

Article

Successful School Leadership in the USA: The Role of Context in Core Leadership Practices

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Abstract: This article draws on findings from a secondary analysis of selected U.S. case studies of successful school principals in the United States. All original ISSPP cases were selected with a common sampling strategy whereby we purposely selected schools with improved student outcomes and nominations by school district leaders and organizations. Data sources include semi-structured qualitative interviews with the district leaders, principal, teachers, parents, and students to provide a more elaborated understanding of the phenomena, i.e., school success and the principal's leadership contribution. The study selected twenty published articles describing complete ISSPP case studies from different U.S. geographic areas for secondary analysis of the principal's core leadership practices. These practices include setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. The U.S. cases since 2002 reflect the dynamics of multiple layers of influence and increasing complexities from student diversity, policy pressures, and the impact of the principals' background and professional identity. These cases provide qualitative, contextualized understandings of school success and principal contributions to that success at particular points in time over the past 20 years and point toward knowledge gaps that we seek to fill in future steps of ISSPP.



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1. Introduction

In this article, we present a secondary analysis of selected U.S. International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) cases conducted since 2002 that reflect increasing complexity from evolving policy pressures, shifts toward curriculum centralization, and school governance changes, as well as increasingly diverse demographics and ongoing concerns about inequities. Original ISSPP cases were conducted in the early 2000s amidst growing accountability pressures and concerns about performance on externalized, standardized tests that reported school performance and included sanctions for underperformance over several years. During the same timeframe, we can observe a growing interest in international school rankings from PISA. While the nation-state moved toward increasing educational policy centralization, student demographics were becoming increasingly diverse.

Since the late 1970s, educational leadership scholars have conducted studies of “effective” schools [1] that performed beyond expectations given student prerequisites in high-poverty contexts. Yet the effective schools’ literature of the 1970s did not reflect leadership challenges from increasing accountability pressures and school comparisons from national and international tests, governance changes, digitalization, and growing diversity from demographic shifts from global population migrations. Thus, the U.S. research team joined the ISSPP developed by Christopher Day [2–4], focusing on “success”

and international comparisons. Initially, the U.S. researchers used the Leithwood and Riehl [5,6] framework of school leadership practices that were necessary but not sufficient for success in any context, including three leadership practices related to school vision, human resource development around the direction, and school governance structures with a fourth practice of instructional program management added in the wake of growing accountability pressures. In our secondary analysis, we considered the extent to which the Leithwood and Riehl framework was evident across 20 cases selected for geographic diversity and noted any other leadership practices and dispositions that emerged over time. In the following three sections, we discuss the U.S. context for school and leadership success and the principal practices related to the Leithwood and Riehl [5,6] framework and additional practices that emerged as the context for school success became increasingly complex with more layers of influences. Our article concludes with lessons from the U.S. ISSPP cases conducted over the first twenty years of the network, as well as future directions.

2. U.S. Context for Schools and Leadership: Tensions and Increasing Complexities

Since the formation of the U.S. nation-state in the late eighteenth century, we can observe tensions between the interests of a shared national identity and the needs of a diverse citizenry of immigrants, between public (common) schools and private, religious schools and between states' rights and national/federal interests. Most recently, we can observe tensions between curriculum centralization (i.e., state versions of the common core with externalized evaluations), increased student diversity, and neoliberal pressures for schools to compete for students in an open market [7–9]. Over the past twenty years, externalized accountability policies have influenced school principals to varying degrees, with early cases heavily influenced by new sanctions imposed from federal policies and pressures to use approved comprehensive reforms in the early 2000s to the recent pandemic situation in which state tests were not administered (for two to three years) and concerns about safety and wellness as well as the use of technology. As ISSPP researchers conduct new cases, there is also a renewed concern with heated public debates over inclusion, equity, and racism. Further, the U.S. cases have been and are being conducted in different geographical and cultural regions of the U.S. and different school contexts, including rural, suburban, urban, and turnaround schools.

U.S. states are situated in different cultural and geographic regions, including the northeast region with states that were formed early from colonies, the southern region that includes states characterized by historical legacies of plantation slavery, the west with U.S./Mexico border cultures and legacies of colonialism with Indigenous peoples, U.S./Canada border cultures as well as California and Texas, and the midwest with large farmland areas in the center north to Great Lakes areas [10]. In other words, U.S. schools are culturally and historically situated in particular communities, states, and cultural regions with unique regional traditions and histories and a common U.S. identity. To date, ISSPP cases have been conducted in the northeast (New York, Massachusetts), the southeast (South Carolina), the west/southwest (Texas, Arizona), and the midwest (Indiana), with schools located in rural, suburban, and urban communities, some of which were identified as “turnaround” schools in light of significant improvements from underperforming to highly performing status. Within these regions, in recent years, we can also observe changing internal demographics from geographical migrations within the nation-state and internal cosmopolitanism from global population migrations and refugees. These changes in student populations and increasing accountability pressures provided new dilemmas and complexities for principals' work. In the following two sections, we describe recent changes in policies and student demographics that were highlighted in the first twenty years of ISSPP.

3. Changing Policies, Politics, and Influences

In the early 2000s, as the New York research team started constructing ISSPP case studies, U.S. schools operated under increased accountability pressures because of required and

publicly reported annual testing requirements from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RttT) mandates. The No Child Left Behind Act and Race to the Top Mandates promoted Comprehensive School Reform to encourage schoolwide improvement rather than fragmented approaches to improving student achievement. Comprehensive Reforms (e.g., Success for All, Direct Instruction, AVID—Achievement Via Individual Determination) include professional development for teachers and staff, resources to sustain the reform effort, measurable goals for student achievement, and annual evaluation of implementation and student achievement results. To be approved as a Comprehensive School Reform, reform project researchers reported research results that linked a Comprehensive School Reform to student outcomes on standardized tests. The U.S. national/federal government provided grant funds for additional research to assess the generalizability of reform implementation and student achievement in schools.

Closely related, schools that persistently failed to make adequate yearly progress under this test-driven regime faced the consequences, including reconstitution and administrator/teacher loss of employment. ISSPP research teams frequently studied schools that had been reconstituted as “turn-around” schools whereby principals led schools from underperforming, turnaround status to high-performing designations, many of which used Comprehensive School Reforms. Other ISSPP cases were selected to illustrate sustained high academic performance amidst rapid and complex policy changes in urban, suburban, and rural community contexts. Most recently, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and political debates about equity, we can observe a reduced emphasis on accountability policy pressures and increased emphasis on socioemotional well-being as well as a political backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and the banning of U.S. history curriculum and library books which teach about race and racism in some states. For example, today’s school leaders must navigate and mediate between political extremes whereby some parents and community members express concerns about teaching children about the historical and contemporary U.S. problems with racism. In contrast, other parents seek more explicit teaching about race and other inclusive practices in classrooms. Such debates reflect conservative and liberal politics playing out on social media, particularly television networks and printed outlets, as well as in school board meetings. While these political debates about racism have intensified in recent years, earlier ISSPP case studies frequently included evidence of principals seeking to support all children while navigating tensions between diversity and curriculum or evaluation policy commonality.

4. Changing Demographics

The 2020 U.S. demographics reflect increasing racial/ethnic diversity: 57.8% non-Hispanic Whites, 18.7% Hispanic or Latino, 12.1% African American or Black, 6% Asian, 4.1% Mixed Race, and 0.7% Native American [11]. Currently, White people constitute the majority of the U.S. population (62%); however, the percentage is expected to fall below 50% by 2050, with Hispanic populations experiencing the most significant increase [12]. The Hispanic or Latino(a) population grew by 23% from 2010 to 2020. Since the 1960s, there has been a significant increase in the number and diversity of immigrants coming to the U.S. The increasing number of international migrants will make the country a pluralistic majority minority nation-state by 2050 [13]. In the next section, we examine findings from twenty years of successful U.S. principals serving turnaround schools, rural, suburban, and urban schools in the northeast, the southeast, the midwest, and the southwest regions.

5. Summary of Selected U.S. ISSPP Cases: School Contexts and Demographics

The twenty ISSPP cases we analyzed were mainly schools in high-poverty contexts, with the poverty index (i.e., free and reduced lunch status) ranging from 40–93%. In the northeast region (Western New York State and Massachusetts), the ISSPP case study schools were predominantly urban, while in the southeast (South Carolina), the three high-poverty schools studied were in rural areas. School levels varied across the sample: eleven schools studied were elementary, six were middle schools, and three were high

schools. Student demographics also varied across regions, although overall, the school populations in these ISSPP case study schools were predominately students of Color. Some schools were predominantly African American (e.g., four of the NY schools), while others, particularly in the southwest (Arizona and Texas), were predominantly Latino. A few schools were racially mixed, including the three schools in the midwest (Indiana) and the southeast (South Carolina). Principal demographics also varied across the schools. Twelve of the principals were female, and eight were male. The majority of principals were White (13), with three African American principals and four Latinx principals represented in this sample. See Table 1 below for the specific demographics of each ISSPP school analyzed for this article.

Table 1. ISSPP Case Study Schools in the United States Organized by Geographic Region.

| | | Northeast | | | | | | | Midwest | | | Southeast | | | Southwest | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--|
| | | Buffalo, NY | | | | | | | Boston, MA | | | Indianapolis, IN | | | South Carolina | | | Tucson, AZ | | San Antonio, TX | | |
| Schools | | Elementary (PK-6) Costello | Elementary (PK-8) Hamilton | Elementary (K-5) Crockett | Elementary (K-5) Coleman | Elementary (K-8) Fraser | Middle school (6-8) Kelly | High school (9-12) Pershing | Small newcomer high school—Romero High School | Elementary—Allen Elementary | Middle school Evergreen 6th grade academy | High School—Southern High School | Middle school—Magnolia Grove | Middle school—County Line | Middle school—Myers Circle | Elementary (K-8)—Hope Academy | Elementary (K-6)—Juarez Elementary | Elementary (K-8)—Canyon Elementary | Middle School (5-8)—Summit Middle School | Elementary school—Briskell Elementary | Elementary school—Stephens Elementary | |
| Student composition | | Urban: 53% African American, White 33%, 5% Hispanic, 3% Native, 6% Asian, Poverty index (FR lunch) 74% | Urban: 94% African American, 2% White, 3% Hispanic, 1% Native, Poverty index 82% | Rural: 97% White, 1% African American, 1% Hispanic, 1% Asian American | Suburban: 95% White, 1% African American, 1% Hispanic, 3% Asian American | Urban: 98% African American, 1% White, 1% Hispanic | Small city (Rural): 88% White, 9% African American, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian American | Urban: 55% African American, 25% White, 3% Hispanic, 17% Native | Urban: 67% Latino, more than 42 different countries represented | Urban: 24% White, 23% African American, 41% Hispanic, 9% multiracial, and 3% Asian, 71% free lunch and reduced lunch | Urban: 75% White, 7% Hispanic, 7% African American, 4% Asian, and 7% other, 40% on free and reduced lunch | 66% African American, 21% Hispanic, 9% White, and 4% other, 77% free and reduced lunch | Rural: 60% African American, 36% White, 4% Hispanic, Poverty Index 93% | Rural: 30% African American, 65% White, 5% Hispanic, Poverty Index 82% | Rural: 43% African American, 53% White, 4% Hispanic, Poverty Index 89% | 60% Native American, 95% free and reduced lunch | 92% Latino, 90% free and reduced lunch | 50% White, 35% Hispanic, 10% African-American, and 5% other | 63% White, 28% Hispanic, 4% Black, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% American Indian | 85% Hispanic, 89% Economically disadvantaged | 94% Hispanic, 92% Economically disadvantaged | |
| Principal gender and race | | African American female | African American female | White male | White female | African American female | White male | White female | Latino male | White female | White male | White male | White female | White male | White male | Latina female | White male | Latina female | White female | White female | Latina female | |

6. Background, Materials, and Methods

For this article, the authors used a thematic synthesis to conduct a secondary analysis of the selected (20) published ISSPP cases conducted over the past twenty years. The selection criteria involved those publications that represented different geographic regions and highlighted a complete ISSPP case study rather than a particular theme or finding. Using this criteria, we identified 20 ISSPP cases that used the complete ISSPP protocols.

In their more extensive international meta-analysis of nine ISSPP countries, Sun et al. [14] identified six indicators to define success, including student outcomes, school learning environment and disciplinary climate, instructional capacity, parent and community support, school reputation and improvement, and school physical appearance and resources. The most commonly used success indicators were students' academic achievement, followed by school disciplinary climate and teaching and learning culture [15–22].

Regarding the influence of context and principal background qualities, Sun et. al. [14] found seven categories of principal qualities that influenced successful school leadership: cognitive capacities, dispositions, skills/capacities, motivation, values/beliefs, emotional intelligence, and social intelligence. These inherent qualities were interconnected and interacted with each other (e.g., beliefs can influence values and dispositions, with some being hard to change (e.g., religious beliefs held by Indonesian Muslim principals) while others can be developed (e.g., pedagogical knowledge, leadership training). On the one hand, these qualities shape what principals do. For example, a principal's values can shape the perception of an issue and the formation of the solution to a problem. On the other hand, principals' working experiences, educational background, interactions with teachers, other school stakeholders, and other principals, as well as family background, all contribute to developing their philosophy, values, and beliefs that underpin their overt leadership behaviors.

We developed two main questions that focused on core leadership practices to guide our thematic synthesis of the 20 selected U.S. cases, including:

1. How have principals contributed to their school's success (e.g., values, qualities, strategies, actions, relationships, engagement, and commitment to teachers)?
2. How have internal or external factors caused, shaped, or influenced the ways that principals contributed to the success of their schools (e.g., principal agency)?

Each author individually analyzed the published cases in terms of these two questions, adding our responses to the questions in a shared document. We then met as a group four times via Zoom to discuss and compare our findings related to the above questions and adjust the shared chart. The next section highlights responses to these questions as our collective findings.

7. Findings: Principal Practices That Contributed to the School's Success

Leithwood and Riehl's [5,6] core leadership practices provide the organizing framework to report our findings about the principal's contribution to school success in the ISSPP schools analyzed. Twenty years ago, in their meta-analysis of leadership studies, Leithwood and Riehl documented core leadership practices that they considered necessary but not sufficient for school success. This four-part framework (i.e., setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program) emerged as the primary conceptual framework in the early U.S. ISSPP case studies. However, additional frameworks were added over the years. The original Western New York cases (five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school) included only the first three of the core leadership practices (setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization) because these cases were conducted before the fourth practice was included in the Leithwood and Riehl framework. While the Indiana case studies (one elementary, one middle, and one high school) did not explicitly name Leithwood and Riehl as their conceptual framework (they took a more exploratory and grounded theory approach), the leadership practices they reported seemed to fit well into this four-part framework (see further discussion of these additional frameworks below). In our analysis of selected ISSPP

cases from four U.S. geographic regions (northeast, southeast, midwest, and southwest), we found that these core leadership practices were evident in principal practices across the case studies, although how these core practices were implemented varied based on neighborhood, school, district, and state contexts.

7.1. Setting Directions

The first core leadership practice, setting directions, involves developing a shared vision of the future and building consensus about school goals [6]. This practice was found across the 20 U.S. cases, particularly with regards to the schools' focus on high standards for academic achievement, but how individual principals developed a vision for academic achievement in their schools varied based on context. For instance, in challenging schools in western New York [19], several principals leveraged external accountability pressure to rally teachers to meet annual reading and math targets and encourage academic gains in their schools. However, to create the preconditions for academic success in some urban neighborhoods that had experienced school vandalism and drug activity, some of these principals first promoted a school vision of a safe, nurturing school environment by establishing consistent student discipline, enlisting parents as neighborhood monitors, and working on the beautification of their school campuses. In another instance, in one of the high-poverty, predominantly Latino elementary schools in Texas, a shared vision about academic achievement focused on bilingual leadership and a commitment by the staff to pursue "any means necessary" to help students succeed [16]. Attention to this student-centered vision included taking into consideration the fact that several of the students were first-generation immigrants, with approximately 30% of the school in the care of grandparents.

This sentiment that "we do whatever it takes" to improve student learning was also echoed by the staff at one of the Arizona elementary schools who noted, "we work with kids before and after school if they need it" [23] (p. 184). The school leader of a small Massachusetts high school for recent immigrants (i.e., the Newcomer Academy) also held high academic expectations for his students and provided additional learning support outside the regular school day. However, this principal consciously buffered students and staff from district accountability pressures to establish a more comprehensive school vision focused on service learning and a shared sense of responsibility among the students [24]. Principals in several U.S. case study schools were described by their staff as the communicators and promoters of their school's vision. For example, one of the South Carolina middle schools characterized their principal as a great "motivator" and "facilitator" with regard to the school vision [25] (p. 790).

7.2. Developing People

Leithwood [26] notes that the second core leadership practice in this framework, developing people, can involve providing support for colleagues' ideas and initiatives as well as modeling values and practices (i.e., "walking the talk"). This practice also reflects the depth of relationships developed to promote growth between leadership, staff, and students. A strong "ethic of care" was evidenced across the U.S. case study schools analyzed, with one of the western New York principals described as a role model who supported her staff by "roll[ing] up her sleeves" to get difficult jobs done. In three of the Arizona cases, successful leaders offered intellectual stimulation and individualized support [23]. The principals in the three Indiana cases we reviewed focused on building relationships with students and the importance of personal connections with staff, including providing mentors and encouraging teachers to pursue graduate study [27]. As a parent in one of the Texas ISSPP elementary case study schools noted, "School programs are not the solution for our children. It is the person behind the program and the relationships that count." [16] (p. 44).

7.3. Redesigning the Organization

Leithwood and Riehl's [6] third core leadership practice, redesigning the organization, involves shaping the culture and organizational structure to align with the school's vision and goals. For the three middle school principals in the South Carolina ISSPP case studies, this meant modifying their school's organizational structures to nurture collaboration among teachers [25]. While these schools were encouraged to develop Comprehensive School Reform models, each South Carolina ISSPP school adopted a different Comprehensive School Reform model, and the particular organizational changes associated with that model varied across schools. Two of the Arizona principals redesigned family-school-community engagement practices in their schools by staging regular home visits with their Native American and Latino families and holding parent meetings in community spaces [23]. The principal of the Massachusetts Newcomer Academy grouped students by language ability rather than grade level in order to allow recent immigrant teenagers to move up independently in each academic area as they gained English Language skills [24]. At one of the Indiana ISSPP schools, a turnaround high school, the school leader redesigned the organization to include a Freshman Center with its own assistant principal and dedicated space and established a partnership with a university business school to revitalize the Business Finance program in the school [27].

7.4. Managing the Instructional Program

The fourth core leadership practice in Leithwood and Riehl's [6] framework, managing the instructional program, focuses on recruiting teachers well matched to the school's vision, providing instructional support, monitoring school activity, and buffering the staff from outside pressures. In the U.S. ISSPP schools analyzed, how particular principals managed their school's instructional program was related to the needs of their school. For instance, in the South Carolina ISSPP case study schools, because of a focus on utilizing Comprehensive School Reform models, this involved introducing support for college access in one school (AVID—Advancement Via Individual Determination) and a new literacy curriculum in another (Literacy Across the Curriculum (LAC), as referenced in [25]). These principals worked to align resources, monitor progress, and provide professional development opportunities for their staff, including workshops and book studies. Several principals across the U.S. case study schools were lauded for participating in professional development opportunities alongside their teachers. However, these professional development activities varied across schools as some principals (e.g., the Arizona cases) managed the instructional program in ways that were culturally responsive by incorporating students' cultural background knowledge into instruction and hiring a more diverse teaching staff [23]; see also [21] below for a discussion of the culturally responsive practices of the western NY principals. We did not see evidence of specific principal practices in relation to students with disabilities in this retrospective data, although ISSPP case studies currently in process indicate that there is greater attention to students with special needs.

8. Findings: Internal and External Factors That Shaped Principal Practices in Successful Schools

This section explores the growing evidence of additional internal and external factors that shaped principal practices in successful schools. Scribner et al. [27] point out that principal practices are not value-neutral; principals, they argue, "solve problems, make personal connections, develop resourcefulness, plant seeds, and use data within the context of a point of view." (p. 416). Our review of ISSPP research highlighted the limited research on how the biographies and dispositions of the school leaders impact leadership practice [21,27]. The Arizona, Indiana, New York, South Carolina, and Texas cases reflect the impact of principal biographies and personalities on their leadership practices. In Indiana, the principal's approach to human resource development was shaped by her previous experience working in a similar diverse school setting [27], while principal Cummings in South Carolina used his upbringing in a poor, rural community to connect with the students,

focus the instructional program, and guide the culture of care [25]. Johnson [21] discussed how one African American principal in New York quickly earned the community's respect because she had been raised in the housing projects and understood the complex issues facing the students. The African American female leaders in these western New York ISSPP case study schools were "often viewed as community 'othermothers' to the children in the schools." [21] (p. 55). In a predominantly Hispanic school in Texas, principal Martinez could connect and earn respect from the school and the community because she was from a similar background to the students and understood their culture and the challenges they face [16,28]. It is evident from the cases that their biographies influenced how principals saw the school community context and how the school community saw and responded to them. These ISSPP cases indicate the need for more research to understand how the racial and professional biographies of principals shape leadership practices.

Leithwood and Riehl's [6] core practices are necessary but not sufficient for successful schools in any context. As mentioned earlier, significant demographic shifts in the U.S. have presented new challenges to school principals. In Arizona, a state experiencing these demographic shifts, Ylimaki et.al. [23] found that successful principals followed the core practices but extended the framework to include the sociocultural affect. The Arizona case found that successful principals explicitly considered the sociocultural affect in three ways. First, they understood the students and the community they served. The Arizona principals understood how poverty and lack of social and cultural capital made it difficult for students to be successful. Second, the principals exhibited responsive leadership capacity. They reached out to the school community to find out how to include Latino and Native American cultures in instruction. The principals supported the students' cultural funds of knowledge. Third, the principals also fostered relationships with the school community in an ethic of care. They were committed to collaboration because they believed that empowering community members was in the best interest of the students. Based on the findings, Ylimaki et. al. [23] concluded that "the sociocultural affect is foundational for the four core practices of successful leaders" (p. 189). Similarly, Johnson [21] argues that culturally responsive leaders should challenge inequitable school structures, incorporate students' funds of knowledge in the school curriculum, and act as agents of social change in the community.

Klar and Brewer [25] also found that successful principals expanded on the four leadership practices to suit the unique needs of the students and the pressures associated with the accountability measures. Like other U.S. cases, Klar and Brewer [25] found that successful principals understood and responded to the demographic, sociocultural, economic, and political contexts. The successful principals balanced the core leadership practices with the unique needs of the students, the school community, and the broader policy context. These 20 U.S. ISSPP cases extended Leithwood and Riehl's [6] four core practices to include the local (demographic, sociocultural, and economic) and state and national (federal and state accountability requirements) contexts.

9. Discussion and Conclusions

While the evidence from the U.S. ISSPP cases supports the four core leadership practices documented by Leithwood and Riehl [5,6], the cases also point to existing knowledge gaps. First, there is some evidence of the impact of biographies on principal practices. The cases called for more research on the "racialized" biographies of school leaders [21] and the professional identity of the leaders [27] to understand the relationship between gender, race, socioeconomic status, education attainment, and leadership. Second, Ylimaki et al. [23] argued for an expanded definition of success to include the cognitive and sociocultural affective domains. Scribner et al. [27] also challenged the current definition of "successful" and called for an expanded view that considered the needs of the students and the community. An expanded definition of success is especially critical with the growing diversity of students who bring varied views, experiences, and challenges to schools. Third, it is clear from the cases that principal practices are shaped by the interaction between the

principal and the internal contexts and external pressures facing the school. However, further research is needed to understand how these successful principals adapt their practices to unique school contexts, including attention to students with disabilities and emergent bilingual learners.

10. Future Directions

New U.S. ISSPP cases are in progress which utilize revised interview protocols and a teacher survey, which incorporates additional questions about teaching and learning, middle-level leadership, leadership practices in relation to the COVID pandemic, and the role of socio-emotional outcomes. These cases build on what we have learned over the last 20 years about how core leadership practices must be responsive to school and community contexts. The new cases currently in progress (in Arizona, Alabama, and Massachusetts, with more states to follow) exhibit increased complexities and influences of the context in which schools (and their leaders) operate. Thus, new cases will be grounded in the new ISSPP conceptual framework drawing upon complexity theory and ecological systems theory that consider the dynamics of influences within and between schools, districts, states, nation-states, and transnational levels, as well as a dual notion of culture within and beyond the school. Here, we seek to understand how the principal influences school practices, in particular school contexts, and how the principal mediates state/federal and district policy requirements with the needs of increasingly diverse student populations. In other words, new U.S. cases will consider how principals lead schools as adaptive organizations that influence and are influenced by digitalization, changing demographics, policies, politics, and concerns about socio-emotional wellness, school disruptions, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Further, given the U.S. context and renewed concerns about racism, equity, and inclusion, the U.S. cases will also consider the principal's habitus or background related to the school and community's sociocultural context. A clearer understanding of how principals adapt practices to the needs of the school has significant implications for leadership preparation. As part of a renewed ISSPP, we see the potential for new U.S. cases to contribute to the field of educational leadership amidst contemporary complexities, influences, tensions, and dilemmas.

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