Data is the foundation upon which decisions are based

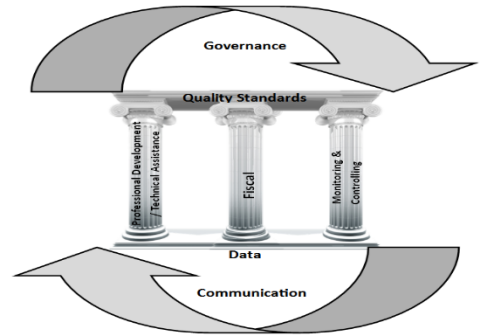
- Data reflects the performance of the Education FIRST team
- Provides insights needed to propel the team forward
- Helps to inform decision-making with respect to practices that are established to improve efficiency
- Builds coherence in processes and procedures to complete administrative activities
- Data is collected by:
 - Surveys;
 - Discussions; and
 - Reviews of developed deliverables.
- As data is collected, meaningful feedback can be gathered to help inform the other Education FIRST components



10

Appendix B: Governance Summary

The Education FIRST leadership framework provides a consistent and reliable set of steps that aides in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. The framework consists of seven major components: governance, communication, quality standards, professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, monitoring and controlling, and data. Education FIRST's leadership components focus attention on the things that matter most. It focuses on transformational leadership.



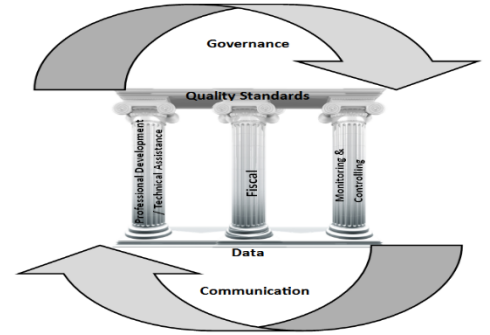
The first component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, governance, defines the way of work and the teaming structure that this leader needs to implement to ensure that all voices and perspectives are considered. Leaders must have the capability to listen to their peers and their followers to ensure that they have all the pertinent information needed to make decisions and set direction. The Education FIRST leader produces an all-inclusive environment that allows all staff to talk freely and participates in active listening. They share in decision-making and is not the authoritarian that has all the solutions, they actively listen, provide direction and collaboratively make decisions.

Within this way of work, there are governance components that must have clearly defined protocols and fillable forms that help to progress the assigned tasks and activities. These include:

- **Prioritization of Activities** – As schools are faced with administrative tasks and activities, they must be able to prioritize them based on level of effort, due date and resource availability.
- **Schedule Management** – With each administrative staff member, their availability to work on administrative tasks and activities must be balanced against their other assigned duties. Knowing when they have time available within their schedule or if they have the capability to rearrange their activities becomes necessary to ensure that the highest priority work is completed timely and efficiently.
- **Risk Management** - Risk Management is the process of identifying events or situations that can impact efforts to achieve goals, objectives, and expectations while engaging in a process of developing a strategy to avoid or minimize the risks. The approach to risk management focuses on building risk discovery and mitigation into day-to-day activities. This ensures that risks are identified early, that explicit steps toward mitigation are built in advance, and the progress is monitored as a routine component of the management process.
- **Issue Management** - Issues are an unexpected occurrence that arises and may impact the completion of tasks and activities. An issue is an event that if not addressed may affect schedule, scope, quality or budget. Issue management captures, surfaces, escalates, and resolves these unplanned events to eliminate or minimize impact on the attainment of completed activities.
- **Change Management** - Change management captures and classifies changes to evaluate the impact of the change. The change management process and approvals are based on the size of the change in relationship to the total effort. Formal change control is required when issues drive alterations to the budget, staff, or scope.

Appendix C: Communications Summary

The Education FIRST leadership framework provides a consistent and reliable set of steps that aides in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. The framework consists of seven major components: governance, communication, quality standards, professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, monitoring and controlling, and data. Education FIRST's leadership components focus attention on the things that matter most. It focuses on transformational leadership.



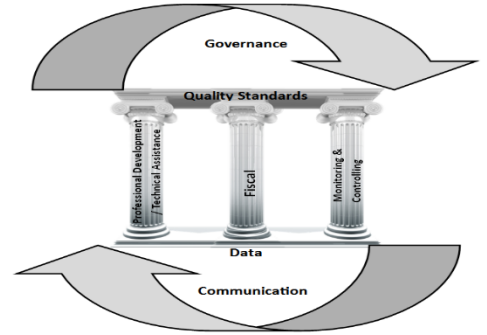
The second component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, communication, helps facilitate the flow of information across staff members. The Education FIRST leader's understanding of the effort is dependent on a robust and open dialogue in which this component of leadership provides. While the Education FIRST leadership framework has a hierarchical structure that provides an authority structure, it is the input and feedback from all staff that helps to inform and allow for proper decision-making. Well-designed, developed, and deployed communications help to manage expectations, minimize fear of the unknown, provide channels to gather feedback and keep stakeholders informed. Communication goals consider the following aspects: they provide honest, well-managed and meaningful communication for the duration of the effort; they respect the influence the communication process has on the creation, management and implementation of long-lasting change; and it recognizes that for each person, change is accepted at a unique pace. Communication needs to provide each layer of the governance teaming structure and effort leaders with immediate input, letting target audiences know that they are heard. In addition, communications should offer the recipient an opportunity for related discussion.

Communications should emphasize on focused and timely messaging that address the needs of the recipients through well-designed, developed and deployed communications. These communications help to manage expectations, minimize fear of the unknown, provide channels to gather feedback and to keep all staff members informed. Communication goals should focus on: providing honest, well-managed and meaningful communications; respecting the influence communications has on the creation, management and implementation of long-lasting change; and recognizes that for each recipient, change is accepted at a unique pace.

Effective communication occurs when efforts are strategically planned. In developing this strategic communications plan, one must consider that communications have one or more basic purposes: to inform, to persuade, or to compel to change, while establishing goodwill. Communications need to be often, targeted to specific needs and their audiences while being highly visible. Messages need to be delivered while also being incorporated into the tasks and activities as they are completed. Each communication message should provide an overview of the intended audience, a description of the rationale for the communication or of the opportunity, and describe the tactics used to develop materials, the method for tracking feedback, who is responsible for the issuance of the communication message, and if supplemental follow-up messages will be needed.

Appendix D: Quality Standards Summary

The Education FIRST leadership framework provides a consistent and reliable set of steps that aides in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. The framework consists of seven major components: governance, communication, quality standards, professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, monitoring and controlling, and data. Education FIRST's leadership components focus attention on the things that matter most. It focuses on transformational leadership.



The third component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, quality standards, forms the basis upon which the work that is produced will be judged. The Education FIRST leader always sets realistic quality standards that cause their followers to reach a little beyond what they have accomplished before. It is through the establishment of quality standards that an expected level of throughput will be attained by the team with an emphasis on maintaining a certain level of quality. As each effort is worked on, the Education FIRST leader can then readjust the quality standards to help the team achieve a higher quality level. Good quality standards are a critical component for an effort's problem-solving needs. As teams work on efforts and apply the defined quality standards to each effort, they apply that same quality to any issues or problems that arise.

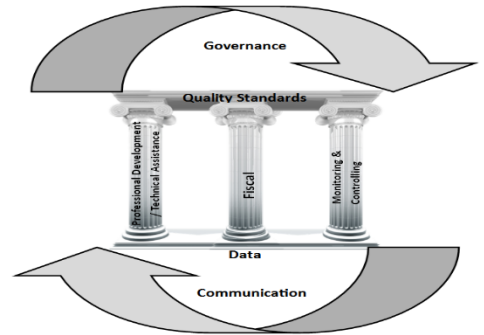
Ultimately, quality standards are applied as guiding principles, aligning with the identified goals and objectives of each effort for administrative staff to work toward completing. They also provide specific guidelines to help ensure completed efforts produce quality results and meets all regulatory obligations while avoiding slip-ups in completing the assigned task or activity.

Quality improvement is an important part of this work being performed. Focused on continuous improvement, an emphasis on producing efficient processes and procedures is paramount to the overall success of Education FIRST. Continuous improvement allows schools to gain efficiencies and then improve upon them on an ongoing basis. These quality standards are consistently reviewed and evaluated for all operational aspects to ensure efficiency following the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle that allows for the implementation of new ideas in a controlled way.

The integration of quality standards within Education FIRST provides school administrators with a wealth of benefits. With their deployment, a consistent standard of work is attained by staff members. There is improved administrative staff buy-in to the processes and procedures being implemented since they are built on a platform of consistency and reliability. A reduction of risk and reduced overall costs are achieved with the use of these quality standards as long as these standards are followed with consistency, fidelity and diligence.

Appendix E: Professional Development/Technical Assistance Summary

The Education FIRST leadership framework provides a consistent and reliable set of steps that aides in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. The framework consists of seven major components: governance, communication, quality standards, professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, monitoring and controlling, and data. Education FIRST's leadership components focus attention on the things that matter most. It focuses on transformational leadership.



The fourth component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, professional development/technical assistance, helps to identify the needed professional development the team needs to be successful. This component also covers the potential need to have technical assistance provided when the team runs into problems and requires assistance to resolve those problems.

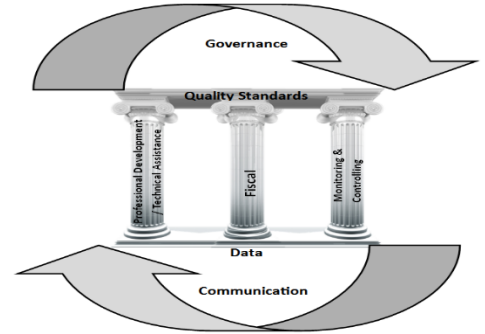
Focused, well-timed, and appropriate-to-use professional learning is a critical factor in implementation success. It is imperative to recognize that one-size-fits-all professional development does not meet the needs of today's school administrative staff, and Education FIRST will seek to create an innovative, research-based delivery system of professional development and corresponding technical assistance support. Administrative staff involved in this learning and receiving assistance will be able to demonstrate increased content knowledge and skills in Education FIRST's critical components. The absence of professional learning can also significantly contribute to change resistance and efforts that stalls and halts. Advances in technology and resulting educational environments require an adaptable, skilled, and educated workforce that is supported through technical assistance.

The mission of technical assistance is to bridge any gaps between the professional learning that educators receive in implementation of an effort and their ability to use that knowledge as part of their daily work activities. Effectively bridging those gaps involves technical assistance resources dedicated to the timely resolution of their questions and issues during and after deployment. An important aspect of technical assistance is knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer is a complex process by which knowledge, skill, or expertise resident within the technical assistance team is transferred to staff members. Knowledge transfer may be accomplished by many methods including the following: instructor led training; hands-on activities; self-paced practice in online learning portals; and reading written materials.

An Education FIRST leader monitors their staff member's performance and if they determine their staff does not possess the skills to complete their tasks, the leader may engage in professional development or training to give them the requisite knowledge to be successful. The Education FIRST leader can help themselves and their staff members complete difficult tasks and activities by engaging with mentors and through on-the-job experience in areas in which they may need additional professional development. By providing the essential training and professional development to the leader's staff members, the leader helps develop their skills and better prepare them for tasks and activities in the future that may require those same skill sets.

Appendix F: Fiscal Summary

The Education FIRST leadership framework provides a consistent and reliable set of steps that aides in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. The framework consists of seven major components: governance, communication, quality standards, professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, monitoring and controlling, and data. Education FIRST's leadership components focus attention on the things that matter most. It focuses on transformational leadership.



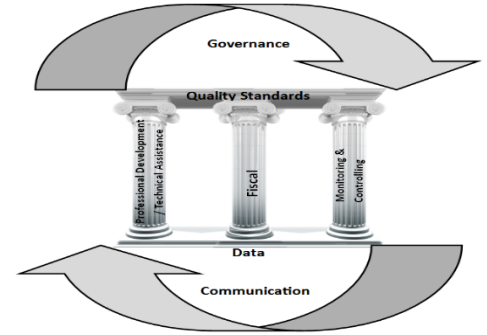
The fifth component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, fiscal, focuses on the funding and other resource issues that require continuous monitoring to ensure that they do not run out before the effort is completed. A key role for the Education FIRST leader is to identify ways to maximize resources on completing tasks and activities. This could include evaluating current funding streams, building staff's capacity to use funding sources effectively, and recommending how to close funding gaps. Funding specifically is a component that must be watched very closely, usually by someone on the team that specializes as a financial analyst or a budget person that can keep close tabs on the depletion of the funding model, or at least what is leftover.

Primarily the emphasis on the fiscal component of Education FIRST is based on internal controls and how the available resources can be best used to complete the administrative tasks and activities efficiently and effectively. These internal controls provide clearly defined protocols that avert misguided or erroneous use of available resources, including: funding sources; office space; and staff. Particular attention will be paid to the level of details regarding who approves what resources to expend on what activities and at which point these decisions will need to be escalated for approval. Clearly defined lines of authority will be outlined ensuring that there is segregation of duties to protect against fraud and error while potential conflicts of interest will be called out and documented.

Ultimately, school administrators are responsible for utilizing sound internal controls and for frequently examining and evaluating their effectiveness, but by using the Education FIRST fiscal component resources can be optimized. Fiscal protocols will be clearly documented and readily available for all administrative staff members to use and reference when needed. Yet, when examining tasks and activities in order to allocate resources to complete them, adequate resources should be assigned. Efficiency is not considered efficient if the plan calls for a limited number of resources that are unable to accomplish the task assigned to them. It may look good but does not realistically address what is needed to complete the activity.

Appendix G: Monitoring and Controlling Summary

The Education FIRST leadership framework provides a consistent and reliable set of steps that aides in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. The framework consists of seven major components: governance, communication, quality standards, professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, monitoring and controlling, and data. Education FIRST's leadership components focus attention on the things that matter most. It focuses on transformational leadership.



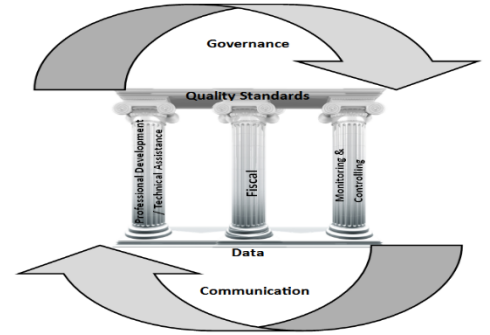
The sixth component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, monitoring and controlling, provides the assigned tasks and activities the ability and authority to make changes to the accepted timeline or other adjustments when in the best serves the needs of the school. This component follows the tactics of project management and the need to ensure the administrative tasks and activities are being produced with a high level of quality and in the anticipated timelines. This component of Education FIRST makes use of the previously produced deliverables in the other Education FIRST leadership framework components as the administrative activities being worked on come to completion.

The Education FIRST leader will analyze and track risks, issues and changes that may occur as situations surrounding the completion of administrative activities require scope and boundary adjustment as impacted by the day to day work of the administrative office. They will need maintain the focus of the administrative staff on their assigned tasks. This will enhance the staff's teamwork and effectiveness while allowing for a collaborative environment to form. Throughout this sixth component, the Education FIRST leader will continue to set and adjust priorities by managing the staff's involvement and performance that helps build confidence in their abilities to complete the tasks and activities efficiently and effectively.

In order for the Education FIRST leader to properly monitor and control the work being performed, they must be able to relinquish their personal detailed involvement in completing administrative activities. They will need to allow for the independence of their staff to complete the assigned activities using their innovative and creative ways, as they see fit. While allowing for their staff's creative energies to be unleashed, the Education FIRST leader must be able to monitor and control the tasks and activities to ensure that they are all working toward the common goal of the effort. This is accomplished by receiving regular updates on the status of the administrative tasks and activities that the staff are working to complete. This work is then compared to the overall plan and schedule, while assessing work performance to see if any corrective or preventative adjustments are needed.

Appendix H: Data Summary

The Education FIRST leadership framework provides a consistent and reliable set of steps that aides in the delivery of high-quality output with a clear direction from start to finish. The framework consists of seven major components: governance, communication, quality standards, professional development/technical assistance, fiscal, monitoring and controlling, and data. Education FIRST's leadership components focus attention on the things that matter most. It focuses on transformational leadership.



The seventh and final component of the Education FIRST leadership framework, data, is the foundation upon which decisions will be based. Data that reflects the performance of the team or provides information in that solution soundness can be attained, provides the insights needed to propel the team forward. Data can be attained in a variety of ways and teams must learn to mine the data that correlates to the effort that they are working to complete.

Data helps to inform decision-making with respect to practices that are established to utilize a particular improvement or outcome goal, namely efficiency, as defined in the Education FIRST leadership framework. The perspective of data, and the role of data within Education FIRST is especially appropriate as the leadership framework is being implemented and building coherence in processes and procedures to complete administrative activities. The Education FIRST team will gather and review data to determine if there are problems or gaps in the completion of tasks or activities that can be improved upon and made more efficient.

Through the methods of surveys, discussions, and reviews of developed deliverables, an Education FIRST team can discover the data needed to help guide the direction of ongoing and upcoming efforts. The progress of completing administrative activities should be built upon the continuing process of learning that will help the school complete the assigned tasks and activities on time and on budget. As these efforts progresses toward completion, the Education FIRST leader will utilize the documented decisions and the supporting data to reach those decisions to provide rationale to stakeholders as validation that the decisions were made correctly.

As data is collected, meaningful feedback can be gathered to help inform the other Education FIRST components and how to gain efficiencies and effectiveness when completing the assigned administrative tasks and activities. Initially, the Education FIRST team will focus on understanding the data and information available to decision-makers. This data will be best used to inform the deployment of the Education FIRST leadership framework allowing for adjustments to be made where necessary.

Appendix I: pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST Likert Scale Survey Questions

Question #	Question	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1	Do you feel overwhelmed with administrative activities?					
2	Is there time available to complete the assigned activities?					
3	Do you see the value in keeping the lines of communication open?					
4	Do you feel that it is important to have a governance structure in your school?					
5	Do you see value in professional development and/or technical assistance for your school?					

Appendix J: pre-Education FIRST and post-Education FIRST

Open-Ended Survey Questions

Question #	Question	Answer Scale
6	How do you define governance in your school?	Open-Ended
7	How is communication used in your school?	Open-Ended
8	What quality standards are applied in your school?	Open-Ended
9	Please define professional development and how it is used in your school?	Open-Ended
10	Please define technical assistance and how it is used in your school?	Open-Ended
11	Please describe the fiscal controls in your school and how they are used?	Open-Ended
12	Please describe resource management in your school and how it is used?	Open-Ended
13	How are administrative activities monitored and controlled in your school?	Open-Ended
14	What data is captured in your school and why?	Open-Ended
15	How is data used in your school?	Open-Ended

Appendix K: Initial Questions for the Follow Up Interviews

Question #	Question
1	From your perspective, what values should guide Education FIRST?
2	Does this adequately capture the way your approach Education FIRST work?
3	If no, how would describe the overarching principles that guide your work?
4	What influences how you think about Education FIRST?
5	Is there a particular group or research base that informs your thinking?
6	How would you describe the essential components of Education FIRST?
7	Do these core components adequately capture the essential parts of a functioning Education FIRST?
8	If not, how would you describe the essential components of Education FIRST?
9	What specific activities have you been engaged that bring these essential components to life?
10	What does administrative staff say and do related to these essential components?

Appendix L: Pre-Education FIRST and Post-Education FIRST Mean and Median

Question		Pre-Education FIRST Mean	Post-Education FIRST Mean	Pre-Education FIRST Median	Post-Education FIRST Median
1	When thinking about administrative activities, like regulatory reporting requirements to provide data and information throughout the various levels of the educational system and completion of forms and data requests to satisfy federal, state and local needs, do you feel overwhelmed with administrative activities?	4.15	3.22	4.00	3.00
2	Within a normal 40-hour work week, is there time available to complete the assigned activities?	1.93	3.11	2.00	3.00
3	Communications help facilitate the flow of information, do you see value in keeping the lines of communication open?	4.67	4.78	5.00	5.00
4	Governance defines the way of work with clearly defined protocols and fillable forms that help to progress the assigned tasks and activities. Do you feel that it is important to have a governance structure in your school?	4.07	4.33	4.00	4.00
5	Professional development helps to identify the needed training staff needs to be successful. Technical assistance is the help provided when staff encounters problems. Do you see value in professional development and/or technical assistance for your school?	4.89	5.00	5.00	5.00

Appendix M: Initial Questions for the Follow Up Interviews

6. How do you define governance in your school?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Activity Management	Status Reporting
	Updates
	Direction

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Activity Oversight	Oversight of Activities
	Prioritization
	Resource Management
	Activity Management

7. How is communication used in your school?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Knowledge Sharing	Information Sharing
	Updates
	Accomplishments
	Upcoming Activities

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Information Exchange	Inform Stakeholders
	Receive Feedback
	To Make Necessary Adjustments

8. Quality standards forms the basis upon which the work that is produced will be judged. What quality standards are applied in your school?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Unknown Standards	Personal Quality Standards
	Group Quality Standards
	Corrective Action
Informal Standards	School Leadership Set
	Previously Established Standards
	Staff Member Established

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Known Standards	Standards Established
	Group Decided
	Applied Standards (Used by Staff)

9. Please define professional development and how it is used in your school?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Staff Personal Growth	New Skill Training
	Staff Efficiency
	Enhanced Skills
	Consistency

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Knowledge Management	Interactive Information Sharing
	Procedure Training
	Process Improvement
	Enhancing Performance

10. Please define technical assistance and how it is used in your school?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Problem Solving	Help with Problems
	Help to get Work Done
	Guidance
	Professional Learning

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Support	Issue Resolution
	Information Sharing
	Coaching
	Mentoring

11. Fiscal controls focus on the funding and other resource management (human, property, etc.) issues that require continuous monitoring to ensure that they do not run out before an activity is complete. Please describe the fiscal controls in your school and how they are used?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Budgetary Effectiveness	Funding Oversight
	Spending Trends and Usage
Fund Management	Spending Control
	Compliance Monitoring
	Fiscal Auditing

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Budget Oversight	Effective Use of Funds
	In-depth Reporting
	Spending Rationale
	Transparency

12. Please describe resource management in your school and how it is used?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Staff Allocation	Teachers
	Paraprofessionals
	Activity Updates
	Work Prioritization
	Head Count
Unused	Lack of Resource Examination
	Not Used with Administrative Staff

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Resource Usage	Effective Use
	Staff Skills Matching
	Focused Efforts

13. Monitoring and controlling ensures that the administrative tasks and activities are being produced with a high level of quality and within the anticipated timelines. How are administrative activities monitored and controlled in your school?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
After Completion	Reporting
	Staff Meeting Discussions
While Being Worked On	High Priority Activities
	Overdue Activities
	Reassigned Activities
Unused	New Assignments
	No Monitoring of Activities
	Completed Assignment

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Activity Management	Regular Updates
	Assignment Adjustments
	Efficient Assignment Completion

14. Data is the foundation that helps to inform decision-making. What data is captured in your school and why?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Captured Data	Student Personal Data
	Student Performance Data
	Program Level Data
	Required Reporting Data
	Assignment Data

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Performance Metrics	Activity Measurements
	Staff Performance
	Throughput Quantities

15. How is data used in your school?

Pre-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Reporting	Compliance Monitoring
	Program Evaluation
	Performance
	Resource Usage
	Resource Efficiency

Post-Education FIRST	
Theme	Categories
Information Sharing	Decision-Making
	Resource Allocations
	Activity Prioritization
	Professional Development Needs
	Technical Assistance Needs

Appendix N: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics, and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation or professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*



Digital Signature

Sean Hennika

Name (Typed)

June 7, 2019

Date