



**A Principal's Leadership in a Rural and Underperforming Secondary School:
A Case Study**

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This case study examined the leadership practices of one secondary school principal in an underperforming rural school in Mpumalanga. The accountability placed on schools has resulted in increased demands on principal leaders. School principals are expected to serve as the instructional leaders for their schools by devoting time and attention to teacher evaluation, curriculum and assessment development, and student achievement data analysis. At the same time, principals continue to serve as managers of their schools. Despite increased responsibility for instruction and student achievement, principals continue to spend up to 60% of their time on managerial tasks.

Rural circumstances create challenges for rural school principals. Rural school districts often are not able to offer students the same resources offered in sub-urban and urban school districts. Rural schools and communities face a number of barriers to achieving academic success. These barriers include lack of funding, difficulty in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, outdated facilities, limited technology, and a community culture that does not value education. Lack of resources and limited advanced course offerings in rural school districts have been linked with academic performance deficits. Regardless of uncontrollable factors that negatively influence student achievement, accountability for student success as measured by standardized tests rests with the school principal.

The purpose of this article was to examine the leadership practices of a rural secondary school principal of a school declared "in need of improvement" throughout the school year which he prepared for and led his staff through the challenging period. The principal who was the focus of this case study had a track record of academic improvement and increased student achievement in schools that he had previously led.

The qualitative research design for this study included in-depth, semi-structured interviews with teachers and the principal. A total of six interviews were conducted. Throughout the interviews, the principal's leadership was conceptualized using the framework of the six core components and six key processes that form the basis for the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education.